

Letters to the Editor

Lawmakers: Resist the extensive arm-twisting by PPIAC

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State lawmakers should take a clue from the state private investigators and do a little sleuthing on their own into proposals by the Professional Private Investigators Association of Colorado to initiate mandatory licensing of investigators by the state. This small but vocal private association — which represents a small minority of professional investigators who are trying to restrict competition within their industry — hired powerful lobbyists in 2011 to push through a so-called “voluntary licensing” measure for private investigators, convincing lawmakers that private investigators in Colorado were clamoring for some sort of licensing to enhance their professional accountability. They were not, as evidenced by the fact that few took advantage of the new regulation.

PPIAC sold lawmakers on the idea, however, prompting state government to spend tens of thousands of tax dollars setting up a regulatory system for which there was no demonstrated need, or demand, on the theory that investigators would pay a small annual fee for voluntary licensing. While the move served only major private investigative firms — who could use the licensing as bait to attract clients with high-dollar advertising — it was unsuccessful because so few investigators found such licensing to have any value. The lack of interest pushed state fees for this low-value voluntary license to more than \$600 a year — an unsustainable quid-pro-quo.

Now the PPIAC is driving instead for a “mandatory licensing” bill — since a voluntary license has proven expensive and worthless. This will raise state costs even further, and by setting prior experience requirements will bar entry to private investigation services for qualified retired police officers, and others who have invested in training and education and have a viable and valued interest in providing investigative services to the legal community, insurance companies and private individuals.

Not once during the voluntary licensing effort (which now appears to have been a ploy all along toward a more restrictive mandatory licensing scheme by those who benefit from restraining trade) was there any evidence that non-licensed investigators were engaged in abusive practices from which the public needed protection in Colorado. Very few complaints have ever been registered among the few hundred existing private investigators offering services in the state. The proposed legislation deserves a little sunshine on the motivations behind it so that lawmakers can resist the extensive arm-twisting by private interests and avoid yet another expensive and unnecessary regulatory proposal.

Rick Johnson

www.denverpi.com

Founder and President of the [Colorado Society of Private Investigators \(www.colopi.org\)](http://www.colopi.org)

Denver private investigator, 25 years

Former Denver and Jefferson County District Attorney's Investigator, 10 years

Former 16 year member PPIAC, 9 year board member, former 3 year president