

Florida Architects Successfully Effect Legislation

Contributed by AIA Florida

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SUMMARY

In 2009, the Florida AIA component created a “blue print for success” for the management of legislative affairs in the state that affected the practice of architecture. During the course of 2009 more than three bills were filed that could have had adverse affects on the profession. Due to the volunteer work by AIA members and the Florida AIA staff, many of these bills were re-written with better terms for architects, were overturned, or stalled in committee.

MAINTAINING STANDARDS

Early planning for the legislative session is part of AIA Florida’s legislative success. To preempt the issuance of bills, AIA Florida formed a Legislative Response Team, a Florida Building Commission Task Force, a BOAID Liaison team and a Legislative Day Committee. In 2009, 21 volunteers and staff were focused on overseeing legislative changes and preparing for a busy session before the first bill was public knowledge.

The Florida Retail Federation, representing office furniture retailers, joined forces with the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) and their trade association, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), to convince state politicians to file legislation removing these businesses from interior design restrictions in state Ch. 481. Therefore, even though their work was similar to interior design work, they would not be required to hold an interior design license.

Prior to this, interior designers had filed complaints against retailers and commercial kitchen manufacturers accusing them of the unauthorized practice of interior design.

As a quick response, AIA Florida general counsel and the Legislative Response Team developed language to clarify the design capacity of furniture retailers, kitchen suppliers, and interior designers. Since these trades are not licensed under the strict guidelines of architects it was important that their designs and drawings reflected this.

AIA Florida was able to make their case heard; legislation was approved to clarify the source and use of commercial kitchen equipment manufacturers’. The language states that designs or

specifications drawn by equipment manufacturers typically for sale or installation of equipment could not also be used for construction or installation affecting structural, mechanical, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, or ventilation systems. Their drawings cannot materially affect life safety systems pertaining to fire safety protection, smoke, evacuation and compartmentalization, and emergency ingress or egress systems. For complete clarity, every drawing must state it is not to be used for construction unless reviewed and approved by a licensed architect or engineer.

Interior designers were not pleased with the proposed legislation and worked with legislators and state oversight boards to adjust the language to the following, “the construction documents shall be prepared by a design professional where required by the statutes of the jurisdiction in which the project is to be constructed.”

JOINING FORCES

Two other bills proposed changing the renewal period of licensees from two years to four which would create more confusion and accounting for continuing education compliance. The bills also allowed anyone with two years of licensure in another state to qualify for licensure in Florida, irrespective of their education or the other state’s minimum requirements. The Department of Business & Professional Regulation formed a coalition with regulators of other professional licenses such as the Florida Engineering Society, Florida Institute of CPAs and others to look into this. After successful lobbying, the sponsor allowed the bill to die in committee.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

These legislative victories were each hard fought and based on the coordinated activities of the lobbying groups, the volunteer leadership of the executive committee, the dedication of the members, and the ability to activate the grassroots membership through the communications mediums and based on the trust previously established with legislators.

To rally the membership, each time a piece of legislation caught the eye of the AIA Florida general counsel a number of communication mediums were

used to inform and coalesce the voice of the membership. Some of the communication tools used include a video message from the President; the e-newsletter, Friday Facts; the winter Florida/Caribbean Architect magazine, and news flashes.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 21.03.17 Texas Legislative Volunteer Hollye Fisk
- 21.03.16 Architects and the Art of Lobbying
- 21.03.19 Ben Tiseo, AIA, Producing Legislative Victories in Michigan

Feedback

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Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architectural associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components
- Legislation