

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Keeping an Eye on Business

As a state official, I am on a lot of mailing lists. So I spend part of every day looking over all information that somebody is distributing throughout Massachusetts. Many items relate to my work at the State House, so I put it on file. Sometimes a topic would interest a particular constituent, so I forward it to that person. Last week a packet arrived from the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs that met both of those criteria, so I am keeping it for my own reference and offering it to you in this Byline.

The letter came accompanied by a leaflet called "A Consumer's Guide to the Licensed Professions." The leaflet contains a listing of the boards that oversee forty-five, different professions, from architects to veterinarians. About 530,000 individuals are regulated by Massachusetts, and the phone number of each board of registration is listed, along with information about the meaning of licensing and the procedures for filing a complaint. Most of the relationships in our daily lives with professionals and tradespeople are satisfactory. It's the exception that gets our attention.

I found the information useful because it deals with the purposes of licensing and the reasons for investigating licensees. The statement that "dissatisfaction alone is not proof of incompetence or sufficient grounds for disciplinary action" caught my attention. Understanding that concept and reading several examples of actual complaints will arm any aggrieved consumer with an idea of what to expect from the complaint process.

After outlining the circumstances that lead to a complaint that is appropriate for a registration board, the leaflet also provides alternate methods for dealing with an unsatisfactory experience. The Better Business Bureau is an option as is small claims court or the attorney general's consumer protection office. The guide also offers a checklist of pointers to help you avoid trouble before it begins. Determining the licensure, understanding the policies all expectations of a tradesperson at the beginning of a business relationship can prevent problems before they occur.

One of the most common complaints to come from Hampden County is that phone calls must generally be made to Boston. The Internet has taken care of that by making information available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/reg>. Unfortunately you must still call Boston to reach a specific Board, but not for the Guide. To take care of that issue, I invite you to call me at 567-1661 if you would like a copy of the Consumer's Guide. If you determine after reading the guide that a formal complaint is appropriate, the Springfield Office of Investigations will provide the forms for filing a written complaint.