



February 1, 2016

George T. Gibson, P.E.  
Chairman  
Oklahoma State Board of Licensure for  
Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors  
220 NE 28th Street, Suite 120  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Mr. Gibson,

The National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) is aware that the state of Oklahoma is currently considering legislation to amend the Oklahoma engineering licensure law to permit SE designation for structural engineers in the state of Oklahoma. NSPE is concerned about this change because it would undermine the existing process for the licensure of professional engineers in Oklahoma and elsewhere for a variety of reasons:

- Of paramount importance to licensure as a professional engineer is the ethical commitment to limit one's area of practice only to those fields of engineering in which he or she can demonstrate competence.
- A PE who is not fully competent to perform structural engineering is already ethically obligated not to do so, even as he or she is obligated not to practice in other areas that are beyond their established expertise and competence.
- The obligation to stay current and practice in one's own field is the bedrock of PE licensure and is not limited to or required by separate discipline-specific licensure.
- For decades, licensure as a professional engineer has been central to protecting the public health, safety, and welfare. As we face increasingly complex challenges, NSPE believes that the continued recognition of PE licensure as the defining qualification for practice is critical to guaranteeing the trust and protection of the public.
- Layers of licensing requirements would cloud that perspective and create uncertainty. The current system recognizes that the line between disciplines can at times be difficult to demarcate and therefore, allows the individual professional to exercise the appropriate professional judgment, autonomy and discretion similar to other professionals rather than controlling by rigid, bureaucratic means.
- The term "structural" is poorly defined, if at all. Structural design is practiced by many other civil engineering professionals (site, water resources, bridges, geotechnical, foundation, etc.) which tend to cross over discipline and/or practice boundaries. Wouldn't such a change then, interfere with the practice of thousands of duly licensed and qualified professional civil engineers?

- The discussion regarding a separate SE license does not address the success of the current system. Tens of thousands of superb structures have been designed and built not only without harm, but in fact with great benefit to the public.

In addition, NSPE has been advised that some of the discussion in Oklahoma has suggested that other states are already moving in the direction of separate licensure or structural engineers. In fact, only a handful of US jurisdictions have adopted this ill-considered approach<sup>1</sup>. In fact, in August 2015, the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying defeated a motion to establish in the council's Model Law a protected structural engineering title and restricted SE practice.

Another point that has been raised by some is that Oklahoma structural engineers are at a "competitive marketing disadvantage" under the existing PE licensure system in Oklahoma. While NSPE certainly wants to see all professional engineers and their employers be successful financially and economically, NSPE believes the engineering licensure system should focus solely on the protection of the public health and safety and not be distracted by other issues that are not a basis for engineering licensure.

Finally, it has also come to NSPE's attention that individual members of NSPE may or may not have made some statements or representations regarding their own personal views on the subject of structural engineering licensure and designations. While individual members of NSPE are certainly free to express their own personal opinions on matters of public policy that are inconsistent with NSPE's views, such statements are their own and do not represent the existing professional policies<sup>2</sup> and position statements<sup>3</sup> of the National Society of Professional Engineers. To be clear, NSPE does not support such designation.

On behalf of the 30,000 members of NSPE, thank you for the opportunity to provide NSPE's views on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Austin, P.E., F.NSPE  
President

TRA:AES/mac

cc: Brian Kennell, P.E., President, Oklahoma Society of Professional Engineers  
NSPE Board of Directors

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<sup>1</sup> "Structural Divide", *PE Magazine*, September/October 2015

<sup>2</sup> NSPE Professional Policy No. 152 – Licensure & Qualifications for Practice

<sup>3</sup> NSPE Position Statement No. 1737 – Licensure and Qualifications for Practice