



Water and Wastewater Plant Operator Licensure

Policy Position Statement:

The Florida League of Cities SUPPORTS legislation to address workforce shortages in municipal water and wastewater facilities by: one, defining facility operators as critical and essential workers; two, providing reciprocity with other states for licensure of facility operators; and three, allowing credit toward licensure for military experience and time served performing similar functions and providing flexibility for facilities to use retired or out-of-state operators in emergencies.

Background:

Workforce shortages are affecting all sectors of public and private employment, including water and wastewater utilities. The need for licensed water and wastewater plant operators is especially acute because these staffing shortages impact a utility's ability to operate safely and effectively. An "operator" is defined in Florida law as any person who is in on-site charge of the actual operation, supervision and maintenance of a water treatment plant, water distribution system or domestic wastewater treatment plant and includes the person in on-site charge of a shift or period of operation during any part of the day. Florida law mandates that qualified personnel operate these facilities and specifies requirements for the licensure of these professionals. Plant operators must possess specified credentials, pay an application fee and pass a Florida licensure exam.

Florida can take proactive measures to help address workforce shortages in this sector by modifying current law requirements for operator licensure. For example, Florida's licensure statute can be amended to provide reciprocity to any applicant who holds a valid and unexpired license from another state or the U.S. government if the requirements of the other state are comparable to or more stringent than those of Florida and the operator has passed a comparable written exam in another state. In addition, Florida's licensure statute can be modified to award work experience or education credits to an applicant who performed duties comparable to the duties of a Florida operator while serving in the U.S. military, provided the service requirements were comparable to or higher than what is required under Florida law. Finally, Florida law can be modified to address acute utility workforce needs during declared emergencies by waiving applicable fees and authorizing temporary licensure by reciprocity to any operator who holds a valid and unexpired license from another state or the U.S. government.