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August 15, 2018

Texas Sunset Advisory Commission
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To the Chairman and Members of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission,

The American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG) has become aware of the recommendation that the Texas Board of Professional Geologists (Board) be abolished and that the Texas Geoscience Practice Act be repealed. AIPG was founded in 1963 to establish a system of certification for professional geologists, to protect the public from incompetent persons claiming to be geologists, and to protect reputable geologists from those who would engage in unethical practices in the field. For more than 50 years, AIPG has championed the ethical, professional, safe practice of geology by qualified professionals in the United States and beyond. To that end, we strongly support actions and activities that promote professional practices that protect the safety, health, and economic vitality of the public and local, state, and national financial interests.

We urge you to reconsider your recommendation to abolish the Board and repeal the Practice Act, for the following reasons:

Geology is highly technical and therefore benefits from regulation and professional boards.

Geology has become a highly technical field of practice that underpins nearly every facet of modern society. Since the field is technical and integral to society, it is critical that a mechanism exists to ensure that geologists have proper education and training, and that practitioners adhere to appropriate ethical and professional practice standards. Regulatory statutes and professional boards established by legislative action, with appropriate disciplinary powers, are a critical mechanism to protect public health, safety, and financial security.

Financial harm can and does occur due to improper geologic practice.

The potential for financial harm is particularly relevant. Geologists often are tasked with providing detailed information as part of the design and permitting process for a large variety of construction projects, mining and quarrying operations, and the development of public and private water projects that utilize surface water or groundwater. Improperly completed applications and supporting documentation can result in project delays, creating significant financial liabilities for companies or individuals pursuing those projects. Additional harm can result from property devaluation from, for example, unrecognized subsidence fissures in a new development.

Geologists are critical to assessing physical hazards and financial loss to the public.

Geologists provide expert knowledge and critical evaluation of geologic hazards and associated potential risks to the public and infrastructure; geotechnical studies to support infrastructure and construction projects; computer models of groundwater and surface water resources; technical studies for environmental investigations and remediation projects; and a myriad of other types of work that directly impact the health, safety, and financial security of the public.

Future Texas water supplies depend on high quality geologic study and design.

Responsible management and use of water from the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer is particularly important to Texas. Long-term planning for the proper use and management of water from this and other aquifers is critical for the continued productivity of the Texas wheat belt and for the future of Texas communities that depend on agricultural production or that use water from the High Plains Aquifer to supply other needs.

Licensing does not limit entry into the field of geology.

It is important to note that licensing and registration of geologists does not create a barrier to entry-level workers gaining employment in the field. Instead, licensing insures that the work of these “Geologists-in-training” is reviewed and validated by a senior geologist who, via the licensing and registration process, can be shown to have the education, experience, and technical expertise, to review and validate the work and affix their PG seal and signature. Having licensed professional geologists sign off on geological work is critical. In some states, that work is not reviewed, or is reviewed by engineers, many of whom, while they are qualified licensed professionals, do not have the specific technical expertise to evaluate the quality of geological work. Licensing and registration places the liability (professional, financial, or otherwise) where it belongs: namely on the person or company that did the work.

We respectfully offer this response to the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission. Should the Commission require any additional information or have questions, comments, or concerns about our response on this issue, please contact AIPG President R. Douglas Bartlett or Executive Director Aaron W. Johnson.



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