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Red Tape Snarls Interior Designers

Should designing a living room require a license? Connecticut says yes.

Susan Roberts can design you a gorgeous living room or a charming kitchen, but don't call her an "interior designer" - she could be fined \$500 and spend a year in jail. Why? Because the state of Connecticut hasn't licensed her to adopt that moniker.

Recently Roberts received a warning call from the state's Department of Consumer Protection. In order to obtain an interior designer's license, the 20-year design veteran would need to pass a \$720 standardized exam that tests designers on technical knowledge acquired during six years of combined higher education and work experience. Roberts could be grandfa-

thered for a license because she began practicing before the state licensing law went into effect, but she objects on principle to paying the \$150-a-year renewal fee.

"I've always felt that this was just another invention to solicit funds for the state," says Roberts, 66.

In September she joined a group of designers who sued the state to have the nearly three-decade-old law overturned. The plaintiffs are working with the Institute for Justice, a public-interest law firm based in Washington, D.C., that plans to fight "titling" laws in five states. So far, the firm has been successful in overturning a law in New Mexico and is filing another suit this month.

"This is what happens when a particular group tries to lobby for laws to keep out other people who are making their living the same way," says IFJ attorney Clark Neily.