



Strong Towns

1001 Kingwood Street, Studio 116

Brainerd, MN 56401

844-218-1681

Strong Towns Will Defend Engineers' Right to Free Speech From the Minnesota Licensing Board

By: Andrew Burleson, Chair of the Strong Towns Board of Directors

Official Publication Date: Aug. 29, 2022

As most of our audience will know, for the past two years, Strong Towns Founder and President Charles “Chuck” Marohn has been under attack from the Minnesota Board of AELSLAGID (Architecture, Engineering, Land Surveying, Landscape Architecture, Geoscience and Interior Design), the state board that oversees the licensing of engineers.

[The facts in this case are straightforward](#). Chuck was late in renewing his license—an offense so common that the board has a standard procedure and fee in place to resolve it. Marohn followed this process and his license was renewed without comment. This is the administrative equivalent of a parking ticket, especially since Chuck has not practiced engineering since 2012.

Nevertheless, after renewing his license, the board chose to pursue a complaint against Marohn and now, after more than a year of litigation, has decided to fine and *censure* him.

Censure is an extreme statement of contempt and disapproval, the harshest assertion the state board can make about a fellow professional. The board chose to censure Chuck but, for context, consider these cases where the board saw no need to censure:

- [Greg Kimman \(License #45042\)](#) worked for a private firm for 12 years before taking a position with the city of Little Falls. **He then directed \$1.4 million dollars' worth of public work to his former firm, where he was still a shareholder, without disclosing that financial interest to his employer or the public.** The board did not censure Kimman.

- [Nicolas Hoffman \(License #56276\)](#) applied for licensure in Minnesota and was awarded a PE in 2018, transferring his license from South Dakota. **However, Hoffman failed to inform the licensing board that he had been convicted of a felony ([embezzlement of a youth sports](#)**

club) in South Dakota and had his license revoked there based on a finding of fraud, deception, and illegal conduct involving moral turpitude. The board did not censure Hoffman.

- **Mark Deady (License #21375) went unlicensed for a decade while overseeing and performing work requiring an engineering license.** The board found that Deady “engaged in conduct involving dishonesty and deceit” and that his conduct “adversely reflects the respondent’s fitness to practice,” but did not censure him.

There are many more such examples, all of which makes the licensing board’s position clear: corruption, fraud, and deception can be forgiven, so long as you don’t *speaking critically* of the profession. The licensing board has pursued their attack against Chuck because of his advocacy for Strong Towns. For these licensing board members, this is an abuse of power, one that is corrupting a state institution along with the engineering profession as a whole.

Why is the board afraid of Strong Towns? We have deep respect for the engineering profession, but we also question some of its widely held assumptions and call for reform. We seek:

- **Transparent local accounting**, so citizens can understand their municipal fiscal health and make informed decisions about new public projects.
- **The end of unconditional highway expansion**, the current cultural norm that continues to saddle communities with expensive maintenance that will never generate enough tax base to pay for it.
- **Safe and productive streets**, because all Americans, and especially our children, deserve the freedom to walk and bike without fear of being killed by unsafe traffic engineering.
- **An end to parking mandates and subsidies**, because citizens should not be forced by central planners to waste acres on unused asphalt.

These are simple, evidence-based reforms that the people of Minnesota and the United States deserve. There’s a common theme unifying these issues, a “bottom-up revolution” where we place trust and stewardship of neighborhood life back in the hands of the people who live there.

Among our movement, there are many reform-minded professional engineers who support Strong Towns reforms and are working to bring them to life. Yet, the Minnesota licensing board has been clear: speak up and you risk becoming a target.

We are disappointed in the Board of AELSLAGID. The people of Minnesota deserve an engineering profession committed to the health, safety, and prosperity of all Minnesotans;

unafraid to look in the mirror and find room for improvement. Instead, Minnesota's licensing board has shown itself to be a tool of those opposed to reform, willing to abuse its authority to suppress critique.

Fortunately, as Americans, our right to freedom of speech is enshrined in the Constitution. The Strong Towns movement is proud to stand behind Chuck Marohn and all engineers speaking up for reform. We defend their right to self-reflect, to question, and even to criticize their own profession, in order to better serve the American people.

Thus, our response is to fight the licensing board's decision in the Minnesota Court of Appeals, and to keep fighting as long as it takes to defend the freedom of speech we need to create Strong Towns in Minnesota, and across the nation.