



**Regulation Matters:  
a CLEAR conversation**

## **Episode 101: Who Knows What We Do? Public Understanding and Recruitment in Professional Regulation May 12, 2026**

**Line Dempsey:** Welcome back to our podcast, Regulation Matters: a CLEAR conversation. Once again, I'm your host, Line Dempsey. I'm currently the Chief Compliance Officer with Riccobene Associates Family Dentistry, with practices in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, and I've also been a board member and past president of CLEAR.

As many of you are aware, the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation, or CLEAR, is an association of individuals, agencies, and organizations that comprise the international community of professional and occupational regulation. This podcast is an opportunity for you to hear about important topics in our regulatory community.

So, today's conversation explores what happens when regulators step outside their usual channels and into the community, uncovering how civic leaders understand licensing, where perceptions diverge, and what those insights mean for building stronger, more effective regulatory systems. I'm excited about talking today with Jennifer Garrett - she is the Deputy Secretary with Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services - and Rich Woolf with the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy and the Healthcare Regulatory Research Institute. So, welcome to you both, and thank you for speaking with me on today's podcast.

**Jennifer Garrett:** Thank you. Happy to be here.

**Richard Woolf:** Great to be here, thanks for including me.

**Line:** Absolutely. So, Jennifer, let's start with you. What prompted you to take this idea directly to Rotary Clubs, and what were you hoping to learn that you weren't getting through traditional recruitment or outreach methods?

**Jennifer:** So, our governor, who is responsible for board appointments, has decided not to run again, and one of the priorities for the remainder of his term is to fill all open board seats, and also identify members who are terming off this July so that those replacements can be in place. And I oversee

policy and policy development at our agency, so it's also a priority of mine, because when we have vacancies on our boards, then we run into quorum issues, and the boards can't meet, and they can't fulfill their responsibilities. And then we face criticism from the public and complaints from license holders who are waiting a long time for decisions on license applications and discipline and otherwise. So, it was a shared priority. Typically, the governor's office does the majority of the recruitment, and we support in some of the vetting. However, given that there was a shortened timeline and a shared interest, I decided to do some outreach of my own and experiment a little bit to learn more about what the public knew about serving on regulatory boards, and what they didn't know.

And I started with Rotary for a couple of reasons. First, they're organizations of civic-minded and service-oriented people, so they seemed like a more prime audience for the message. And also, and this was a matter of convenience, a previous secretary had been a Rotary member and had spoken at a lot of Rotary clubs, and so we already had contact information at a lot of them and the speaker application process. So it was an easy but also relevant place to start. And so I did a series of about a dozen talks at different Rotary Clubs, mostly in southwestern Wisconsin. I ventured out to the western part and a little bit north, but they've mostly been within two hours of Madison.

**Line:** Right on. So, as you spoke with the civic leaders across Wisconsin, what feedback or perceptions about licensing and regulation maybe surprised you during this process?

**Jennifer:** Well, first and foremost, there was almost no recognition of the existence of these boards, except for people who held a license that was issued by one of the boards. And even sometimes they weren't quite sure what the boards were, and what the connection was to them, and what my connection was to the boards. I didn't expect a high level of awareness, but I was a bit shocked at the complete lack of awareness.

**Line:** Yeah, that's really interesting. Now, Rich, based on your work with public perception data, where do you see the biggest gaps between what regulators do and what the public in general kind of thinks regulators do.

**Richard:** Yeah, we had the opportunity to use our research arm, the Healthcare Regulatory Research Institute, to work with some market research data from Chris Grecco and Mandy Hall at Element Market Research. And they did two studies, and both had similar findings about what people's familiarity was with state licensing boards. Those that are very familiar (may have, you know, lodged a complaint or otherwise at some point interacted) are very small, maybe less than 10%. Somewhat familiar, maybe around 31%. So the vast majority were not familiar at all with what we do. We all suspect that, but to have some actual numbers around that's pretty large. When we gave an open answer, an open-ended question around that, and said, 'What do you think the licensing boards do?' Okay. A quarter of them said, 'Well, you're gonna give them licenses.' A quarter. Almost 50% did not

even provide an answer. No clue whatsoever on that response whatsoever. Some of them thought they oversaw industry standards, set healthcare standards, right? Only 5% said they investigate complaints and take disciplinary action. So, clearly, there's this disconnect with the public that we are charged with protecting, and their lack of awareness that we're even there to help them.

**Jennifer:** Line, may I comment on that?

**Line:** Of course!

**Jennifer:** A small spoiler alert here. I was watching *The Pitt* recently, and there was an argument between two of the physicians, and one of them said to the other, 'I should have reported you to the medical board.' And I did a little tap dance in my head that they included that, but I also worry that discipline is the only thing people associate with our boards. And while it's an important part, it's not the only part of their work.

**Line:** Yeah, great, great point. You know, anecdotally from my experience having been a senior investigator with a dental board - a more familiar board in some places, with regard to all the different licenses that are offered - I would always get questions about, 'what is it that you do?' Not having a complete understanding at all. And you're absolutely right - that negative aspect of boards. Even if you go to a board website, what do you normally see? You see board discipline, right? So, you know, even as an outsider trying to gather more information, you tend to find just the negative side of things, if you would, but it's obviously so much deeper than that. So, for both of you I guess, where did the informal insights from the rotary conversations align, or clash for that matter? What are the broader trends that you are seeing in the data that you're looking at?

**Jennifer:** Well, Rich has the data, but I think my little experiment confirms that his data is pretty accurate, because that was my suspicion, generally, that most people don't know what the regulatory boards are, and my tour confirmed that. Again, which wasn't surprising but was still disappointing.

**Richard:** Yeah, I would echo that. I think one of the takeaways that I probably had from this is, while the public doesn't know who we are, and we're invisible for the most part. So when regulation's working well, nobody sees it. Finely oiled machine. And it's only when maybe regulation's not doing well and it's splashed all over the headlines that the public is really aware and starts complaining and brings awareness to this. It makes it harder to connect with the public every day when we've got a well-working, a well-oiled machinery. And so, that's a challenge.

During the market research data that was conducted, further after they asked them what they knew about it, they gave a little description about what regulatory boards do and their role, and their role in prevention, as you brought up as well. Once they were informed about what they do, and they asked individuals, 'Do you agree that this is extremely helpful?,' the answer just flips. Vast majority said, 'We

love this. This is great to know that this resource is out there, that they're protecting our back, that they're taking care of us.' And so, probably, 75 to 90% all of a sudden were very positive or somewhat positive about the role of regulatory boards after hearing the description of what regulatory boards do. So there's the disconnect. Once they know, they love and appreciate us, or are welcome to have us there, but the challenge is that they are unaware of what we do, and because of that - that gap or that difference - we struggle in a very difficult space to be able to get our message out.

**Jennifer:** And Line, I would add to that, too, that because of that gap, the public will fill in the gap with other ideas of who is responsible for safety. Many people think our med malpractice insurance lawsuit route does it all. Others think it's the associations. And I actually almost got into an argument and had to stand down and just agree to disagree with one of the Rotary members, or Rotarians, who insisted that we didn't issue her father's medical license; that it was the state medical society. And I said, 'No, I'm pretty sure it was us.' And she started to argue, and then I just let it go. But I thought, one, that was a stunning challenge, and two, she probably isn't the only one who makes that assumption.

**Line:** Oh, of course, I mean, we got confused all the time with the dental society and the dental board, and especially when people were trying to resolve an issue or something like that, you know. We had a lot more power, the dental board did, because we could affect or impact a practitioner's ability to practice, right? Whereas a society didn't have that kind of a power.

So, I'll start with you, Jennifer. What did you learn about that motivates these civic-minded people to even serve. You know, taking it even a step further, there's a lack of understanding of what the boards are. But, to even get them to serve, or not serve on a regulatory board, and how should that reshape recruitment strategies going forward?

**Jennifer:** Well, one thing I learned was after one Rotarian then applied for a board seat, so I did have a small amount of success. However, he was the former mayor of the city for that Rotary Club. And it occurred to me, upon reflection, that former elected officials are often among the pool of candidates for board service. And that's logical, because they're already familiar with government processes; they're not intimidated by them; they are aware that there are these appointed roles within different government structures, whereas most of the public wouldn't know that, or might not know that.

So, that didn't seem terribly surprising to me, but it prompted me then to look at who else were our public members on our boards, and who were the public members on other boards that were high-performing and very engaged. And one trend I noticed - and it's not scientific; this is just my observation - is that a lot of lawyers are public members on boards, and are often among the higher-performing public members. And I think, again, that is logical, because part of what is intimidating for our public members is the legal nature of the work, and the legal implications of the work, and lawyers are not afraid of that. And then the other thing I see with our public members is proclivity to

defer to the professional members, especially at the beginning of their service. And that's far less common with attorneys. And you can read into that what you like. I went to law school; I'm not licensed in practicing, but lawyers are trained to challenge and question, and so by nature of their training, and perhaps by nature of their personalities, they come into a situation, a room, a board, ready to do that. So that was a big takeaway for me, that perhaps attorneys are a good pool to tap for public board member seats.

So the next thing I've been working on is then how to find the right attorneys, the ones that are at the right point in their career, where they have time for board service, where they appreciate the professional development, the growth, the broadening of skills that board service brings that complement their legal skills and experience. And I'm still figuring that out, but I do think that that may be a more fruitful pool of candidates than the Rotarians were.

**Richard:** It's interesting, that approach there. Maybe I'm gonna just set the stage for a [discussion this fall at CLEAR's annual meeting](#). Eileen Linnabery from Vantage Leadership Consulting is working on a success profile for public members. And so she's got a presentation. Currently, she came and did a little preview at our regulatory training recently, and I found it fascinating to say, what are the competencies you need to have to be successful? Being a lawyer wasn't one of them, right? But understanding that you gotta be familiar with the processes associated with that, and just feel comfortable. And also, as Jennifer said, the willingness to speak up, to understand, depending on the structure of the board, they may be in the minority in the room, but they need to make sure the voice is heard, that they're there to protect the public, they are representing the public, and so their opinion carries a ton of weight, and needs to continue to carry weight, so that's there. But you don't have to be perfect, right? There are opportunities to build competencies through this process, and I know that Vantage Leadership Consulting, as they were developing this, asked for some leads of a lot of different board administrators who identified what were the strong candidates from their best public members. Then also interviewed several public members themselves to say what made it worthwhile, what made it challenging, where could we grow? So, I think there's a lot coming out of this work that may help us then identify, okay, if they gotta have these competencies, where are we looking, and how are we reaching out that might help inform this approach. But I also welcome the fact that, while we got one rotary, how many other individuals became aware of the role of regulatory boards through that? And I do not think all of us collectively as regulators do a very good job of our elevator pitch to our friends and our neighbors in our communities about the role of regulation and how it's there to serve the public.

**Jennifer:** And Line, I want to add something to what Rich said. I agree that you don't have to be a lawyer to be a good public member, but I think what it told me is that they come in a little more ready. And what other public members who may not have that experience and training need is training. And

we don't do a great job of onboarding any board members, but particularly public members, and then we really have a lot of opportunity for improving the ongoing training for board members. So I'm glad Rich challenged that a little bit, because that is the other thing that I learned: That it's not that an average person off the street can't be a good board member, but they need some understanding of what they're doing, what the expectations and role and responsibilities are. And we don't always prepare them to be successful right from the beginning. And so it takes them a little while to absorb and gain the confidence to participate at a higher level. And some never get there, and they then gradually disengage, and then they're even more problematic than a vacancy, because they're holding a seat, but they don't attend. And so, that tells me that we can't ignore the training, that recruitment is part but retention is critical as well. And a good retention strategy, not the only, but a good one, is to train effectively and often.

**Line:** Great points. So for conversation's sake, I mean, let's say the rotary is not the route to go. If we've got other regulators that are listening, what would be some realistic low-barrier ways that you could gather similar informational feedback and build these relationships in other communities? Do you have some ideas of where we go next from here?

**Richard:** Jennifer, let me jump in, first, and have you respond to this. Just this morning, I was on my LinkedIn page, and up popped a feed from the Physical Therapy Board of California. And what was it? It was one of their board members doing a 30-second video about why I joined the board, and what my experience was. In the very end of the presentation was a little pop-up with some text that said, if you're interested in volunteering for the board, here's the link to the governor's webpage, and got that up and going. Surely not hard. Very easy to be able to do that, get the word out on social media. I liked it, I reposted it, so all my friends that are not physical therapists could also see this and say, 'Oh, you know, maybe I do want to do this, maybe there's an opportunity for me to get involved in some of these things.' We probably underutilize social media. I don't know that many of our member boards even have LinkedIn pages. And then when we do, we probably underutilize them.

**Jennifer:** I agree completely with Rich. We, at our agency, have prioritized over the past couple of years our LinkedIn account as opposed to Facebook and other social media accounts, and we do get quite a bit of traction there. Unlike the California Board, we have not yet gotten to the point where we've included board members actively, so we're not shooting videos and posting profiles very often, but that's because of capacity and the number of boards we serve. But I agree wholeheartedly that current board members are your best ambassadors, and agencies like mine need to figure out the resources and capacity so that we can leverage those existing board members.

And I did have a conversation when I was speaking about this, not at a Rotary Club, but at a meeting at the Capitol, and someone came up to me and said, 'You don't have time to do this; your board

members should be doing this.' And I agree completely. We're trying to work towards having kind of a plug-and-play slide deck, so any board member with one or two passes through it can feel comfortable about talking about it, and they can take it to where their colleagues are, where their community members are, and they can recruit for us. They're a much better mouthpiece. They're the ones actually doing the work. And they're the ones who are passionate about it. They're the ones who are sitting on the board. So, I agree 100% with Rich that that would be a better use of our time, and we need to build the tools so that we can get there, and then train our board members so they're confident and comfortable being that mouthpiece for the governor and for their board and the agency.

**Line:** That's good, thank you. So I guess, let me finish up with asking this. So, if there's one message that regulators should be communicating more clearly to the public, based on your findings from this, what is it, and how should they be delivering that message maybe differently than what they currently are?

**Jennifer:** Do you want to go first, Rich?

**Richard:** Sure. I think it comes down to this. Recently, we did this exercise with the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy's Board of Directors, and said, alright, everybody take 10 minutes and develop an elevator pitch about what state-based regulation is all about. What's the purpose of it? And so everyone got thoughtful, everyone came back with a little different slant. And I would say the message is, just adding on to what Jennifer said, we need to develop that elevator pitch, but then we need to be intentional about delivering that pitch every single opportunity we can. They don't know what we do. The public is unaware, right? That message that regulation exists to protect the public and that the public has a role in helping to shape it, right? And so, if we can get that message out there and we can share: hey, this is what it is, it's kind of fun, right? There's opportunities to be engaged; there's new friends to make; there are meetings to attend; there could be national organizations you could be part of through this whole process ; develop new relationships and have a great opportunity to still serve the public in a very, very meaningful way.

**Jennifer:** And I would add to that that there are a lot of people who want to serve in some capacity, but do not want to launch and run a campaign. They are just not cut out for the election process, but they are very engaged and very interested and want to be part of the solution to the challenges we're all facing. And this is one of the ways they can do that. It's not the only way, but it's one way they can be very involved, they can be a decision maker, and they don't have to, you know, run a campaign to do it. They are appointed roles, so they're not... it's not simple, but it's a far simpler process than becoming an elected official.

**Line:** Excellent. Well, thank you. This conversation really does highlight that when regulators rethink how we connect with the public, we can open the door to strong relationships along with better decision-making and more resilient regulatory systems. So, I do want to thank both of you, Jennifer and Rich, for sharing your perspectives with me today and our listeners. Thank you so much.

**Richard:** Thank you, it was a pleasure.

**Jennifer:** Thank you, Line and Rich. I appreciate it and enjoyed it.

**Line:** Absolutely, it has been a pleasure. And we'd love to continue this conversation with our members on the [CLEAR Regulatory Network](#). This podcast episode will be posted there, along with some questions for our members to consider, such as:

- What untapped community networks or civic groups in your jurisdiction could serve as a pipeline for future board or committee members, and how might you begin building relationships with them?
- Also, what barriers, either real or perceived, might be preventing qualified, service-minded individuals from pursuing board appointments in your jurisdiction, and how could you better communicate the value and accessibility of these roles?

We greatly appreciate and thank our members for your discussion and feedback in the CLEAR Regulatory Network. And if you haven't already, please, we invite and encourage you to join and take part in the online discussions.

I also want to thank our listeners for tuning in to this episode. We'll be back with another episode of Regulation Matters: a CLEAR conversation very soon. And if you're new to the CLEAR podcast, please subscribe to us. You can find us on Podbean or any of your favorite podcast services. If you've enjoyed this podcast episode, please leave a rating or comment in the app. Those reviews help us to improve our ranking and make it easier for new listeners to find us. Feel free to visit our website at [www.clearhq.org](http://www.clearhq.org) for additional resources, along with a calendar of upcoming programs and events. Finally, I'd like to thank our CLEAR staff, specifically Stephanie Thompson. She is our content coordinator and editor for this program. Once again, I'm Line Dempsey, and I hope to be speaking to you again very soon.

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