



2026 City Business License Model Threshold update

Effective January 1, 2026

What are the main changes to the model threshold?

The main change in the update would make a one-time increase to a higher threshold to \$4000 for out-of-city businesses from the current \$2,000 threshold, effective January 1, 2026.

Other changes include:

- Every four years thereafter, the threshold would have an automatic periodic increase based on cumulative inflation.
- The rates of inflation would be calculated using the Consumer Price Index-U (CPI-U) Western for June of each year compared to the previous year for the previous four years.
- The rate of inflation would be calculated as zero in any year in which inflation was negative and capped at 5% per year or 20% over four years if inflation exceeded those amounts.
- To make the threshold easier to administer, the cumulative inflation amount would be rounded to the nearest \$100.

Could my city still require a no fee registration for out-of-city businesses below the threshold?

Cities retain the local option of requiring a no-fee registration for out-of-city businesses below the threshold.

Was the definition of “engaging in business” changed?

No, the definition of engaging in business has not changed since the 2018 model was adopted.

What are the deadlines for all cities with business licenses to adopt the 2026 model threshold?

Cities with a business license **must** adopt the model by **January 1, 2026**.

However, cities that currently partner with the state’s Business Licensing Service (BLS) for business licensing administration must adopt it by mid-October 2025, because they must **provide BLS 75-day notice** of any changes to their business licenses, including this mandatory change.

What if my city has a higher threshold?

Cities can choose to enact a higher threshold. The \$4,000 city threshold for out-of-city businesses is the minimum level that every city must enact.

What if my city wants to have a threshold that applies to in-city businesses in addition to the out-of-city business threshold?

The \$4,000 threshold level for out-of-city businesses is a mandatory minimum threshold that every city business license city must adopt, but the law does not impact the city’s authority to have exemptions or other thresholds.

Cities can continue to require a license for businesses located in the city without regard to the threshold (unless the city chose to exempt these businesses).

Cities can also choose to enact a separate threshold exemption that applies to in-city businesses.

Who should my city notify when the model is adopted?

BLS partner cities: Send a completed Change Request Form to BLS notifying them of the update
All other cities: Email Sheila Gall, AWC (sheilag@awcnet.org) so we can track updates.

How will businesses find out about the changes?

Consider providing information on changes to your business license by adding information to your license renewal letter, sending a letter to your potentially impacted businesses, updating information on your city’s website or presenting to your local chamber.

Background on the 2018 model threshold

In the 2017 session, EHB 2005 (RCW 35.90) passed requiring three actions by cities with business licenses and local B&O taxes. The law required cities to make changes to business licensing, including requiring cities with business licenses to establish a workgroup to create a model business license threshold by July 2018 for adoption by all business license cities by January 1, 2019.

**2018 model ordinance for local business licenses
– minimum threshold**

The 2018 model included a mandatory definition of “engaging in business” and a \$2000 minimum threshold (or occasional sale) exemption to establish when out-of-town or transient businesses are required to be licensed. All business license cities adopted the model by January 1, 2019 (RCW 35.90.080).

Contact

Sheila Gall

General Counsel

sheilag@awcnet.org

wacities.org