

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1307
Author: Ávila Farías (D), et al.
Amended: 8/21/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE BUS., PROF. & ECON. DEV. COMMITTEE: 10-0, 6/15/26

AYES: Wahab, Choi, Archuleta, Caballero, Grayson, Menjivar, Niello,
Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arreguín

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/13/26

AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-4, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Licensed Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program

SOURCE: Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas

DIGEST: This bill revises and recasts the statutory framework for the Licensed Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program (Mexico Dentists Program) and updates various requirements of the existing pilot program relating to temporary state licensure of licensed dentists from Mexico who work for a federally qualified health facility that has at least one health professional shortage area or dental professional shortage area within its service area in California.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/21/26 eliminate Mexico Dentists Program evaluation requirements; update orientation program subjects and specify that the subjects must be taught by an instructor affiliated with a California Dental School accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation; authorize the Dental Board of California (DBC) to terminate a license if a participant is denied a visa; decrease the license fee; update license timeframes; impose a new requirement for program participants to pass the ADEX Dental Examination and; state Legislative intent that DBC implement the Mexico Dentists Program within six months of receiving

philanthropic funds of \$200K or more and that DBC administer the program without adopting regulations.

ANALYSIS:

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the Dental Practice Act (Act). (Business and Professions Code (BPC) §§ 1600 et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the Dental Board of California (DBC or Board) within the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) to administer and enforce the Dental Practice Act (Act). (BPC § 1601.1)
- 3) Establishes the Mexico Dentists Program which requires the Board to issue a three-year non-renewable permit to practice dentistry to no more than 30 dentists from Mexico who meet specified criteria. (BPC § 1645.4)
- 4) Requires dentists in the pilot program to meet specified criteria to qualify for participation. (BPC § 1645.4(e))
- 5) Limits employment of dentists in the Mexico Dentists Program to nonprofit community health centers. (BPC § 1645.4(f))
- 6) Requires dentists in the Mexico Dentists Program to apply for a three-year visa and Social Security number (SSN) within 14 days of receiving a permit, provide the SSN within 10 days of obtaining it, and prohibits participants from engaging in the practice of dentistry until these are met. (BPC § 1645.4(i))
- 7) Provides that all applicable employment benefits, salary, and policies provided by nonprofit community health centers to their current employees shall be provided to medical and dental practitioners from Mexico participating in the Mexico Dentists Program and that nonprofit community health centers must provide malpractice insurance coverage. (BPC § 1645.4(j))
- 8) Requires an evaluation of the program to commence 12 months after implementation, performed by a California dental school or independent consultant, and requires the evaluation to include specified issues, e.g. quality of care and impact on cultural and linguistic services. (BPC § 1645.4(k))

- 9) Requires costs for administering the Mexico Dentists Program to be secured from philanthropic entities. (BPC § 1645.4(l))
- 10) Requires Mexico Dentists Program applicants to work with the governments of Mexico and the United States in order to obtain the necessary three-year visa required for program participation. (BPC § 1645.4(m))

Background

Licensed Dentists in California. To obtain a dental license in California, applicants to the Dental Board are required to: furnish satisfactory evidence of having graduated from a board-approved dental college; successfully pass a written license examination (National Board of Dental Examination of the Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations); successfully take an examination in California Law and Ethics; successfully pass a practical exam of dental skills and diagnosis-treatment planning; submit fingerprints for the purposed of conducting a background check; and furnish evidence of liability insurance for any injuries sustained as a result of the applicant's taking of the practical licensure examination, among other requirements.

Out-of-country unlicensed applicants may be issued a license to practice in California if they have been issued a diploma from a foreign dental school accredited by a body that has a reciprocal accreditation agreement with any commission or accreditation organization whose findings are accepted by the board so long as the applicant has been issued a degree of Doctor of Dental Medicine or Doctor of Dental Surgery and provides evidence of completion of the full number of academic years of undergraduate courses required for graduation and that the applicant has been issued a dental diploma or degree to the Board (BPC § 1628).

Additionally, if an out of country applicant holds a valid and unrestricted license from another U.S. state or territory, and meets the clinical practice requirements, or can secure a two-year full-time contract with an approved dental school or community/public clinic, they may qualify for licensure through the Licensure by Credential pathway (BPC § 1635.5).

This bill builds upon the existing pathway to licensure in California for a very limited number of currently licensed dentists from Mexico to allow these licensed professionals to serve limited term tenures in critically underserved areas where cultural competency is severely needed.

Licensed Physicians and Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program. The Mexico Pilot Program, established by AB 1045 (Firebaugh, Chapter 1157, Statutes of 2002),

was designed to bring licensed physicians and dentists from Mexico with rural experience, who speak the language, understand the culture, and know how to apply this knowledge in serving the large Latino communities in rural areas who have limited or no access to primary health care services. AB 1045 authorized up to 30 licensed physicians specializing in family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology and up to 30 licensed dentists from Mexico to practice medicine or dentistry in California for up to three years, and required the individuals to meet certain requirements related to training and education. Proponents of the measure were concerned about addressing primary care physician and dentist shortages while maintaining a high quality of care. The bill specified that any funding necessary for the implementation of the Mexico Pilot Program, including the evaluation and oversight functions, was to be secured from nonprofit philanthropic entities and further stated that implementation of the program could not move forward unless appropriate funding was secured from nonprofit philanthropic entities.

The Medical Board of California (MBC) received the necessary philanthropic funding in 2018 to initiate the program and began taking the necessary steps for implementation. As of April 2019, MBC began accepting applications for the Mexico Pilot Program. MBC received the required funding commitments necessary for program implementation in December 2020. In August 2022, the Center for Reducing Health Disparities (CRHD) at the University of California, Davis released its first annual progress report of the Mexico Pilot Program.

In 2024, AB 2860 (Garcia, Chapter 246) created two distinct programs, the Licensed Physicians from Mexico Program (Mexico Physicians Program) in the Medical Practice Act, and the Mexico Dentists Program in the Dental Practice Act, and made various updates and conforming changes.

Despite the statutory framework for the Mexico Dentists Program being in existence for over 20 years, DBC has not implemented a program. The Mexico Physicians Program was implemented after appropriate funding was secured and appears successful in meeting the needs of medical patients in areas where cultural competency is a factor in health care outcomes, as described by an independent evaluation conducted by the University of Davis School of Medicine Center for the Study of Health Disparities.

Comments

The August 21 amendments create new impediments to implementation of the Mexico Dentists Program, including requiring participating dentists to pass the

American Board of Dental Examiners (ADEX) examination and authorizing DBC to terminate a license if a visa is denied.

Participants in this program are not dental students seeking to demonstrate competency for initial entry into the profession; they are dentists who have already completed their dental education and satisfied the requirements to become licensed dentists in Mexico. The program was specifically structured to provide an alternative, closely regulated pathway for a limited number of these licensed dentists to practice in California, subject to additional education, orientation, supervision, practice-setting, and other program-specific requirements intended to ensure competency and patient protection.

Requiring these dentists to additionally pass ADEX effectively overlays an initial-licensure examination requirement onto a program created to establish an alternative pathway for dentists already licensed in Mexico. The requirement creates additional costs, logistical barriers, and potential delays for prospective participants and may further impede implementation of the program.

California law provides a separate licensure-by-credential pathway under which an eligible dentist holding an active and unrestricted license in another state may obtain a California license without passing ADEX, provided the dentist satisfies specified practice experience and other requirements. California therefore does not require passage of ADEX in every instance in which an already-licensed dentist seeks authority to practice in this state; qualifying out-of-state licensees may instead demonstrate eligibility through their licensure, practice experience, and satisfaction of the other requirements for licensure by credential. By contrast, AB 1307 would require participants in this narrowly tailored workforce program to pass ADEX notwithstanding their existing professional licensure in Mexico and the additional competency, education, oversight, and practice restrictions imposed by the program itself.

The August 21 amendments also authorize DBC to terminate a program participant's license if the participant is denied a visa. This provision raises separate concerns because it ties continued eligibility for a state professional license to a federal immigration determination that does not necessarily reflect the dentist's professional qualifications, competency, or ability to practice safely.

The experience of the corresponding Licensed Physicians from Mexico Program is instructive. MBC previously reported to the Legislature that physician applicants encountered difficulty obtaining the visa necessary to participate in the program because they had not yet been issued their California license. In response, the Legislature established a process under which MBC may issue a program license

to an otherwise qualified applicant before the applicant obtains the necessary visa and Social Security number. The physician must then promptly seek the appropriate visa and may not begin practicing until the applicable federal immigration requirements have been satisfied. The statutory framework in the Medical Practice Act does not, however, make an initial visa denial an independent basis for terminating the physician's professional license.

This sequencing recognizes the practical relationship between professional licensure and federal immigration authorization. A visa determination may depend upon the visa classification sought, documentation presented, the individual's employment circumstances, or changes in federal immigration requirements or policy. A participant may need to pursue a different or corrected immigration pathway without any corresponding change in the individual's professional qualifications. Treating a visa denial as grounds for terminating a professional license conflates two distinct governmental determinations: whether an individual is professionally qualified to practice dentistry, which is within DBC's regulatory jurisdiction, and whether that individual is authorized to enter or remain in the United States for that employment, which is determined under federal immigration law.

This bill now authorizes DBC to terminate the license of a dentist who has otherwise satisfied the state's professional and program-specific requirements based on an immigration determination that may be unrelated to the dentist's clinical qualifications, and that may be subject to correction or reconsideration. Notably, the bill does not provide a subsequent process for a participant to appeal or otherwise challenge the termination, or address circumstances in which a visa denial is subsequently reconsidered, corrected, or reversed.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

The DBC estimated a one-time cost of \$300,000 to contract with a vendor to conduct the required program evaluation for the prior version of the bill. The Board also noted it will experience a one-time workload impact on the prior version of the bill to promulgate regulations, as well as ongoing workload to process applications and issue licenses. The Senate Appropriations Committee noted that although this bill will create a non-absorbable fiscal impact to implement and regulate the program, all costs will be covered by donations from philanthropic foundations. Workload will not begin until all required funding is received, and the bill becomes operative six months after these funds are secured. DBC will establish a new, dedicated account specifically for the Mexico Pilot

Program to track all program-related revenues (including licensing fees) and expenditures.

The Office of Information Services (OIS) estimates costs of \$72,000 to create a new license type in the BreZzE system. OIS notes these costs will also be paid for by philanthropic funds.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/24/26)

Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas (source)

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/24/26)

None received for the current version of this bill.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-4, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, Elhawary, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Sanchez

NO VOTE RECORDED: Gallagher, McKinnor, Patterson

Prepared by: Yeaphana La Marr / B., P. & E.D. /
8/24/26 13:36:37

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