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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### SB 1179 (Menjivar) - Doctors from El Salvador Program

**Version:** April 9, 2026

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** April 27, 2026

**Policy Vote:** B., P. & E.D. 10 - 0

**Mandate:** No

**Consultant:** Janelle Miyashiro

**Bill Summary:** SB 1179 establishes the Doctors from El Salvador Program (El Salvador Program) to authorize licensed physicians from El Salvador to practice in California for up to three years.

#### **Fiscal Impact:**

- The Medical Board of California (MBC) anticipates costs of approximately \$67,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 1, \$2,000 in FY 2, \$30,000 in FY 3, and \$43,000 in FY 4. MBC notes that program administration costs will be offset by fee revenue. The board anticipates first-year revenues of approximately \$38,000 in application fees, \$104,000 in initial licensing fees, \$3,000 in the CURES fund, and \$2,000 from the Steven M. Thompson Fee.
- The Office of Information Services (OIS) within the Department of Consumer Affairs anticipates IT costs of approximately \$144,000 to build a new MBC license type in BreZE. OIS notes these costs are not absorbable, and the system build will require a delayed implementation to secure necessary vendor resources.

**Background:** The El Salvador Program proposed by this bill is modeled after the Licensed Physicians from Mexico Pilot Program (Mexico Pilot Program). AB 1045 (Firebaugh, Chapter 1157, Statutes of 2002) established the Licensed Physicians and Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program, and was designed to bring 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. Proponents of the measure were concerned about addressing primary care physician and dentist shortages while maintaining a high quality of care.

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. AB 1045 tasked MBC with oversight review of both the implementation of the program and an evaluation of the program once it is implemented. AB 1045 specified that any funding necessary for the implementation of the 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.

Physicians from Mexico finally started serving patients under the pilot program in August 2021, beginning with physicians working at San Benito Health Foundation in

August 2021. Additional physicians subsequently began serving patients at Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas in Monterey County, Altura Centers for Health in Tulare County. From January to November 2023, additional licensed physicians from Mexico began serving patients in the Alta Med Health Corporation in Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

The first annual progress report on the pilot program, submitted to the Legislature by the University of California (UC), Davis in August of 2022, found that many patients had positive experiences with physicians practicing through the pilot program. Patients reportedly had substantially positive experiences communicating with their doctor and frequently felt welcome. While the overall efficacy of the pilot program was still under review, initial reports appeared positive.

UC Davis submitted its second annual progress report on the pilot program to the Legislature in October of 2023. As stated in the report summary, the goal of the evaluation was to provide recommendations on the pilot program and opine on "whether it should be continued, expanded, altered, or terminated." The report summary concluded with a finding that the pilot program "has strong positive feedback from all. Physicians integrated seamlessly, making healthcare more accessible, and increasing patient trust. Staff reported excellent patient care processes and a supportive environment." The report further concluded that physicians in the program "demonstrated a solid understanding of California Medical Standards."

AB 2860 (Garcia, Chapter 246, Statutes of 2024) reestablished the Licensed Physicians and Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program as the distinct Licensed Physicians from Mexico Program and made various updates and conforming changes. AB 2860 expanded the program to include many more physicians and set licensure fees for physicians from Mexico commensurate with those of California licensed physicians and surgeons, among other changes related to ongoing program administration and implementation.

### **Proposed Law:**

- Establishes the El Salvador Program and specifies that the program must be developed in consultation with representatives from a community health clinic in California that has an established partnership and framework with the Universidad Evangélica de El Salvador and Universidad de El Salvador. Requires the program to include:
  - Coordinating entities for securing required documents; recruiting and vetting candidates; assisting candidates for the program in El Salvador to meet all program requirements; selecting appropriate federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) throughout California; ensuring compliance with program provisions; developing policy and clinical workshops; monitoring productivity and increased access to medical care and; assessing the necessity of policy and programmatic improvements.
- Requires MBC to issue a nonrenewable three-year physician's and surgeon's license to a person who:

- Is licensed, certified, or recertified, and in good standing in the applicable medical specialty in El Salvador by the Consejo Nacional de las Especialidades Médicas or the Ministry of Health in El Salvador.
- Prior to leaving El Salvador, passed the MBC review course with a score equivalent to United States applicants in each of the physician's specialty areas and passed an interview examination for each specialty area. Specifies that a family practitioner who includes obstetrics and gynecology in their practice is prohibited from performing deliveries in California unless they have performed 50 live birth deliveries, as required by United States standards, confirmed by written documentation by the supervising department chair, hospital administrator, or hospital chief medical officer. Requires each obstetrician and gynecologist from El Salvador to be a fellow in good standing of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.
- Satisfactorily completed an orientation program developed in consultation with the with representatives from a community health clinic in California that has an established partnership and framework with the Universidad Evangélica de El Salvador and Universidad de El Salvado
- Provides for the same peer review, employment limitations to the employing clinic, and fee requirements as participants in the Mexico Program.
- Requires program costs to be secured from philanthropic entities and requires an evaluation of the program to be conducted by a medical school in Southern California and either a named university in El Salvador or foreign medical school approved by MBC that includes specified information and recommendations on whether the program should be continued, expanded, altered, or terminated.

**Staff Comments:** The bill specifies that costs for administering the program be secured from philanthropic entities. Based on the fiscal estimates provided by MBC and OIS, the program will likely require donations in the low-to-mid hundreds of thousands of dollars. It is unknown when adequate funding will be secured to initiate the program.

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