UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1368
Author: Wahab (D)
Amended: 8/17/26
Vote: 21

SENATE BUS., PROF. & ECON. DEV. COMMITTEE: 10-0, 4/20/26
AYES: Wahab, Choi, Archuleta, Caballero, Grayson, Menjivar, Niello, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg
NO VOTE RECORDED: Arreguín

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SENATE FLOOR: 33-0, 5/22/26
AYES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Hurtado, Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0, 8/24/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and hearing aid dispensers

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill extends the operations of the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board (Board) until January 1, 2031, and makes various conforming changes to the regulation of licensed and registered professionals by the Board stemming from the joint sunset review oversight process for the Board.

Assembly Amendments make various technical changes to improve Board operations and the enforcement of the Act.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law establishes the Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists and Hearing Aid Dispensers Licensure Act (Act) for the purposes of regulating speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and hearing aid dispensers. (Business and Professions Code (BPC) §§ 2530 et.seq.)

This bill:

1) Makes various changes to the Act in response to issues raised during the SLPAHAD's sunset review oversight process including:

   a) Provides the Board with statutory authority to establish a retired license category.
   b) Makes statutory clarifications to enhance Board oversight of continuing education providers and continuing professional development providers.
   c) Makes technical changes that improve the Board operations and the enforcement of the Act.
   d) Extends the Board operations to January 1, 2031.

Background

The SPLAB (formerly a committee) was created in 1973 and enacted in 1974 under the jurisdiction of the MBC. SPLAB was restored to a board with the passage of AB 124 (Ackerman, Chapter 436, Statutes of 1999) in 1999, effective January 1, 2000. In 2009, (AB 1535, Chapter 309, Statues of 2009) merged the Hearing Aid Dispensers Bureau into the SPLAB to create the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board (SLPAHADB or Board) effective January 1, 2010.

The Board's mandate is to protect the public by licensing and regulating the Speech-Language Pathologist, Audiologists, and Hearing Aid Dispensers, which are three separate professions, each with individual scopes of practice, entry-level requirements, and professional settings. The Board sets entry level licensing standards, examination requirements, ensures consumer protection, and enforces standards of professional conduct by investigating applicant backgrounds, and complaints against licensed and unlicensed practitioners, while taking disciplinary action whenever appropriate.

The Board licenses and regulates more than 44,800 individuals and entities. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Speech Language Pathologist profession is expected to grow by 15 percent, the Audiologist profession by 9 percent and the Hearing Aid Dispenser profession by 18 percent from 2024-2034.

The Board is responsible for regulating the following licensing types and categories:

- Speech-Language Pathologist - provide assessment and therapy for individuals who have speech, language, swallowing, and voice disorders.

- Audiologist - identify hearing, auditory system, and balance disorders, and provide rehabilitative services, including hearing aids and other assistive listening devices.

- Dispensing Audiologist – licensed to perform the duties of an Audiologist as described above and authorized to sell hearing aids.

- Speech-Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) – registered paraprofessionals who complete formal education and training and serve under the direction of a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist.

- Required Professional Experience Temporary License - speech-language pathology and audiology applicants completing required professional experience to qualify for full licensure, practicing under the supervision of a licensed practitioner.

- Speech-Language Pathology Aide – support personnel approved to work directly under the supervision of a Speech-Language Pathologist. No requirement for formal education and training, but on-the-job training must be provided.

- Audiology Aide - support personnel approved to work under the supervision of a licensed Audiologist. No requirement for formal education and training, but on-the-job training must be provided.

- Speech-Language Pathology or Audiology Temporary License – Speech-Language Pathologist or Audiologist, licensed in another state, who qualifies for a six-month license while seeking permanent licensure.

- Hearing Aid Dispenser – licensed to fit and sell hearing aids, take ear mold impressions, postfitting procedures, and directly observe the ear and test hearing in connection with the fitting and selling hearing aids.

- Hearing Aid Dispenser Temporary License – Hearing Aid Dispenser, licensed in another state, who qualifies for a 12-month temporary license while seeking permanent licensure.

- Hearing Aid Dispenser Trainee License – allows a Hearing Aid Dispenser trainee applicant to work under the supervision of a licensed Hearing Aid Dispenser for up to 18 months.

- Branch License – licenses issued to Hearing Aid Dispensers authorizing the dispenser to work at additional branch locations.

Business and Professions Code (BPC) § 2531.02 states that the protection of the public shall be the highest priority for the Board in exercising its licensing, regulatory, and disciplinary functions

Oversight Hearings and Sunset Review of Licensing Boards and Programs. In March 2026, the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee and the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions (Committees) began their comprehensive sunset review oversight of 10 regulatory entities including the Board. The Committees conducted three oversight hearings. This bill and the accompanying sunset bills are intended to implement legislative changes as recommended by staff of the Committees, and which are reflected in the Background Papers prepared by the Committee staff for each agency and program reviewed this year. The following are selected issues pertaining to the Board along with background information concerning the issue.

Retired License. In 2016, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed AB 2859 (Low, Chapter 473, Statutes of 2016) which permitted any of the boards within DCA to establish a retired category of licensure for people not actively engaged in their practice. Each board would need to do this through the regulatory process. BPC § 464 prohibits a retired license holder from practicing unless the board specifies, through regulation, the criteria for a retired license to practice.

Current law does not authorize the Board to issue a retired license which it requests authority to do. According to the Board, licensees have requested to be placed in a retired status instead of having to renew their license or have their license expire at a specified time before it can be cancelled. Licensees were failing their CPD audits because they had professionally retired and should have been in an inactive status but continued to renew, either because they were unaware of the inactive status or made a mistake on their renewal form.

The Board states that creation of this license would require a one-time fee and would provide a means for a retired licensee to return to active status under certain circumstances. The Board would also like to ensure that any retired license creation covers the following:

- A retired license cannot be issued if the licensee is currently holding a license that is restricted or if they have outstanding citations and fines or if they are currently under investigation for an active complaint or conviction

- The license cannot be reinstated to active if the individual has been out of practice for a specified number of years

- The licensee is limited to a certain number of times that a license can be reinstated from retired to active

This bill will provide the Board statutory authority to establish a retired license category.

Oversight of Continuing Education Providers and Continuing Professional Development Providers. The Board highlighted the need for statutory clarifications to ensure robust oversight of CE, CPD, and CE/CPD providers. Specifically, the Board would like to:

- Clarify that both the national and California chapters of professional organizations qualify as approved and exempt CE providers

- Allow mandatory training courses be either state, federal, or local government entities that cover professional issues that impact the provision of services to qualify as CE

- Allow Speech-Language Pathology Assistants to meet their CPD requirements through the same course providers as their supervisors are allowed

- Prohibit Speech-Languge Pathology Assistants from using coursework required by a master's degree for licensure as a Speech-Language Pathologist towards their CPD requirement, as a master's level course is intended to prepare an individual for a different professional role, not expand the knowledge of practicing as a Speech-Language Pathology Assistant.

CE courses and CPD providers are reviewed and approved by the Board for compliance under the regulations governing CE course content and CPD provider applications. Subject matter experts may provide guidance, if needed, with course content. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association, the American Academy of Audiology, or the California Medical Association's Institute for Medical Quality Continuing Medical Education are accepted by the Board through statutory authority as CPD providers. The Board suggests that licensees are not often paying close attention to the CPD approval status of course providers and clarification could benefit those taking coursework.

This bill will make statutory clarifications to enhance Board oversight of CE providers and CPD providers.

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

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, it costs approximately $3.4 million per year to continue the operation of the Board. The Board also identified an increase in revenue as follows: $7,200 from 96 applications in 2026-27, $16,650 from 222 applications in 2027-28, and $30,225 from 403 applications annually thereafter. The Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Office of Information Services anticipates absorbable costs to perform Americans with Disabilities Act compliance checks; post retired-status paper applications for speech-language pathologists, audiologists, hearing aid dispensers, and dispensing audiologists to the board's website and to create a new "retired" license status for these license types; develop functionality to allow a licensee to restore a retired license back to active status; and update DCA Search to display the new status.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/24/26)

California Speech Language Hearing Association
Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/24/26)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: The Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board writes in support, "This bill will ensure that the Board is able to continue its important consumer protection work for the four years. This bill would clarify and expand the types of acceptable continuing professional development for speech-language pathologists, speech-language pathology assistants, and audiologists for purposes of licensure renewal. This bill would provide new guardrails preventing aides, assistants, and trainees from independently operating businesses, thus enhancing public safety by ensuring only fully licensed professionals provide clinical services. This bill would also provide a clear pathway for experienced professionals to exit or re-enter their practice responsibly with the addition of retired license provisions. Together, these changes promote public protection while aligning the Board's Practice Act with current technology, education, and service-delivery models."

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0, 8/24/26
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, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
NO VOTE RECORDED: DeMaio, McKinnor, Ta

The California Speech Language Hearing Association (CSHA) notes support stating, "CHSA supports the continued licensing and regulation by the Speech Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board and appreciates the outreach and communication of the Board and the ongoing efforts by Board leadership and staff to engage with the important work of regulating the profession and protecting consumers."

Assembly Floor 76 0 3 SB 1368 Wahab Senate Third Reading By Berman

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, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

Noes:

No Vote Recorded: DeMaio, McKinnor, Ta

Prepared by: Anna Billy / B., P. & E. D. / (916) 651-4104
11/12/26 12:52:30

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