



Issue

The shortage of physicians in California has worsened over the last three decades. The population of California has also continued to grow, and with it, the ethnic and racial diversity. The American Community Survey of 2022 found that Latinos comprise 40% of the population. Of the 40% of Latinos, it is estimated that 28.18% speak Spanish. Yet less than 7% of all physicians in California are of Latino origins, and even fewer are culturally and linguistically competent. This situation results in poor health profiles and conditions for a substantial portion of the state's population.

Background

Beginning in January 2024, the population of undocumented workers will be eligible to receive Medi-Cal services, but there are not sufficient physicians in preventive health specialties or mental health providers. Exacerbating this situation is that the physician shortage for the Latino population is much worse due to the size of the population and the accompanying fact that fewer physicians are culturally and linguistically competent. Without having doctors who can communicate in the language of origin of a patient and have no knowledge of how culture impacts the health care of persons, quality medical care cannot be provided at the level necessary.

Thirty doctors from Mexico currently practice medicine in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA), primarily in farmworker communities and one large urban center. These doctors participated in a pilot program signed into law by then-Governor Gray Davis in September 2002. This 3-year pilot program issues 3-year medical licenses to doctors from Mexico who meet specific criteria required in the enabling legislation. After a delay of more than fifteen years the first doctors arrived and began serving patients in August 2021.

The Doctors from Mexico are required to be Board Certified, complete a comprehensive English language course, submit a copy of their medical license, their medical school transcript, residency confirmation from a hospital accredited by the Joint Commission, and complete the orientation program offered by the National Autonomous University of Mexico School of Medicine.

The three-year medical licenses and visas begin expiring in 2024. Specifically, seven doctors must renew their visas this calendar year and have their medical licenses extended for three years to file a visa extension.

The FQHCs employing these doctors have increased the number of patients serving Limited English Speakers (LEPs) and increased medical encounters, primarily with Latinos. There has been an apparent increase in patient satisfaction with the doctors and growing confidence in the patient base. From August 2021 to September 2023, 24 of 30 doctors from Mexico provided 118,498 medical encounters with an average of 2.79 patients per hour (federal guidelines promote four medical encounters per hour. These numbers have increased since September 2023, as the hourly and daily encounters have increased.

Bill Summary

AB 2864 allows a one-time extension of the California medical license of all thirty doctors from Mexico should the employing FQHC offer another three years of employment and doctors continue to meet the required criteria. This will allow for the medical continuity of care to remain intact and not cause potential harm to patients who otherwise will not continue to be served by culturally and linguistically competent physicians. This bill carries an urgency clause because of the concern that seven doctors will have their visas and licenses expire in the current calendar year.

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Support

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