

Date of Hearing: April 16, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2702 (Chen) – As Amended March 14, 2024

SUBJECT: Training programs for clinical laboratory scientists and medical laboratory technicians: grants.

SUMMARY: Authorizes the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to, upon appropriation by the Legislature, establish a grant program to provide funding to approved training programs for clinical laboratory scientists (CLS) and medical laboratory technicians (MLT). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes the CDPH to, upon appropriation by the Legislature, establish a grant program to provide funding to training programs that meet both of the following criteria:
 - a) Offer training programs for CLS or MLT; and,
 - b) Are approved by the CDPH or accredited by a recognized accrediting program approved by the CDPH.
- 2) Limits the amount of the grants, as enumerated in (1) above, to no more than \$600,000.
- 3) Requires the funds provided to CLS or MLT training programs to be used within three years of receiving a grant.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Donahoe Higher Education Act, setting forth the mission of the UC, CSU, and CCC; and, defines "independent institutions of higher education" as nonpublic higher education institutions that grant undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or both, and that are formed as nonprofit corporations in California and are accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education (Education Code Section 66010, et seq.).
- 2) Regulates clinical laboratories and the performance of clinical laboratory tests through the licensing of clinical laboratories and laboratory directors, scientists, and other laboratory personnel under the CDPH and Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA) (Business and Professions Code (BPC) Sections 1200 - 1327).
- 3) Defines "CLS" as a person who is licensed to engage in clinical laboratory practice under the overall operation and administration of a laboratory director, unless serving as a director of specified laboratories (BPC Section 1204).
- 4) Requires the CDPH to issue a CLS or a limited CLS license to applicants who hold a bachelor's or an equivalent or higher degree and the qualifications established by CDPH, as specified (BPC Section 1261(a)(1) and California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 17, Section 1030.7).

- 5) Requires the CDPH to establish an “MLT-to-CLS” pathway program by January 1, 2022, that authorizes a licensed MLT to apply their work experience and training from a CDPH-approved MLT training program towards the completion of a CLS training program. The work experience and training may only be eligible for the pathway program upon approval by the CDPH (BPC Section 1261(b)).
- 6) Requires the CDPH to issue an MLT license to applicants who have completed specified MLT training programs and the qualifications established by the CDPH (BPC Section 1260.3, CCR, Title 17, Section 1030.6).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Double referral.* This measure was heard by the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions, on April 2, 2024, where it passed out with a vote of 18 – 0.

Purpose of the measure. According to the author, “the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Human Resources and Service Administration estimates an increase in demand [of CLS and MLT) by nearly a quarter for medical and clinical lab technicians by 2025. The need for lab professionals greatly exceeds the current employment vacancy rates, which is 7.2% on average according to a survey conducted by the American Society for Clinical Pathology.”

The author contends that, “the need for CLS and MLT has grown in recent years at a rate severely disproportionate to the growth rate of educational training program opportunities for up and coming lab professionals. With state law requiring that each clinical laboratory scientist or medical laboratory technician have experience in such programs, the process of students becoming professionals must be streamlined and provided for by the state.”

Further, the author states that, “by expanding the number of students that Clinical Laboratory Science educational programs accept, AB 2702 would make it more likely for underrepresented individuals to get the experience required to become a clinical laboratory scientist or medical lab technician.”

This measure authorizes the CDPH to award grants of no more than \$600,000 to schools who provide CLS and MLT laboratory training programs.

Clinical laboratory scientists and medical laboratory technicians. CLS and MLT are highly skilled professionals who work in lab settings. They are responsible for performing complex assessments to assist medical professionals diagnose and treat diseases. Common job duties for these job titles include:

- Preparing test samples of blood, tissue, and fluids
- Ensuring specimens and test samples match
- Collecting and updating patient data
- Evaluating samples, slides, and cultures with microscopes
- Troubleshooting issues that occur with equipment

The only difference between a CLS and a MLS is the actual job title. The two professions involve the same training, job duties, and credentials. The main difference is what job title an employer chooses to use. Employers may also refer to these professionals as medical technologists. However, there is a difference between said job titles and a medical technician, the latter not requiring as much education and has less job responsibilities. But it is common for both professionals to work together in the same job settings.

In order to become a medical technologist, CLS or MLS, one needs to earn a bachelor's degree. Common majors for individuals interested in becoming a CLS and MLT, include biology, biochemistry, or microbiology. Another requirement for this career path is completing a medical technologist program. It is accredited by the National Accrediting Agency of Clinical Laboratory Science (NAA-CLS). During the program, students learn about organic chemistry, microbiology and biology. Students may also participate in clinical rotations, gaining hands-on instruction from experienced technologists.

Before getting their first medical technologist, clinical laboratory scientist, or medical laboratory scientist job, individuals need to complete a pathology lab internship; whereby they gain hands-on experience and work with professionals in this field.

The California Association for Medical Laboratory Technology in their support of this measure, state that, “there has been a long-standing shortage of training opportunities for qualified candidates to receive the clinical experience required by law to fulfill the requirements necessary to become a CLS/MLT. There are estimated to be over 1,200 vacant CLS/MLT positions currently and the number is expanding every year, compounded by the aging demographics of the profession and an increase in retirements. Our healthcare system is built on the foundation of clinical laboratory testing and diagnostics, and the COVID-19 crisis has clearly revealed the cracks in that foundation. Millions of diagnostic tests are performed each year in California, influencing approximately 70% of medical decisions.”

According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for CLS and MLT is forecasted to grow from 7% from 2019 to 2029. This is faster than the average growth rate for all occupations, which is 4%. As the population continues to increase, there will be a greater need for professionals who can help with the process of diagnosing diseases through lab procedures and tests.

CLS and MLT Programs and Schools. As referenced above, in order to become a CLS or MLT, an individual must earn, at a minimum, a bachelor’s degree. At the time this analysis was published, Committee Staff was not able to ascertain the exact number of institutions of higher education (IHE) in the State that offer degrees and/or training programs in CLS and/or MLT. However, the chart below, lists the top California IHEs that offer degrees and/or training program in CLS and/or MLT and the type of institution:

Name of IHE	Type of IHE
California State University Dominguez Hills	Public
College of the Canyons	Public
Grossmont College	Public
Loma Linda University	Independent (not for profit)
Mt. San Antonio College	Public
National University	Independent (not for profit)

Name of IHE	Type of IHE
San Francisco State University	Public
Saddleback College	Public
University of California (UC) Davis	Public
UC Irvine	Public

Committee comments. Currently, this measure requires the CDPH to establish and administer a grant program to provide funding to approved CLS and MLT training programs; however, Committee Staff understands that the CDPH does not currently administer any training grant programs.

Moving forward, the author may wish to work with the appropriate stakeholders in order to determine if the CDPH is the best entity to establish and administer the grant program, or if there is a better suited entity.

Arguments in support. San Francisco State University (SFSU) states that, “at hospitals all over California, lab staff are experiencing burn-out from working overtime or having a second job. Understaffing means poor turn-around-times for lab results or an increase in errors. Automation has not sufficiently alleviated this need since people are still required to run and troubleshoot the instruments. In addition, many tests are still done manually since it takes time to develop an automated method.”

Further, SFSU states that, “the most obvious solution would be to recruit and train more Clinical Lab Scientists and Medical Technicians to fulfill the need. However, schools are running on tight budgets. The SFSU Clinical Lab Science program has difficulty recruiting instructors due to salaries that are far below the market rate for lab scientists. To teach students lab skills, we must modify our lessons to only need the most inexpensive equipment, and we must accept donations from hospitals for lab items that are old or expired. Despite our struggles, we continue to fight to keep the program open, however we would like to do better for our students.”

SFSU concludes that, “we support AB 2702 as this will increase much needed funding for clinical lab training schools.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

- American Society for Clinical Pathology
- California Association for Medical Laboratory Technology
- California Association of Medical Laboratory Technology
- California Clinical Laboratory Association
- California Life Sciences
- Engineers and Scientists of California, IFPTE Local 20, AFL-CIO
- Quest Diagnostics Incorporated
- San Francisco State University

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Jeanice Warden / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960