

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 1075 (Holden) – As Introduced February 21, 2019

SUBJECT: California State University: speech-language pathologist programs

SUMMARY: Appropriates \$750,000 to the trustees from the General Fund for the 2019–20 fiscal year, for allocation by the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU) through competitive grants to speech-language pathologist programs at campuses of the university. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Appropriates \$750,000 from the General Fund to the Trustees of the CSU for the 2019–20 fiscal year, for allocation in accordance with all of the following:
 - a) The Chancellor of the CSU shall allocate the funds appropriated through competitive grants to campus speech-language pathologist programs;
 - b) As part of their applications, campus programs applying for grants under this subdivision shall specify how many enrollment slots they plan to add during the grant period and how they propose to address any potential impediments to expanding their enrollment capacity; and,
 - c) The chancellor’s office shall evaluate campus applications, award and oversee the grants made, and report periodically to the Legislature, in compliance with the Government Code, on the progress of the university toward increasing enrollments in speech-language pathologist programs.
- 2) Statues that the Legislature finds and declares both of the following:
 - a) The CSU can likely increase enrollment in its speech-language pathologist programs by about 47 full-time equivalent students, which would be a five-percent increase, at a cost of about \$750,000; and,
 - b) If the state provides additional augmentations moving forward, these programs can continue expanding by roughly five percent annually for at least another 10 years.

EXISTING LAW: Establishes the CSU, under the administration of the Trustees of the CSU, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. The CSU comprises 23 institutions of higher education throughout the state, and the Chancellor of the CSU serves as the university’s chief executive officer. (Education Code Section 89000, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: Need for the bill. According to the author, “California is experiencing one of the worst teacher shortages in history. We all know there is a severe shortage of Special Education teachers but what might be less well known is that there is a serious shortage of Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs). SLPs provide many services in a student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Speech and language is one of the largest disabilities in students and is growing each year. Due to the shortage in SLPs, school districts are forced to contract with

speech service agencies and pay higher rates...By expanding the number of seats in these CSU SLP graduate programs, we will be able to meet the desperate need for SLPs in our schools. If we do not expand SLP graduate programs in California we will never meet the growing demand of SLPs.”

Background. Speech-language pathologists (often referred to as speech therapists) diagnose and treat communication and swallowing disorders in children and adults. Besides schools, SLPs work in hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, private clinics, and other settings.

There are several requirements one must achieve in order to practice as an SLP. Most importantly, an individual must earn a master’s degree in SLP from an accredited program, pass a national exam, and complete a post-graduate clinical fellowship. The Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA) accredits SLP programs.

The CSU offers a number of CAA-accredited Master’s Degree SLP programs. Currently, 13 CSU campuses offer master’s degree programs that prepare SLPs. (The SLP program is known as “communication disorders” at several campuses.) Of these programs, 11 are state funded and two are entirely supported by student fees. According to the CSU Chancellor’s Office, in 2017-18, CSU enrolled a total of 933 full-time equivalent students in these programs and graduated about 400 students.

SLP programs at CSU generally are two years in duration, with student cohorts attending year-round in the first year (fall, spring, summer) and in the fall and spring in the second year. CAA requires all programs to offer a substantial amount of hands-on clinical training to supplement classroom instruction. Currently, students must complete at least 375 hours of clinical placements. CAA specifies that students must gain this clinical experience in a variety of settings working with different populations and age groups.

On-campus clinical placements are provided through CSU-run speech-language clinics. These clinics are open to the campus community and general public, typically on a donation basis. Under the supervision of a CSU clinical faculty member, students assess, diagnose, and treat clients. To supplement these clinical hours and give students required experience in other work settings, programs enter into contracts with schools, hospitals, and other local providers to host student clinicians. Through these off-campus experiences (often referred to as “externships”), students provide speech-language services and receive one-on-one supervision and feedback from an employee at the work site (a practicing speech-language pathologist).

Barriers to expanding SLP programs at CSU. High SLP education costs are due primarily to accreditation standards that require programs to maintain a 3:1 student-to-clinical faculty (supervisor) ratio in their on-campus clinics. (Programs do not have a required student-to-faculty ratio for classroom instruction.) SLP programs also often purchase expensive equipment, such as high-tech mannequins that can simulate speech impairments for students. On average, total program costs are well beyond costs for typical CSU programs. According to program administrators interviewed at CSU by the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), these high relative costs limit the size of the cohort they can enroll each year.

Program administrators also expressed ongoing concern with hiring sufficient numbers of clinical faculty to supervise students at on-campus clinics. Recruiting for these positions is challenging due to non-competitive salaries. Clinical faculty are often hired under CSU’s lecturer

classification (with limited opportunities for future pay increases) and generally are paid less than starting salaries for SLP graduates at a hospital or school setting. CSU administrators have indicated to the LAO that until they begin paying more competitive salaries, expanding program enrollments will be a challenge.

In addition, program administrators reported to the LAO that they sometimes experience challenges with securing enough off-campus placements for their students. While placements in schools generally are not a problem, administrators indicate that clinical opportunities serving adults (such as in a hospital) are relatively limited in number and thus can be difficult to secure. The issue is further compounded in areas with a higher concentration of SLP programs, where programs are in competition to secure an already limited number of opportunities for their students.

LAO Recommendations. In correspondence with the Assembly Education Committee, the LAO wrote that they believe CSU likely could increase enrollment in SLP programs by about five percent (47 full-time-equivalent students) in 2019-20. Based on the LAO's analysis of these programs, they estimate the state cost of these additional enrollment slots would be approximately \$16,000 per student or approximately \$750,000 overall. If the state were to provide additional augmentations moving forward, it was estimated that these programs could continue expanding by roughly five percent annually for at least another ten years.

The LAO also noted that, because programs could have different capacities to grow in the coming years, it was recommend the Legislature appropriate these targeted enrollment funds on a competitive grant basis.

Committee comments. Committee staff notes that the provisions of AB 1075 align closely with the LAO's recommendations. While it is unusual for the Legislature to fund specific academic programs, this bill is similar to Legislative initiatives to fund enrollment increases in CSU and community college nursing programs in order to address shortages in the field.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Hospital Association/California Association of Hospitals and Health Systems

Opposition

None on file.

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