

LFC Requestor: MONTANO, Noah

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION  
AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS

Section I: General

Chamber: Senate

Category: Bill

Number: 502

Type: Introduced

Date (of THIS analysis): 2/24/2025

Sponsor(s): Larry R Scott

Short Title: SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST LICENSURE

Reviewing Agency: Agency 665 - Department of Health

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Section II: Fiscal Impact

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation Contained		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY 25	FY 26		
\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY 25	FY 26	FY 27		
\$0	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Non-recurring	Fund Affected
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A

### **Section III: Relationship to other legislation**

Duplicates: None

Conflicts with: None

Companion to: None

Relates to: None

Duplicates/Relates to an Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act: None

### **Section IV: Narrative**

#### **1. BILL SUMMARY**

##### a) Synopsis

Senate Bill 502 (SB502) proposes to create a new license for Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs), while repealing the existing Apprentice in Speech and Language license. The bill amends the Speech-Language Pathology, Audiology, and Hearing Aid Dispensing Practices Act, specifically modifying Section 61-14B-2 NMSA 1978 and repealing Sections 61-14B-3.1 and 61-14B-15.1 NMSA 1978 (originally enacted under Laws 1999, Chapter 128, Sections 3 and 8, as amended). These changes aim to formalize the role of SLPAs and standardize their qualifications, responsibilities, and supervision requirements in New Mexico.

The bill removes all references to "apprentice" from existing law and eliminates its definition, which previously described an individual working toward full licensure in speech-language pathology. This shift replaces the apprenticeship model with a more structured licensing framework for SLPAs.

SB502 introduces statutory language defining an SLPA as "a person who provides speech-language pathology services as prescribed, directed, and supervised by a licensed speech-language pathologist."

SB502 would add a new section which clarifies the role and requirements for a Speech Language Pathology Assistant, to include that the speech-language pathology assistant shall perform administrative duties and shall work with a supervisor who may delegate certain repetitive, mechanical or routine tasks that fall within the scope of the practice of speech-language pathology. The bill also clarifies "direct contact" as "a level of supervision in which a supervisor is able to provide immediate feedback to a person under their supervision." Furthermore, it establishes guidelines for the scope of practice, supervision requirements, and qualifications necessary for SLPAs.

SB502 further outlines what a speech-language pathology assistant may not do, which includes: representing themselves as a speech-language pathologist, disclosing patient

information, other than to supervisor or as required by law, diagnose test, write or develop a treatment plan, make referral, or provide interpretive information to a patient regarding status of patient.

Is this an amendment or substitution?  Yes  No

Is there an emergency clause?  Yes  No

b) Significant Issues

A speech language pathologist (SLP) assesses, diagnoses, and treats individuals with speech, language, voice, fluency, and swallowing disorders, working with patients of all ages to develop personalized treatment plans aimed at improving their communication abilities through exercises, activities, and strategies; they may also counsel clients and their families on coping with communication challenges.

A Speech and Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) is a healthcare professional who works under the supervision of a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), assisting with the assessment and treatment of individuals with speech, language, voice, and swallowing disorders by implementing therapy plans, collecting data, and providing patient support, all while following the SLP's direction and guidelines.

The United States is currently in the middle of a national shortage of audiology and speech language pathology professionals. Every county in New Mexico is a Federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) designated health professional shortage area. <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find> According to available information, there are approximately 1,060 Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) working in New Mexico with most of them based in Albuquerque.

Key points about the work done by SLPAs:

- **Role:** They primarily assist the SLP in carrying out therapy sessions, including preparing materials, administering screening tests, practicing exercises with patients, and documenting progress.
- **Supervision:** SLPAs cannot practice independently and must always operate under the supervision of a licensed SLP.
- **Responsibilities:**
  - Conducting basic screenings under SLP supervision
  - Implementing treatment plans developed by the SLP
  - Collecting data on patient progress
  - Preparing therapy materials and activities
  - Communicating with patients and their families
  - Maintaining patient records

SLPA's work in Schools, Hospitals, Rehabilitation centers, and private clinics.

The American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) has developed a scope of practice for the speech language pathology assistant including a code of ethics, liability education and training requirements.

While ASHA endorses the use of trained and supervised support personnel, ASHA does not require the use of support personnel. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) should not be expected to use support personnel, particularly if they feel that quality of service may be compromised. ASHA expects SLPs to use support personnel in accordance with the [ASHA Code of Ethics](#) and may impose sanctions on SLPs if assistants are used inappropriately.

Supervising SLPs retain full legal and ethical responsibility for the students, patients, and clients served, but may delegate specific tasks to an SLPA. The SLPA may execute specific components of a speech, language, or feeding program as specified in treatment plans developed by the SLP. SLPA's can provide valuable support by taking on some of the administrative tasks and allowing the SLP to focus more time on direct client interaction with complex needs, ultimately leading to better client care and potentially a higher caseload capacity.

[https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/speech-language-pathology-assistants/?srsltid=AfmBOooSsmP0Q81DowMm0Cvbbv3\\_iDjOxbjWMBZwlxcNTq5DbH9vAyfr](https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/speech-language-pathology-assistants/?srsltid=AfmBOooSsmP0Q81DowMm0Cvbbv3_iDjOxbjWMBZwlxcNTq5DbH9vAyfr)

The State of New Mexico has a higher-than-average number of people who are bilingual. US Census data shows that 33% of New Mexico households are bilingual. There is a need to ensure that speech language pathologists are multilingual and culturally aware of non-English speakers. At this time only 8.2% of providers licensed as speech language pathologists identify as multilingual ([https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1064&context=shs\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1064&context=shs_etds)). With the licensing of speech-pathology assistants, SB502 could encourage more multilingual individuals to become licensed and better serve New Mexico residents.

SB502 aims to refine the professional structure of speech-language pathology by enhancing the clarity of roles within the statute. This could lead to a more defined scope of practice for SLPAs and SLPs, potentially improving oversight and consistency in service delivery. By establishing a new licensure category for SLPAs and removing the apprentice designation, the bill may create a more structured pathway for those entering the field. These changes could impact training, supervision requirements, and the overall availability of speech-language services across the state.

## 2. PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

- Does this bill impact the current delivery of NMDOH services or operations?  
 Yes  No
- Is this proposal related to the NMDOH Strategic Plan?  Yes  No
  - Goal 1:** We expand equitable access to services for all New Mexicans
  - Goal 2:** We ensure safety in New Mexico healthcare environments
  - Goal 3:** We improve health status for all New Mexicans

**Goal 4:** We support each other by promoting an environment of mutual respect, trust, open communication, and needed resources for staff to serve New Mexicans and to grow and reach their professional goals.

### 3. FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

- If there is an appropriation, is it included in the Executive Budget Request?  
 Yes  No  N/A
- If there is an appropriation, is it included in the LFC Budget Request?  
 Yes  No  N/A
- Does this bill have a fiscal impact on NMDOH?  Yes  No

### 4. ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Will this bill have an administrative impact on NMDOH?  Yes  No

### 5. DUPLICATION, CONFLICT, COMPANIONSHIP OR RELATIONSHIP

None

### 6. TECHNICAL ISSUES

Are there technical issues with the bill?  Yes  No

### 7. LEGAL/REGULATORY ISSUES (OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES)

- Will administrative rules need to be updated or new rules written?  Yes  No
- Have there been changes in federal/state/local laws and regulations that make this legislation necessary (or unnecessary)?  Yes  No
- Does this bill conflict with federal grant requirements or associated regulations?  
 Yes  No
- Are there any legal problems or conflicts with existing laws, regulations, policies, or programs?  Yes  No

### 8. DISPARITIES ISSUES

SB502 may have a positive impact on disparities regarding access to speech and language pathology services, especially in rural and under-resourced communities.

### 9. HEALTH IMPACT(S)

SB502 could help to improve access to treatment and care for people in need of these interventions by expanding the professional work force. This could lead to positive health impacts.

### 10. ALTERNATIVES

None

### 11. WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL?

If SB502 is not enacted, then the creation of a new license for a speech language pathology assistant would not occur and the apprentice in speech and language license would not be repealed.

**12. AMENDMENTS**

None