

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 915
By: Kolkhorst
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Interested parties note the dramatic increase in college textbook prices over the past four decades, an increase that has easily outpaced the consumer price index. According to the parties, efforts by the federal and state governments to address this growing problem have so far proven inadequate. S.B. 915 seeks to provide a starting point for addressing the rising cost of college textbooks in Texas.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 915 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish and administer a pilot program to encourage the use of affordable textbooks at institutions of higher education and to implement the pilot program beginning with the 2015–2016 school year. The bill requires the coordinating board to select one eligible institution to participate in the pilot program and to establish by rule the application process and selection criteria for program participation. The bill authorizes the coordinating board, if no eligible institutions apply, to select any eligible institution to participate.

S.B. 915 requires the coordinating board to designate one academic department of the selected eligible institution to implement the pilot program and requires the designated department to use electronic or open-source textbooks, open educational resources, public domain material, or other free or low-cost textbooks or textbook alternatives for each course offered through the department to the greatest extent possible; to notify the institution's college bookstore of each textbook or textbook alternative that has been adopted for use in a course offered through the department and that will be distributed through the bookstore; and to maintain records of the cost of textbooks and textbook alternatives for each course offered through the department for the duration of the pilot program. The bill requires the selected eligible institution's college bookstore, on receipt of notice from the designated department, to notify the designated department of the anticipated cost to a student of each textbook or textbook alternative that has been adopted for use in a course offered through the department and that will be distributed through the bookstore.

S.B. 915 requires the coordinating board, not later than December 1, 2018, to submit to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and presiding officer of

each standing legislative committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education a report on the success of the pilot program and any recommendations for legislative or other action. The bill requires the report to include a comparison of the average cost of textbooks for courses offered through the department designated to implement the pilot program and for courses offered through departments at other institutions of higher education that have implemented a similar textbook affordability program. The bill requires the eligible institution selected to participate in the pilot program, on request by the coordinating board, to assist in preparing the report. The bill authorizes the coordinating board to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source to prepare the report and develop recommendations as required and requires the coordinating board to adopt rules as necessary to implement the bill's provisions, which are set to expire September 1, 2019.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2015.