

SUBJECT: University of Houston student fees

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Ogden, Goolsby, Harris, Kamel, Moreno, Reyna, Rodriguez
0 nays
1 absent — Gallego

WITNESSES: For — Julie Baumgarten, University of Houston Student Fee Advisory Committee
Against — None

BACKGROUND: The board of regents of the University of Houston System may levy a student union fee of up to \$15 per student per semester and \$7.50 per student per summer session. The board may increase student union fees only if a majority of students voting in a referendum approve. The fees go towards maintaining and improving the university's student union building.

DIGEST: HB 1296 would authorize the board of regents of the University of Houston System to levy student union fees of up to \$35 per student per semester and \$17.50 per student per summer session. An annual increase of more than 10 percent in a current fee would have to be approved by a majority vote of the students or a majority vote of the student government.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1296 would raise much needed funds for maintenance and improvements to the University of Houston's University (UH) Student Center. The center has a leaky roof, faulty plumbing and other problems that cannot be covered by the current student fee.

UH student fees are the lowest in the country. HB 1296 would allow the university to raise them to a level on par with the state's other universities. The bill would also allow students to decide to increase their fees through either their student government or through a referendum.

The student center contains the university's bookstore, main dining areas, student meeting rooms and shops. It also is often the first place prospective students see when they visit the campus. It would benefit all UH students, including commuting students, to have a student center that is well maintained. The leaders of UH's student organizations support HB 1296.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Since the University of Houston is a commuter school, the majority of UH students do not use the University's Student Center regularly. Rather than increasing student fees for all students, the student organizations that use the center should be charged a fee to maintain the center.

Students should have a voice in deciding whether they must pay any higher fee for facilities such as a student union. Current law requires a student vote for all student fee increases. Under HB 1296, fees could be increased by 10 percent a year without a student vote, and increases above 10 percent could be approved by student government, without holding a student referendum.

NOTES:

SB 786 by Ellis, the companion to HB 1296, passed the Senate by 30-0 on April 6 and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House Higher Education Committee on April 20. SB 786 is eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 1296.