

SUBJECT: Registration fee exemption for retired physicians giving charity care

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Berlanga, Hirschi, Delisi, Glaze, McDonald
0 nays
4 absent — Coleman, Janek, Maxey, Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — Dr. Clift Price, Texas Pediatric Society, Milton Turner, M.D.
Against — None

BACKGROUND: The Medical Practice Act requires that persons licensed to practice medicine register annually with the Texas Board of Medical Examiners and pay a yearly license fee of \$300. Part of the fee revenue goes into general revenue, part to the state school fund and part into a special account.

DIGEST: HB 3116 would exempt retired licensed physicians whose sole practice is providing volunteer charity care from the annual registration fee. HB 3116 would take effect immediately if approved by two-thirds of the membership of each house. Fees due before the effective date would still be due.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The bill would create an incentive for retired licensed doctors to volunteer their services to charity. Current law lets physicians be either active and authorized to practice medicine or retired and prohibited from practicing. A doctor with "Texas retired status" may not practice medicine, not even to write prescriptions or treat family members. A physician who retires from office practice but retains authority to write prescriptions and/or provide volunteer health care services must pay \$300 a year to be licensed. For some retirees, this can be a financial burden.

Some physicians who are retired from full-time office practice would still like to practice medicine and would find it very gratifying to provide charity health care for indigent patients if they could do so without incurring a financial burden. The license exemption would help encourage

retirees to share their medical talent and experience with the community by volunteering to provide charitable care.

HB 3116 would not exempt those physicians who are not practicing but who maintain a current license from continuing medical education requirements, nor would it exempt them from having to renew their licenses annually.

Retired professionals such as architects and engineers enjoy a reduced fee once they are 62 and 65 years of age respectively, and lawyers are exempted from a licensure fee at age 70. Doctors who provide volunteer charitable care should enjoy similar benefits

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Texas has about 5,000 physicians over age 65, and many of them might want to keep their license active, which ordinarily would cost \$300 a year for each doctor. If many used the exemption in bill, the state could lose many thousands of dollars, some of which would be earmarked for the general revenue fund.

Most retired physicians should have no problem paying a \$300 fee. The exemption should at least be based on need.