

SUBJECT: Raising the cap on student fees at certain state universities

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Giddings, J. Jones, Mercer

0 nays

3 absent — Chavez, Nixon, Smithee

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — Denise Trauth, Southwest Texas State University

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 54.5089(c) allows the board of regents of the Texas State University System (TSUS) to charge each registered student a medical services fee of up to \$55 per semester or 12-week summer session, or up to \$25 for each summer session of six weeks or less. Sec. 54.523(a) allows the board, if approved by the students, to charge up to \$70 per semester, or \$35 per six-week summer term, to fund a student center. Sec. 54.538(a) permits the board of regents, if approved by the students, to charge a recreational sports fee of up to \$50 per semester or 10-week summer session, or \$25 per five-week summer session.

Sec. 54.511 allows Southwest Texas State University to charge a bus service fee of up to \$46 per semester or \$23 per summer term.

TSUS includes Angelo State University, Lamar Institute of Technology, Lamar State College - Orange, Lamar State College - Port Arthur, Lamar University, Sam Houston State University, Southwest Texas State University, Sul Ross State University, and Sul Ross State University - Rio Grande Campus. Student populations at schools in the system recently have been increasing. For example, over the last three years, Southwest Texas State University has seen an average increase of more than 1,000 students per year and currently has more than 24,000 students.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 1817 would increase the cap on the TSUS medical services fee to \$100 per semester or \$50 for each summer session of less than 12 weeks. It would increase the cap on the TSUS student center fee to \$100 per semester and \$50 per summer session, and would increase the limit on the recreational sports fee to \$100 per semester and summer session of 10 weeks or longer, and \$50 per summer session of less than 10 weeks.

It also would increase the cap for the bus service fee to \$100 per semester and \$50 per summer session of six weeks or less, and would apply this fee to all schools in the system, not just Southwest Texas State University.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003, and would apply beginning with the Fall 2003 semester.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 1817 would allow the board of regents of the TSUS to increase fees as necessary to ensure the continued availability of quality services to the students of each university. Several institutions are at or near the current cap on the fee amounts that can be assessed. This combined with population growth and inflation, particularly in medical costs, requires that the board be allowed to increase fees to meet student resource needs. The original implementation of these fees sprung from student requests for additional services to improve campus life, which this bill would allow to continue and grow along with universities in the system.

The bill would not mandate fee increases, but would give the board authority to increase fees within reasonable limits. The board would take into account many factors, including student input and, in many cases, a vote of the student body before deciding on fee increases. The number and amount of fees differ from campus to campus, and this bill would permit the board to raise fees beneath the maximum levels allowed, if appropriate. The bill also would give the board the freedom to adjust fees without having to ask permission from the Legislature every session. Setting all the caps at \$100 would provide uniformity and consistency to the law.

**OPPONENTS SAY:** Although this bill would not require that fees be increased, it would allow the TSUS board to raise them to the point where some students might find it difficult to afford higher education. State schools are supposed to offer affordable quality education, and raising fees would not support this mission.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from the bill as introduced by conforming it to Texas Legislative Council drafting style. In addition, CSHB 1817 would specify that a summer session would be 12 weeks or longer, instead of six weeks or shorter, for determining the amount of a medical service fee. In assessing the bus service and student center fees, the bill would specify that a summer term would be six weeks or less in length. It also would set the cap on the recreational sports fee at \$100 for a summer session of 10 weeks or longer, rather than a 10-week session, and \$50 for a summer session of less than 10 weeks.

The companion bill, SB 1368 by Duncan, has been referred to the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education.