

- SUBJECT:** Summer optometry career program at the University of Houston
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Branch, Alonzo, Cohen, D. Howard, McCall, Patrick, Rose
0 nays
2 absent — Castro, Berman
- WITNESSES:** For — Steve Nguyen; Grover Campbell, University of Houston; Earl Smith, UH College of Optometry
Against — None
On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Macgregor Stephenson, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- BACKGROUND:** The University of Houston has conducted a summer optometry program to prepare economically and academically disadvantaged students for professional optometry programs since 1987. The program had been funded by a federal grant. In 2002, the federal government dissolved the grant program, leading the university to request additional state funding in order to sustain the program. With federal funding, the program served between 30 and 35 students a year. Current funding allows the program to serve between 14 and 15 students each year.

About two-thirds of the students entering the program enter a professional optometry school. Before the summer program at the University of Houston, 5 percent of optometry graduates were minorities. Since the beginning of the program, the number of African-American and Hispanic students has increased by a factor of five. Last year, UH graduated more Hispanic students than any other optometry school in the United States.
- DIGEST:** HB 184 would authorize the University of Houston College of Optometry to operate an optometry career summer program for economically and academically disadvantaged junior-level, senior-level, and post-baccalaureate students from public and private higher education

institutions to encourage the pursuit of advanced studies and careers in the field of optometry.

The program could offer study skills and Optometry Admission Test preparation courses, as well as courses designed to familiarize students with work in advanced degree programs in optometry. Students could be introduced to clinical work and extracurricular activities, such as observing professionals in optometry. To the extent practicable, the program would allow students to obtain course credit from their respective institutions.

The bill would allow the college to solicit and accept gifts and grants to fund the program, and the Legislature could appropriate money for this purpose.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 184 would codify a program that serves as a mechanism for the state to close the gaps in achievement between student groups. Placing the program in statute would give it more stature and help with the pursuit of grant funding. A higher profile would draw more students to the program and increase the number of optometrists in Texas, a field in need of increased numbers. HB 184 would not expand special item funding because it would not make an appropriation. According to the fiscal note, the current annual cost of the program is absorbed by the university.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 184 is unnecessary. This program has existed for 22 years, and the state could appropriate funds for it whether or not it was placed in statute. In addition, it could serve as the basis for special item funding, which has grown out of control, increasing from \$66.9 million in fiscal 1986-87 to more than \$1 billion in fiscal 2008-09, an increase of 1,406 percent.

NOTES:

According to the fiscal note, the LBB estimates that if the state were to fund the program as provided in the bill, the annual cost to the state would be \$47,000.

During the 2007 regular session, the 80th Legislature enacted HB 1427 by Alonzo, which would have established an optometry summer program at the University of Houston. The governor vetoed the bill.