

SUBJECT: Establishing a certification program for job skills training

COMMITTEE: Technology, Economic Development, and Workforce — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Strama, Parker, Button, Eissler, Gattis, Harless, Rodriguez
0 nays
2 absent — F. Brown, Ritter

WITNESSES: For — Colleen Englert, Florida Ready to Work
Against — None
On — Debbie Carlson, Texas Workforce Commission

BACKGROUND: Labor Code, title 4, subtitle B provides regulations for workforce development and employment services programs by the Texas Workforce Commission.

DIGEST: CSHB 2745 would establish the Texas Ready to Work Certification Program to be administered by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) by amending Labor Code, title 4, subtitle B.

Under the bill, the TWC would, through rule, develop and establish a certification program to provide job skills training to individuals receiving unemployment benefits and who soon would enter the workforce, as identified by TWC. TWC would identify occupations appropriate to include in the certification program, develop basic skills set for each occupation, and develop or adopt a method of assessment to determine a program participant's proficiency level with an identified skill set.

For those skills at which a participant was not proficient, as measured by the assessment, TWC would develop or adopt an instruction curriculum to improve the participant's proficiency level through Internet-based instruction. Following instruction, a participant would take a post-instructional assessment.

Each participant who demonstrated proficiency in the identified skills area would receive a Texas Ready to Work certificate and a portfolio describing in detail each of the skills in which the participant was proficient as determined by the post-instructional assessment.

TWC would be required to establish the Texas Ready to Work Certification Program only if it received funds for that purpose from:

- the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009;
- a legislative appropriation;
- gifts, grants, or donations; or
- any other lawful source.

This 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:**

CSHB 2745 would help ensure that the state's workforce was properly skilled to meet the demands of employers and give confidence to workers and those entering the workforce, that their skills would be rewarded by the job market by establishing a certification program for job skills. This program would be available online to all Texans and would be beneficial for high school graduates about to enter workforce, those having difficulty finding a job, and those desiring additional skills to improve their careers by allowing job seekers to develop and align their skills to growing job sectors. Through the program's skills assessment, participants could obtain a portable certificate recognized state-wide that would provide assurance to potential employers that the person had demonstrated proficiency in a given skill set.

At a time when an increasing number of jobs require advanced skills, CSHB 2745 would provide an innovative workforce education program and economic development tool to prepare the state's workforce for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

While no one dispute the need for workforce development to meet the needs of Texas businesses, during a time of scarce state resources, a program that could cost the state over \$40 million in the next biennium should not be pursued.

Additionally, while it is doubtful that the business community would not be involved in determining the occupations and skills to be included in the Texas Ready to Work Certification Program, the bill lacks any specific provisions stating that this would occur.

NOTES:

The Legislative Budget Board has determined that the bill would cost the state approximately \$40.1 million through the next biennium.

The author intends to offer a floor amendment that would prohibit the program from receiving a legislative appropriation until in or after the fiscal 2012-2013 biennium.