

**SUBJECT:** Modifying qualifications for UNTHSC president, offering MD degree

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 9 ayes — Lozano, Raney, Alonzo, Alvarado, Button, Clardy, Howard, Morrison, Turner

0 nays

**WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Ray Martinez, Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas)

Against — David Garza, Texas Osteopathic Medical Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Matt Oliver)

On — Lee Jackson, University of North Texas System; Michael Williams, University of North Texas Science Health Center; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

**DIGEST:** HB 1913 would remove a requirement that the president of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth be a licensed physician who holds a Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) degree and has been licensed to practice medicine in Texas or another state for at least five years.

The bill also would repeal a provision that currently prohibits the University of North Texas System board of regents from awarding a doctor of medicine (M.D.) degree.

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, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 1913 would reverse a law enacted in 1983 that requires the president of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (TCOM) to hold a D.O. degree as required for accreditation. TCOM, then a free-standing

institution, has since grown into the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth (UNTHSC), which encompasses several other professional health-related schools.

No longer requiring the health science center president to be an osteopath would expand the pool of possible candidates for this position and would not affect the institution's accreditation. The dean of the college must hold a D.O. degree, which is a requirement for accreditation that would not be affected by the bill. Removing this requirement would be appropriate because no other university system governing board in Texas has similar hiring restrictions for its chief executive positions.

The bill would reverse a law preventing UNTHSC from offering an M.D. degree, which was adopted in 1993 when TCOM expanded into UNTHSC. The law was designed to prevent the delay of creating a similar medical school program at the state's southern border. Since then, medical schools have been established in both El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley, so the law preventing the conferral of an M.D. is no longer needed.

The bill would not have fiscal implications for Texas because UNTHSC and Texas Christian University have agreed to jointly start an M.D. degree program with classes beginning in 2019, and would not seek formula funding from the state. Instead, the program would be funded through money raised from research, philanthropy, and tuition. The House-passed version of the fiscal 2018-19 general appropriations act contains a rider in Article 11 prohibiting the use of funds appropriated for UNTHSC to be spent on the M.D. degree program.

The bill would not impact the fiscal or resource support of TCOM, which remains the cornerstone of the UNTHSC system.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

HB 1913 could negatively impact TCOM by reducing the resources available to the college. Creating a new M.D. program at the health science center could divert state funding or funding and resources within the UNT system away from TCOM, which has been training doctors of osteopathy for the past 47 years.

There is no need to create an M.D. school in Fort Worth because doctors of osteopathy are licensed for the unlimited practice of medicine, just like medical doctors. A majority of D.O.s who graduate from TCOM go into the field of primary care, which helps to address the need for physicians in the local community.

While the intent of the bill is that formula funding would not be used to pay the costs of creating the new M.D. program, it could require state funding in the future. According to Legislative Budget Board estimates, this could be expensive and could lead to even more competition among state-funded medical programs for fiscal resources.

**NOTES:**

In its fiscal note, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) projects that HB 1913 would have an indeterminate but significant cost to the state in future biennia. According to the LBB, costs related to formula funding for students in the M.D. program could range from \$2.5 million in general revenue funds in fiscal 2020 and increasing to \$9.9 million in fiscal 2024.