

SUBJECT: Creating a liaison officer for post-secondary students who are homeless

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — C. Turner, Stucky, Button, Frullo, Howard, E. Johnson,
Pacheco, Schaefer, Smithee, Walle, Wilson

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Kristian Caballero, Texas Appleseed; Irene Saucedo; Barbara
Wand James; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Marilyn Hartman, NAMI
Austin; Eric Kunish, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Austin; Brett
Merfish, Texas Appleseed; Andrew Homer, Texas CASA; Nataly
Sauceda, United Ways of Texas; Knox Kimberly, Upbring)

Against — None

On — Debra Emerson, Department of Family and Protective Services;
Paige Muehlenkamp, University of Texas at Austin (*Registered, but did
not testify*: Jerel Booker, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 51.9356 requires institutions of higher education to designate at least one employee to act as a liaison officer for current and incoming students who were formerly in the care of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). The liaison officer is required to provide this student population with information on support services and other resources available to them.

Sec. 51.978 requires institutions of higher education, on the student's request, to assist full-time students who were formerly in DFPS care with locating temporary housing between academic terms if they lack a reasonable alternative. An institution is authorized to either provide a stipend or temporary housing directly to the student.

42 U.S.C. sec. 11434a defines homeless children and youths as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

DIGEST: CSHB 809 would require institutions of higher education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to designate at least one employee to act as a liaison officer to students who were homeless. The institution and coordinating board could designate the same employee to act as a liaison officer to students who were homeless and to students who were formerly in the care of the Department of Family and Protective Services or could designate one or more employees to act as a liaison officer for each of those student populations separately.

CSHB 809 would define students who are homeless using the definition assigned to homeless children and youth in federal law. It would include students who resided in a student housing facility maintained by an institution of higher education during an academic term but who were homeless between terms.

The bill would require the liaison officer for students who were homeless to perform the same duties as would the liaison officer to students who were in the care of DFPS. The liaison officer would provide the students for whom the officer was designated with information on financial aid, on- and off-campus housing, food and meal programs, and counseling services available at the institution.

CSHB 809 would require institutions of higher education that maintained student housing facilities to give priority to students who were homeless when assigning housing. The institutions also would be required to provide full-time students experiencing homelessness with certain assistance in locating temporary housing between academic terms.

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, 2019.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 809 would help post-secondary students who were experiencing homelessness by providing them with information on obtaining housing, financial aid, and meals. The state has recognized the need for liaison

officers in helping vulnerable student populations navigate institutions of higher education, but services currently are only available to students who were in the care of DFPS. Those same services should be extended to students who are experiencing homelessness.

Tens of thousands of university and community college students experience homelessness in Texas every year. CSHB 809 would help these students with some of their unique challenges by informing them of resources available to them at their school and in their community. This would enable students experiencing homelessness to focus on their degree instead of on food and housing.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No concerns identified.