

- SUBJECT:** Providing for payment of driver's education costs for vulnerable youths
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Hull, Klick, Neave, Noble, Rose, Shaheen
0 nays
1 absent — Meza
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 29 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** None
- BACKGROUND:** Transportation Code sec. 521.1811 exempts a person from the payment of any fee for the issuance of a driver's license if that person is:
- younger than 18 and in the managing conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS);
 - at least 18, but younger than 21, and resides in a foster care placement, the cost of which is paid by DFPS; or
 - a homeless child or youth as defined by federal law.

Sec. 521.4265 governs the identification fee exemption account, which is an account in the General Revenue Fund consisting of grants and donations made to the Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to cover the costs of fee waivers for the issuance of driver's licenses or personal identification certificates for certain foster and homeless children and youths.

For such fee waivers, TxDOT is required to deposit to the credit of the Texas Mobility Fund an amount from the identification fee exemption account that is equal to the amount of the waived fee that would otherwise be deposited to the mobility fund. TxDOT may not grant an exemption for a fee if money is not available in the identification fee exemption account to meet the requirements regarding the deposit of credit to the mobility

fund.

DIGEST: SB 2054 would provide a process by which the fees and costs associated with obtaining a driver's license could be waived for certain foster and homeless children and youths.

Payment of associated fees. Unless inadequate funds existed in the identification fee exemption account, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) would be required to, on request, pay the fees associated with meeting education and examination requirements for obtaining a driver's license for a person who was:

- eligible for a driver's license fee exemption under Transportation Code sec. 521.1811; or
- younger than 26 and was in the managing conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) on the day before the person's 18th birthday or was a homeless child or youth as defined by federal law.

TWC would be required by rule to establish a process through which such children and youths could apply to the commission for the payment of fees and through which the commission would pay fees associated with meeting an educational or examination requirement to appropriate entities on behalf of the children and youths.

Accounts. From the money in the identification fee exemption account, TxDOT would have to:

- request that the comptroller transfer to TWC amounts sufficient to provide for the payment of fees to entities other than TxDOT; and
- pay TxDOT's costs associated with administering the transfer to TWC.

TxDOT could not request a transfer of money for the payment of fees associated with meeting driver's license educational or examination requirements if it was determined by the department in consultation with

TWC that the balance of the identification fee exemption account was insufficient.

TxDOT, in consultation with TWC, would be required to establish a process through which transfers for the associated fees would be made.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 2054 would provide additional support for youth in foster care and young adults experiencing homelessness in obtaining driver's licenses in Texas by allowing the waiver of fees associated with education and examination requirements.

Last session, the Legislature enacted a bill that created the identification fee exemption account to pay for costs associated with obtaining driver's licenses and state identification for youth in foster care and young adults experiencing homelessness. Even though Texans have been generous in making donations to the fund to support such youths, additional support is needed to aid them in overcoming other barriers associated with obtaining a driver's license, including the fees associated with education and examination requirements.

Many of these youth and young adults may not have anyone who can help pay the fee for driver's education. They might not have access to a vehicle or know anyone with a valid license and insurance to assist them with driving practice, requiring access to driving schools for the practice time. While the current exemption account helps offset the cost for the driver's license, many are unable to complete the requirements for a license due to other costs or lack of access to a car and cannot take advantage of the existing benefit.

The bill would provide access to driver's education and examination requirements. Having a driver's license improves access to jobs, postsecondary school, voting, safe housing, and healthcare.

CRITICS

No concerns identified.

SAY:

NOTES: The House companion bill, HB 2286 by White, was considered by the House Human Services Committee in a public hearing on April 20, reported favorably on April 30, and sent to the Calendars Committee.