

SUBJECT: Allowing University of Houston student union fee to fund programming

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Murphy, Muñoz, Ortega, Parker, C. Turner, J. Turner
1 nay — Pacheco
4 absent — Cortez, Frullo, P. King, Raney

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 19 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Christopher Caldwell
Against — None
On — Richard Walker, University of Houston System

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 54.526(a) allows the board of regents of the University of Houston System to levy a student union fee of up to \$150 per student for each regular semester and up to \$75 per student for each term of the summer session. The sole purpose of the fee is financing, constructing, operating, maintaining, and improving a Student Union Building for the University of Houston.

DIGEST: SB 480 would allow the student union fee at the University of Houston to be used to provide programming at the Student Union Building. This change would apply to student fees imposed for a semester or term beginning before, on, or after the bill’s effective date.

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, 2021.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 480 would allow the University of Houston to provide additional mental health services to students by specifying that money from the

student union fee could be used to provide programming at the student union. This would free up existing funds so the university could hire more licensed mental health professionals and develop resources for students. The bill would address a growing need for mental health services at the University of Houston using funds already collected by the university.

The bill would not extend the use of the student fee for an unrelated purpose or increase fees, but simply provide that money from the fees could be used to provide programming at the student union. The purpose of constructing a new Student Union Building at the University of Houston was to provide quality programming that met the needs of students, which this bill would enable.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

SB 480 would expand the use of the student union fee beyond its original intent. The increase in the student union fee to fund the construction and maintenance of the Student Union Building was originally portrayed to and understood by students as being for that purpose. Allowing the university to provide general programming at the student union with this money would not reflect the original understanding of students who supported the fee increase.