

SUBJECT: Providing financial assistance for certain nursing education programs

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Kuempel, Paul, Burrows, M. González, Howard, Raney
0 nays
5 absent — Bucy, Burns, Clardy, Cole, Lalani

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, (March 30) — 31 - 0

WITNESSES: For — Heather De La Garza, Texas Hospital Association; Jack Frazee, Texas Nurses Association (*Registered, but did not testify*: Andrea Earl, AARP Texas; Marisa Finley, Baylor Scott & White Health; Rebecca Young Montgomery, Center for Transforming Lives, Coalition of East Tarrant Chambers of Commerce, and Greater Arlington Chamber of Commerce; Stacy Wilson, Children’s Hospital Association of Texas; Neftali Partida, Greater Houston Partnership; Alyse Meyer, LeadingAge Texas; Sebastien Laroche, Methodist Healthcare Ministries; Maureen Milligan, Teaching Hospitals of Texas; Renzo Soto, Texas 2036; David Albert, Texas AFT / ACC AFT; Jessica Lynch, Texas Association of Health Plans; Megan Mauro, Texas Association of Business; Meredith Cooke, Texas Children’s Hospital; Leela Rice, Texas Council of Community Centers; Kevin Warren, Texas Health Care Association; Marcus Mitias, Texas Health Resources; John Henderson, Torch; Katherine Schmader, Travis County Democratic Party; Elisa Hernandez, University Medical Center of El Paso; Taylor Sims, Western Governors University; Naomi Cruz, Young Invincibles; and 25 individuals)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eve Margolis)

On — Diane Santa Maria, UTHealth Houston (*Registered, but did not testify*: Veronica Costilla, Texas Rising)

BACKGROUND: Some have suggested that providing grants to support additional

education, training, and financial assistance to nurses and nursing students could help to address the current health care staffing shortage within the state.

DIGEST: CSSB 25 would establish and revise provisions regarding scholarships, loan repayment, and grant programs for nursing students.

Definition revision. The bill would revise the definition of “professional nursing student” to mean a student enrolled in a higher education institution or a nonprofit, tax-exempt, regionally accredited college or university operating in accordance with a memorandum of understanding with the state under an executive order issued by the governor in a course of study leading to a professional nursing degree, rather than a public, private, or independent institution of higher education.

Scholarships and loan repayment. The bill would revise certain provisions regarding scholarship and loan repayment programs for nursing students.

Eligibility for scholarships and loan repayment. The bill would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish criteria for selecting persons to receive scholarships and loan repayments, with such criteria being required to include that the eligible person be enrolled in or have outstanding student loans for education received at a higher education institution or a nonprofit college or university. Such criteria also could include whether the person received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, rather than Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or participated in another public welfare program.

Loan repayment limitations. THECB would be required to determine the maximum amount of loan repayment received by a nurse in any given year. THECB would be required to base the amount of loan repayment assistance received by a nurse for part-time employment on the proportion of the number of hours worked by the nurse to the number of hours worked by a full-time nurse. The bill would remove the requirement that such assistance could not exceed \$7,000 in any given year.

Rules. The bill would require that the rules adopted by THECB related to financial aide and loan repayment programs for nurses and nursing students establish that no more than 10 percent of the total amount of scholarships or repayment assistance awarded in a year under a relevant program could be awarded to persons enrolled in or for the repayment of student loans for education received at an eligible nonprofit college or university.

Nursing education and training grant programs. The bill would establish certain grant programs to support the education and training of nurses.

Clinical site nurse preceptor grant program. THECB, in consultation with the nursing advisory committee, would be required to establish and administer a program to award grants to eligible clinical sites to support the use of nurse preceptors in providing clinical training to nursing students. To be eligible for such a grant, a clinical site would be required to provide clinical training to nursing students through the use of one or more nurse preceptors, comply with any clinical site requirements established by THECB, and comply with any other requirements adopted by THECB rule.

Clinical site innovation and coordination program. The bill would require THECB to establish and administer a program to award grants to eligible clinical sites that created and operated innovative pilot programs that would support nursing performed at clinical sites by increasing the number of nurses, improving the working environment for nurses, improving the retention of nurses, addressing workplace safety, and coordinating any solutions found to address common concerns with other clinical sites.

Nursing faculty grant program – part-time positions. THECB would have to award grants to eligible higher education institutions to provide funding for qualified part-time nursing staff working at clinical sites. The amount of a grant and the number of grants to be awarded would be required to be

based on the total number of part-time nursing staff throughout the state in the year for which the grant was awarded. A grant received under the bill would have to be expended to support the applicable nursing faculty positions.

A higher education institution would be required to certify in the grant application the number of unfilled faculty positions to which the application applied and, after a grant was awarded, would be required to certify which of those positions had been filled before receipt of the grant. The bill would require THECB to prescribe the dates for the submission of applications and the awards of grants to ensure that a recipient had sufficient time to prepare for receipt and effective use of the grant before the relevant academic period. Grant amounts would be awarded for two consecutive fiscal years. THECB could distribute a grant amount for nursing faculty only on receiving the certification from the institution that the applicable nurse faculty position had been filled. For each first-year nursing faculty position for which a clinical site received an initial grant amount, THECB would have to make available an equal grant amount for the subsequent fiscal year contingent on filling the part-time nursing faculty positions funded by the grant within the second year.

Nursing faculty grant program – clinical training. The bill would require THECB to award grants under a nursing faculty grant program to eligible clinical sites in order to provide funding for qualified nursing faculty of higher education institutions who sought to obtain additional clinical training by working part-time at a clinical site. Under the bill, the amount of a grant and the number of grants to be awarded would have to be based on the total number of nursing faculty in such institutions throughout the state in the year for which the grant was awarded.

Funds. In consultation with the nursing advisory committee, THECB would be required to allocate certain funds for the purposes of the bill. In addition to money appropriated by the Legislature, THECB could solicit, accept, and spend gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source.

Rules. The bill would require THECB, in consultation with the nursing advisory committee, to adopt rules for the administration of the grant programs established under the bill. The rules would be required to include administrative provisions relating to the award of grants and methods for tracking the effectiveness of grants that used data reasonably available to THECB or the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies and evaluated the transferability and scalability of innovation programs.

Application date. By September 1, 2023, THECB would be required to establish the above grant programs and begin awarding grants under the programs by January 1, 2024.

Permanent fund for higher education nursing, allied health, and other health-related programs. The bill would require that grants awarded by THECB for the fiscal biennium ending on August 31, 2025, rather than 2021, and the fiscal biennium ending on August 31, 2027, rather than 2023, be awarded to programs preparing students for initial licensure as registered nurses or programs preparing qualified faculty members with a graduate degree for such a program. The expiration date for this provision would be September 1, 2027, rather than 2023.

Repeals. The bill would repeal certain provisions of the Education Code, including provisions regarding the matching fund program and certain advisory committees, and would make conforming changes throughout.

The changes in law made by the bill would apply beginning with loan repayment assistance awarded for the 2024-2025 academic year.

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, 2023.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the fiscal implications of the bill cannot be determined due to the unavailability of data related to the number of clinical sites and institutions that would be eligible for awards and what amounts would be awarded under the programs.

