

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1141
By: Van de Putte
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Texas currently has a shortage of speech-language pathologists and audiologists who choose to seek employment in the public school system. A vacancy rate of 399 positions multiplied by an average caseload of 55 students equates to an estimated 21,945 children in Texas who are not receiving services. The vacancy rate is continuing to rise, and undergraduate students are citing the cost to obtain a master's degree in this field, which is required for licensure, as a reason for not pursuing the degree or not using their expertise in the public school system.

This void of qualified speech-language pathologists and audiologists has forced some school districts that have a high vacancy rate to provide compensatory service for students. Other districts have to contract with private licensed speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Each of these actions has associated costs. Compensatory or outside contracts have to be approved within a due process hearing.

As proposed, S.B. 1141 creates an incentive for licensed speech-language pathologists and audiologists to remain employed in public schools or seek employment in the public school system by implementing a student loan repayment program. The loan repayment program would authorize a speech-language pathologist or audiologist who is currently employed and has been employed in a school district for at least one year or who is currently employed or has been employed for a year as a faculty member of a communicative disorders program in an institution of higher education, to be eligible for a student loan repayment of up to \$30,000 for a master's degree and \$45,000 for a doctoral degree. The speech-language pathologist or audiologist would have to remain a full-time employee in a public school to continue eligibility for payment each year, totaling six years of service.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Sections 61.9802, 61.9803, and 61.9809, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Subchapter FF, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER FF. REPAYMENT OF CERTAIN SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST AND AUDIOLOGIST EDUCATION LOANS

Sec. 61.9801. DEFINITIONS. Defines "audiologist," "communicative disorders program," "public school," and "speech-language pathologist."

Sec. 61.9802. REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED. Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), in accordance with this subchapter and THECB rules, to provide assistance in the repayment of student loans for speech-language pathologists and audiologists who apply and qualify for assistance.

Sec. 61.9803. ELIGIBILITY. (a) Requires a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist, to be eligible to receive repayment assistance, to apply to THECB, and at the time the speech-language pathologist or audiologist applies for the assistance, have been employed as a speech-language pathologist or as an audiologist, as applicable, for at least one year by, and be currently employed full-time in that capacity by, a public school, or

have been employed as a faculty member of a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education for at least one year, and be currently employed full-time in that capacity at such an institution.

(b) Authorizes THECB by rule to provide for repayment assistance on a pro rata basis for speech-language pathologists and audiologists employed part-time by a public school or institution of higher education.

Sec. 61.9804. **LIMITATION.** (a) Authorizes a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist, on qualifying for the assistance, to receive repayment assistance grants for each year of employment, not to exceed five years, by a public school, or a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education.

(b) Prohibits the amount of repayment assistance grants that a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist may receive for each year of employment in a public school or a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education from exceeding 20 percent of the speech-language pathologist's or audiologist's total principal amount of student loans.

(c) Prohibits the total amount of repayment assistance grants received by a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist under this subchapter from exceeding \$30,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a master's degree but not a doctoral degree, or \$45,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a doctoral degree.

Sec. 61.9805. **ELIGIBLE LOANS.** (a) Authorizes THECB to provide repayment assistance for the repayment of any student loan for education at an institution of higher education, including loans for undergraduate education, received by a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist through any lender.

(b) Prohibits THECB from providing repayment assistance for a student loan that is in default at the time of the speech-language pathologist's or audiologist's application.

(c) Requires THECB, each state fiscal biennium, to attempt to provide repayment assistance in amounts sufficient to use all the money appropriated to THECB for the biennium for the purpose of providing repayment assistance under this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9806. **REPAYMENT.** (a) Requires THECB to deliver any repayment made under this subchapter in a lump sum payable to the lender and the speech-language pathologist or audiologist, in accordance with any applicable federal law.

(b) Authorizes a repayment made under this subchapter to be applied only to the principal amount of the loan.

Sec. 61.9807. **ADVISORY COMMITTEES.** Authorizes THECB to appoint advisory committees to assist THECB in administering this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9808. **ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS.** Authorizes THECB to accept gifts, grants, and donations for the purposes of this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9809. **RULES.** (a) Requires THECB to adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter.

(b) Requires THECB to distribute a copy of the rules adopted under this section and pertinent information regarding this subchapter to each institution of higher education, any appropriate state agency, and any appropriate professional association.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2009.