

BILL ANALYSIS

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S.B. 358
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Health and Human Services
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Workforce retention is a persistent problem at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). According to the DFPS 2014 Data Book, turnover among all agency employees was over 19 percent last year. It is much higher among specific classifications of front line staff. Twenty-eight percent of new workers leave within a year of starting employment, and 43 percent leave within two years.

Providing assistance with the repayment of money borrowed to finance higher education is one commonly employed means of promoting worker retention. Accordingly, S.B. 358 provides for student loan repayment assistance for certain classes of employees at DFPS. The program would be administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The maximum amount of an annual award would be \$2,500. Awards would be available for up to four years. In making awards to first-time applicants, THECB is required to give priority to applicants demonstrating financial need. In the event that insufficient funding is available in a given year to fund all applications, priority will be given to regions of the state experiencing the highest turnover. Full-time employees in the following job classifications who have been employed at DFPS for at least one year would be eligible: Child Protective Services family-based safety services caseworker; Child Protective Services investigator; child care licensing investigator or inspector, or residential child-care licensing investigator or inspector.

As proposed, S.B. 358 amends current law relating to student loan repayment assistance for certain employees of the Department of Family and Protective Services.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 61.737, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

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

SUBCHAPTER N. REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR CERTAIN DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES EMPLOYEES

Sec. 61.731. **REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.** Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish a program to provide, using funds appropriated for that purpose and in accordance with this subchapter and rules of THECB, assistance in the repayment of student loans for employees of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) who apply and qualify for the assistance.

Sec. 61.732. **ELIGIBILITY.** (a) Requires a person, in order to be eligible to receive repayment assistance, to:

- (1) apply to THECB; and
- (2) have been employed for at least one year as, and be currently employed full-time at DFPS as:

- (A) a child protective services family-based safety services caseworker;
- (B) a child protective services investigator;
- (C) a child-care licensing investigator or inspector; or
- (D) a residential child-care licensing investigator or inspector.

(b) Requires THECB to, in awarding repayment assistance to first-time applicants, give priority to applicants who demonstrate financial need.

Sec. 61.733. AMOUNT OF REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE; LIMITATION. (a) Authorizes a person to receive repayment assistance under this subchapter in an amount determined by THECB rule, not to exceed \$2,500 for each year that the person meets the eligibility requirements provided by Section 61.732.

(b) Prohibits a person from receiving repayment assistance under this subchapter for more than four years.

(c) Requires THECB to award repayment assistance to eligible applicants by prioritizing awards to applicants employed in regions of this state experiencing the highest turnover if the money available for repayment assistance in a period for which assistance is awarded is insufficient to provide assistance to all eligible applicants described by Section 61.732(b).

Sec. 61.734. ELIGIBLE LOANS. Authorizes THECB to provide repayment assistance for the repayment of any student loan for education at a public or private institution of higher education, including loans for undergraduate education and graduate education, issued through any lender.

(b) Prohibits THECB from providing repayment assistance for a student loan that is in default at the time of the person's application.

Sec. 61.735. REPAYMENT. (a) Requires THECB to deliver any repayment assistance made under this subchapter in a lump sum directly to the lender or other holder of the loan on the person's behalf and in accordance with any applicable federal law.

(b) Authorizes repayment assistance received under this subchapter to be applied to the principal amount of the loan and to interest that accrues.

Sec. 61.736. FUNDING. (a) Provides that the repayment assistance program established by this subchapter is funded only from appropriations made specifically to fund the program and from gifts, grants, and donations. Requires THECB attempt to provide repayment assistance in each state fiscal biennium in amounts sufficient to use all amounts appropriated for the program in that biennium.

(b) Authorizes THECB to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of this subchapter.

Sec. 61.737. RULES. (a) Requires THECB to adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter, including a rule that establishes the amount of repayment assistance awarded to eligible persons each year.

(b) Requires THECB to distribute to each institution of higher education, DFPS, and appropriate professional associations copies of the rules adopted under this section and pertinent information in this subchapter.

SECTION 2. Requires THECB to adopt rules for the repayment assistance program under Subchapter N, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act, not later than December 1, 2015.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2015.