

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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C.S.S.B. 2231
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Higher Education
4/26/2019
Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Paramedics provide life-saving emergency medical services (EMS), and their role is expanding as Texas tries to bring greater efficiencies to health care delivery. Medicaid and Medicare recognize this and will start reimbursing EMS agencies to transport patients to locations other than emergency rooms in 2020. Paramedics will be expected to provide physician-level care without transport to an emergency room, participate in preventive and follow-up care, and triage patients to alternate destinations. Similarly, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's EMS Agenda 2050 calls for EMS to be a complete out-of-hospital medical provider by 2050.

Texas needs to create better pathways for paramedics to obtain higher education degrees so that they are prepared to succeed in their expanded role. In 2011, the legislature created a tuition exemption for certain firefighters enrolled in courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum at public institutions of higher education. Under a Texas attorney general opinion interpreting the existing tuition exemption, Texas' public institutions of higher education designate the degrees, if any, that qualify for the exemption. Generally the degrees that schools designate cover fire services, but they also cover degrees such as nursing, public administration, and emergency management, which are directly applicable to paramedics.

Some Texas paramedics have benefited from the current exemption because they are also firefighters. However, an estimated 3,000 paramedics work for a political subdivision but are not firefighters, and thus they are currently excluded from this benefit.

S.B. 2231 closes this gap by adding paramedics employed by a Texas political subdivision to the existing tuition exemption for firefighters. This is a smart, limited investment to help these public servants provide high-quality, life-saving care. (Original Author's/Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

C.S.S.B. 2231 amends current law relating to the exemption of tuition and laboratory fees at public institutions of higher education for certain paramedics.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority previously granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is modified in SECTION 2 (Section 54.353, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends the heading to Section 54.353, Education Code, to read as follows:

Sec. 54.353. FIREFIGHTERS OR PARAMEDICS ENROLLED IN FIRE SCIENCE COURSES.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 54.353, Education Code, by amending Subsections (a) and (f) and adding Subsection (e-1), as follows:

(a) Adds a person employed as a paramedic by a political subdivision of this state to a list of students enrolled in one or more courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum

whom the governing board of an institution of higher education is required to exempt from the payment of tuition and laboratory fees.

(e-1) Authorizes the governing board of an institution of higher education, notwithstanding Subsection (a), in accordance with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rule, to exclude from the exemption under this section a course that is offered through distance education.

(f) Requires THECB to adopt:

(1) rules governing the granting or denial of an exemption under this section, including rules:

(A) prescribing the educational attainment or level of certification necessary to qualify for an exemption as a paramedic;

(B) creates this paragraph and Paragraph (C) from existing text and makes a nonsubstantive change; and

(C) relating to the exclusion from the exemption under Subsection (e-1) of a distance education course, including prescribing the maximum number of distance education courses that are authorized to be excluded from the exemption under that subsection; and

(2) makes no changes to this subdivision.

SECTION 3. (a) Requires THECB to adopt the rules required by Section 54.353(f), Education Code, as amended by this Act, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act.

(b) Makes application of Section 54.353, Education Code, as amended by this Act, prospective to the 2019 fall semester.

SECTION 4. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2019.