

By: Gámez

H.B. No. 5520

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to border protection and economic development services, programs, and other measures, including measures to recruit health care professionals to the border region, improve border inspection efficiency, and enhance border region airport security and capacity, and establishing certain educational programs.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

ARTICLE 1. SHORT TITLE

SECTION 1.01. This Act may be cited as the Border Enhancement Act.

ARTICLE 2. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY DUTIES

SECTION 2.01. Subchapter A, Chapter 411, Government Code, is amended by adding Sections 411.02091 and 411.02092 to read as follows:

Sec. 411.02091. BORDER SECURITY LIAISON. (a) The department shall designate a department employee to act as the liaison between the department and each sector for border operations established by the United States Customs and Border Protection.

(b) The department shall avoid duplicative efforts, improve efficacy of deployed resources, and ensure efficient allocation of department resources along the Texas-Mexico border.

Sec. 411.02092. BORDER SECURITY PRIORITIES AND EQUIPMENT.

(a) The department shall pursue strategies and efforts for

securing the Texas-Mexico border.

(b) The department may purchase for use at or near the Texas-Mexico border equipment that increases the efficacy and efficiency of inspecting vehicles entering this state from Mexico, including equipment that uses radiography (X-rays) to inspect vehicles and freight.

ARTICLE 3. GRANT PROGRAM FOR COURTS IN THE BORDER REGION

SECTION 3.01. Chapter 72, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter H to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER H. BORDER COURT GRANT PROGRAM

Sec. 72.201. DEFINITION. In this subchapter, "border region" has the meaning assigned by Section 772.0071.

Sec. 72.202. GRANT PROGRAM. (a) From money appropriated for that purpose, the office shall establish and administer a grant program to support the operation of courts in the border region.

(b) In addition to other funds appropriated by the legislature and for purposes of administering and funding the grant program, the office may:

(1) seek and apply for any available federal funds;  
and

(2) solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any other source, public or private, as necessary to ensure resources are available to achieve the purpose described by Subsection (a).

(c) The grants awarded under this subchapter may be used for the reimbursement of costs associated with the operation of a court, including the:

1           (1) salary of a visiting judge appointed under Chapter  
2 74;

3           (2) salary and benefits of an associate judge, court  
4 coordinator, court administrator, court reporter, and court  
5 interpreter;

6           (3) salary and benefits of district and county clerk  
7 staff;

8           (4) travel costs and other expenses incurred by court  
9 personnel and judges in the performance of their duties;

10           (5) cost of equipment necessary for personnel  
11 dedicated to processing and adjudicating cases; or

12           (6) fees and related expenses for the appointment of  
13 counsel to represent an indigent defendant under Chapter 26, Code  
14 of Criminal Procedure, or the costs to operate a public defender's  
15 office or managed assigned counsel program under that chapter, as  
16 those fees and expenses relate to the adjudication of cases in  
17 courts in the border region.

18           Sec. 72.203. RULES. (a) The office shall adopt rules for  
19 the administration and operation of the grant program established  
20 under this subchapter.

21           (b) In adopting the rules, the office shall:

22           (1) conduct a study of the data collected for this  
23 purpose or otherwise available on crime, arrests, detentions, and  
24 convictions to identify offenses for which prosecutions have  
25 increased as a result of Operation Lone Star; and

26           (2) solicit from governmental officials, community  
27 leaders, and other interested persons in the border region

1 information necessary to identify the courts of the region needing  
2 financial assistance.

3 (c) The rules must include:

4 (1) administrative provisions for grants awarded  
5 under this subchapter, including:

6 (A) eligibility criteria for grant applicants,  
7 including criteria to limit eligibility to those applicants  
8 experiencing an increase in caseloads;

9 (B) grant application procedures;

10 (C) guidelines relating to grant amounts;

11 (D) procedures for evaluating grant  
12 applications; and

13 (E) procedures for monitoring the use of grants;

14 (2) methods for tracking the effectiveness of grants  
15 and the efficiency of the applicants receiving grants; and

16 (3) procedures for reporting caseload data at least  
17 annually, including caseload data necessary to update the study  
18 described by Section 72.2055.

19 Sec. 72.204. GRANT AMOUNTS. The amount of a grant awarded  
20 under this subchapter may not exceed the amount set by the General  
21 Appropriations Act.

22 Sec. 72.205. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANT RECIPIENTS.  
23 The recipient of a grant awarded under this subchapter shall submit  
24 to the office an annual report on the grant money spent during the  
25 year covered by the report and the purposes for which that money was  
26 spent.

27 Sec. 72.2055. ANNUAL REPORT BY OFFICE. Annually, the

office shall update the study conducted under Section 72.203(b)(1) using caseload data required to be reported under the rules adopted under Section 72.203.

Sec. 72.206. ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS. Unless otherwise provided by the appropriation, in each state fiscal year, the office may use a reasonable amount, not to exceed five percent, of any general revenue appropriated for purposes of this subchapter for that state fiscal year to pay the costs of administering the grant program.

SECTION 3.02. As soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, the Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System shall, with respect to Subchapter H, Chapter 72, Government Code, as added by this Act:

(1) adopt rules as necessary to implement the subchapter; and

(2) establish the grant program required by the subchapter.

ARTICLE 4. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND SERVICES IN THE BORDER REGION

SECTION 4.01. Chapter 421, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter G to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER G. USE OF FUNDS FOR BORDER PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Sec. 421.111. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Border region" has the meaning assigned by Section 772.0071.

(2) "Local government" means a municipality or county.

(3) "Office" means the trustee programs within the

office of the governor.

Sec. 421.112. USE OF CERTAIN FUNDS. From money appropriated for that purpose, the office, as authorized by Chapter 418, including Subchapter D of that chapter, shall make funds available to state agencies and local governments for the following purposes:

(1) the construction and maintenance of facilities related to prosecuting and adjudicating offenses committed in the border region, including court facilities, processing facilities, detention facilities for persons who are 10 years of age or older, regardless of gender, criminal justice centers, and other similar facilities;

(2) the payment of staff salaries and benefits and the payment of operational expenses related to providing law enforcement services;

(3) the purchase or maintenance of equipment related to providing public health and safety services in the border region, including law enforcement services, communication services, and emergency services, to enhance safety and security;

(4) the construction and maintenance of border security infrastructure, including drive-through mobile cargo scanners that use radiography (X-rays) to inspect vehicles and freight, surveillance technology, or other improvements, designed or adapted to surveil or impede the movement of persons or objects across the Texas-Mexico border at locations other than ports of entry;

(5) the construction of improvements to an area in the

immediate vicinity of a port of entry to enhance vehicle inspection capabilities and assist in the investigation, interdiction, and prosecution of persons smuggling individuals or contraband across the Texas-Mexico border; and

(6) the construction or improvement of roadways, sea ports, airports, and similar transportation facilities in the border region.

Sec. 421.113. FEDERAL FUNDS; GIFTS, GRANTS, AND DONATIONS. In addition to funds appropriated by the legislature and for purposes of this subchapter, the office may:

(1) seek and apply for any available federal funds; and

(2) solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any other source, public or private.

Sec. 421.1131. USE OF FEDERAL GRANT MONEY. To the extent authorized by federal law, the office may use federal money received under this subchapter for dual-use infrastructure improvements at general aviation airports in the border region to:

(1) improve border security operations; and

(2) support regional economic development by expanding the commercial or cargo capacity of an airport.

Sec. 421.114. RULES. The office may adopt rules for the administration of this subchapter.

Sec. 421.115. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS. (a) The recipient of funds for a purpose described by Section 421.112 shall submit to the office reports on an interval prescribed by the office regarding the use of the funds and any other issue related to the

1 funds as determined by the office.

2 (b) Funds received by a state agency for a purpose described  
3 by Section 421.112 are considered border security funding for  
4 purposes of reporting requirements in the General Appropriations  
5 Act.

6 Sec. 421.116. ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS. Unless otherwise  
7 provided by the appropriation, the division may use a reasonable  
8 amount, not to exceed five percent, of any general revenue  
9 appropriated for purposes of this subchapter to pay the costs of  
10 administering this subchapter.

11 SECTION 4.02. As soon as practicable after the effective  
12 date of this Act, the office of the governor shall adopt rules as  
13 necessary to implement Subchapter G, Chapter 421, Government Code,  
14 as added by this Act.

15 ARTICLE 5. EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISHMENT OF TEXAS

16 CENTER FOR BORDER POLICY

17 SECTION 5.01. Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by  
18 adding Subchapter D-1 to read as follows:

19 SUBCHAPTER D-1. BORDER INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAM

20 Sec. 61.101. BORDER INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAM. (a) In this  
21 subchapter, "border region" has the meaning assigned by Section  
22 772.0071, Government Code.

23 (b) Subject to the availability of funds, the board shall  
24 establish a border institution grant program under which the board  
25 awards financial assistance to institutions of higher education  
26 located in the border region that administer innovative programs  
27 designed to:



1           (1) recruit, train, retain, or otherwise increase the  
2 number of professionals in fields related to border safety or  
3 affected by ongoing criminal activity and public health threats to  
4 the border region, as determined by board rule, including by  
5 providing a salary increase or stipend to a faculty member who  
6 provides instruction to additional students in a degree or  
7 certificate program that graduates those professionals; and

8           (2) conduct research in areas of study related to  
9 border safety or the effects of ongoing criminal activity and  
10 public health threats to the border region.

11       Sec. 61.102. FEDERAL FUNDS AND GIFTS, GRANTS, AND  
12 DONATIONS. In addition to other funds appropriated by the  
13 legislature and for the purposes described by Section 61.101, the  
14 board may:

15           (1) seek and apply for any available federal funds;  
16 and

17           (2) solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations  
18 from any other source, public or private, as necessary to ensure  
19 effective implementation of the grant program established under  
20 this subchapter.

21       Sec. 61.103. RULES. (a) The board shall adopt rules for  
22 the administration of the grant program established under this  
23 subchapter. In adopting the rules, the board shall solicit, from  
24 border region officials, community leaders in the border region,  
25 and other stakeholders, information necessary to identify  
26 innovative programs anticipated to produce the best outcomes and  
27 serve the greatest need.

1       (b) The rules must include:

2               (1) administrative provisions for grants awarded  
3 under this subchapter, including:

4                       (A) eligibility criteria for institutions of  
5 higher education, including a requirement that the institution  
6 demonstrate regional and state workforce need;

7                       (B) grant application procedures;

8                       (C) guidelines relating to grant amounts;

9                       (D) procedures for evaluating grant  
10 applications; and

11                       (E) procedures for monitoring the use of grants;  
12 and

13               (2) methods for tracking the effectiveness of grants  
14 that:

15                       (A) using data reasonably available to the board,  
16 consider relevant information regarding the career paths of  
17 professionals described by Section 61.101 during the four-year  
18 period following their graduation; and

19                       (B) evaluate whether and for how long those  
20 professionals practice in a field described by Section 61.101 in  
21 this state.

22       Sec. 61.104. AWARD OF GRANTS. In awarding grants under this  
23 subchapter, the board shall give priority to applicants that  
24 propose to:

25               (1) enhance or leverage existing degree programs that  
26 graduate professionals described by Section 61.101;

27               (2) establish or maintain a program that serves a

1 rural or underserved area;

2 (3) partner with another institution of higher  
3 education to develop a joint program;

4 (4) establish or maintain a program that incentivizes  
5 professionals described by Section 61.101 to serve in their field  
6 or a related field of study for at least three consecutive years  
7 following graduation; and

8 (5) establish or maintain a degree or certificate  
9 program to educate professionals in specialties that face  
10 significant workforce shortages, including those described by  
11 Section 61.101.

12 Sec. 61.105. GRANT AMOUNTS. The amount of a grant awarded  
13 under this subchapter may not exceed an amount specified in the  
14 General Appropriations Act.

15 Sec. 61.106. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS. An institution of  
16 higher education that receives a grant awarded under this  
17 subchapter shall submit to the board an annual report on the amounts  
18 and purposes for which grant money was spent during the year  
19 covered by the report.

20 Sec. 61.107. ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS. Unless otherwise  
21 provided by the appropriation, in each state fiscal year, the board  
22 may use a reasonable amount, not to exceed five percent, of any  
23 general revenue appropriated for purposes of this subchapter for  
24 that state fiscal year to pay the costs of administering this  
25 subchapter.

26 SECTION 5.02. (a) As soon as practicable after the  
27 effective date of this Act, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating

Board shall adopt rules for the implementation and administration of the border institution grant program established under Subchapter D-1, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act.

(b) Not later than September 1, 2026, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall establish the border institution grant program required by Subchapter D-1, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act, and shall begin to award grants under the program as soon as practicable after the program is established.

ARTICLE 6. TRADE AGRICULTURAL INSPECTION GRANT PROGRAM

SECTION 6.01. Sections 12.050(k) and (l), Agriculture Code, are amended to read as follows:

(k) Not later than January 15, 2029 [~~2025~~], the department shall evaluate the performance of the program under this section and submit a report to the legislature. The report must include an evaluation of agricultural inspections affected by the program, including the extent to which the program is reducing wait times for agricultural inspections of vehicles at ports of entry along the border with the United Mexican States.

(l) Unless continued in existence by the legislature, this section expires September 1, 2029 [~~2025~~].

SECTION 6.02. The Department of Agriculture is required to implement a provision of this article only if the legislature appropriates money specifically for that purpose. If the legislature does not appropriate money specifically for that purpose, the department may, but is not required to, implement a provision of this article using other appropriations available for

1 that purpose.

2 ARTICLE 7. TUITION REIMBURSEMENT AND STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM  
3 FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS IN BORDER COMMUNITIES

4 SECTION 7.01. (a) The Department of State Health Services,  
5 in consultation with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board,  
6 shall develop and adopt a plan to establish new and improve existing  
7 tuition reimbursement programs and programs providing assistance  
8 with the repayment of student loans for eligible health care  
9 professionals who are serving in communities near and along the  
10 international border of this state with the United Mexican States.

11 (b) The plan developed under this section must:

12 (1) require a health care professional to commit to  
13 full-time employment as a health care professional in the  
14 communities near and along the international border of this state  
15 with the United Mexican States for a specified time to be eligible  
16 for participation in the tuition reimbursement and student loan  
17 repayment programs; and

18 (2) give preference for participation in the programs  
19 to health care professionals who live in those communities.

20 (c) Not later than September 1, 2026, the Department of  
21 State Health Services shall submit to the legislature the plan  
22 developed under Subsection (a) of this section and the estimated  
23 cost to this state of implementing the plan.

24 (d) This section expires January 1, 2027.

25 ARTICLE 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

26 SECTION 8.01. This Act takes effect immediately if it  
27 receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each

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1 house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution.  
2 If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate  
3 effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2025.