

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 969
By: Dukes
Human Services
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

One of the challenges facing the Department of Family and Protective Services is the inability to retain child protective services caseworkers. Interested parties assert that the turnover rate among such caseworkers is among the highest. These parties contend that, because many child protective services workers graduate with student loan debt and are paid less than many other workers with similar education requirements, a student loan repayment program for these caseworkers would be an investment in the recruitment and retention of qualified caseworkers.

Currently, there is no loan repayment program in Texas directed specifically at child protective services workers. H.B. 969 seeks to provide such a loan repayment program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTIONS 1 and 2 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 969 amends the Education Code to authorize the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to provide assistance in the repayment of student loans for certain child protective services caseworkers who apply and qualify for the assistance using funds appropriated for that purpose and in accordance with the bill's provisions and coordinating board rules. The bill establishes that the provision of such financial assistance in the repayment of student loans promotes a public purpose.

H.B. 969 requires a child protective services caseworker, as a condition of eligibility for such assistance, to apply to the coordinating board and to have been employed for at least one year, and be currently employed full-time, as a direct delivery caseworker at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). The bill authorizes a child protective services caseworker to receive up to \$5,000 in repayment assistance for each year that the caseworker is employed full-time and serves as a direct delivery caseworker at DFPS but limits the receipt of such assistance to not more than four years. The bill requires the coordinating board, if money will not be sufficient to provide repayment assistance to each eligible applicant, to award repayment assistance to eligible applicants by prioritizing awards to applicants employed in regions in Texas experiencing the highest turnover. The bill authorizes the coordinating board 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 and graduate education, issued through any lender. The bill prohibits the coordinating board from providing repayment assistance for a student loan that is in default at the time of the caseworker's application. The bill requires the coordinating board to deliver any repayment assistance in a lump sum directly to the lender and in accordance with any applicable federal law. The bill authorizes the repayment assistance to be applied to the principal amount of the loan and to interest that accrues.

H.B. 969 authorizes the coordinating board to appoint an advisory committee from outside the

board's membership to assist the coordinating board in performing its duties relating to the repayment assistance program. The bill specifies that the program is funded from the child protective services caseworker student loan assistance trust fund, which is established outside the treasury and administered by the comptroller. The bill authorizes money in the trust fund to be spent without appropriation and only to fund the program. The bill requires interest and income from the fund's assets to be credited to and deposited in the fund. The bill authorizes the coordinating board to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source for purposes of the program and to deposit money accepted under such provisions to the credit of the trust fund. The bill authorizes the legislature to appropriate money to the trust fund.

H.B. 969 requires the coordinating board, not later than December 1, 2013, to adopt rules necessary for the administration of the repayment assistance program, including a rule that establishes the amount of repayment assistance awarded to a caseworker each year. The bill requires the coordinating board to distribute to each institution of higher education, DFPS, and appropriate professional associations copies of the rules and pertinent information regarding the program.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2013.