

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1073
By: Allen
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Speech-language pathologists and audiologists help children and adults prevent or overcome a variety of communication disabilities, including speech, language, hearing, reading, and learning disorders, or combinations thereof. Many such specialists are employed by public school districts to provide services to students with complex disorders that are becoming more common in schools, such as developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, stuttering, autism, and other social disorders. According to interested parties, national data shows that appropriately trained and educated speech-language pathologists make a significant difference not only in a child's communication, but also in the child's educational achievement. Interested parties contend that there is a critical shortage, however, of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in Texas public schools and a critical shortage of the doctoral-level faculty nationwide needed to educate and train master's level speech-language pathologists and doctoral-level audiologists.

C.S.H.B. 1073 seeks to reduce this shortage by providing a student loan repayment program for speech-language pathologists or audiologists employed by public schools or as faculty members of certain graduate programs at public institutions of higher education.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1073 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, in accordance with the bill's provisions and coordinating board rules, to provide assistance in the repayment of student loans for speech-language pathologists and audiologists who apply and qualify for assistance. The bill requires a speech-language pathologist or audiologist, 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 as a speech-language pathologist or audiologist by a public school district or as a faculty member of a communicative disorders program at a public, private, or independent institution of higher education. The bill authorizes the coordinating board by rule to prorate repayment assistance for speech-language pathologists and audiologists employed part-time by a public school or institution of higher education.

C.S.H.B. 1073 authorizes a qualifying speech-language pathologist or audiologist 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 a public, private, or independent institution of higher education and caps the total annual amount of such repayment assistance at \$6,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a master's degree but not a doctoral degree or \$9,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a doctoral degree. The bill authorizes the coordinating board to provide repayment assistance for the repayment of any student loan, as defined by coordinating board rule, for education at any public or private institution of higher education in or outside of Texas

received by an eligible speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

C.S.H.B. 1073 requires the coordinating board to deliver any repayment in a lump sum payable to the lender and the speech-language pathologist or audiologist, in accordance with any applicable federal law, or to the lender or other holder of the loan on behalf of the speech-language pathologist or audiologist. The bill authorizes a repayment to be applied to the principal amount and accrued interest of the loan.

C.S.H.B. 1073 authorizes the coordinating board to appoint advisory committees to assist the coordinating board in administering the bill's provisions. The bill limits program funding to funding solely from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by the coordinating board for the program's purposes. The bill requires the coordinating board to adopt rules necessary for the administration of the bill's provisions and to distribute a copy of the rules and pertinent information to each appropriate public, private, or independent institution of higher education, any appropriate state agency, and any appropriate professional association.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2013.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 1073 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following comparison is organized and highlighted in a manner that indicates the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

INTRODUCED

SECTION 1. Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter II to read as follows:

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

Sec. 61.9811. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Audiologist" means a person licensed as an audiologist under Chapter 401, Occupations Code.

(2) "Communicative disorders program" means:

(A) a graduate degree program in audiology or speech-language pathology accredited by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology; or

(B) an undergraduate degree program that prepares and qualifies students for admission to a graduate degree program described by Paragraph (A).

(3) "Public school" means a public preschool or primary or secondary school in this state.

(4) "Speech-language pathologist" means a

HOUSE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE

SECTION 1. Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter II to read as follows:

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

Sec. 61.9811. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Audiologist" means a person licensed as an audiologist under Chapter 401, Occupations Code.

(2) "Communicative disorders program" means:

(A) a graduate degree program in audiology or speech-language pathology accredited by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology; or

(B) an undergraduate degree program that prepares and qualifies students for admission to a graduate degree program described by Paragraph (A).

(3) "Public school" means a public preschool or primary or secondary school in this state.

(4) "Speech-language pathologist" means a

person licensed as a speech-language pathologist under Chapter 401, Occupations Code.

Sec. 61.9812. REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED. The board shall provide, in accordance with this subchapter and board rules, assistance in the repayment of student loans for speech-language pathologists and audiologists who apply and qualify for assistance.

Sec. 61.9813. ELIGIBILITY. (a) To be eligible to receive repayment assistance, a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist must:

(1) apply to the board; and

(2) at the time the speech-language pathologist or audiologist applies for the assistance:

(A) 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

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

(b) The board by rule may 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. 61.9814. LIMITATION. (a) On qualifying for the assistance, a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist may receive repayment assistance grants for each year of employment, not to exceed five years, by:

(1) a public school; or

(2) a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education.

(b) For each applicable year of employment described by Subsection (a), the total amount of repayment assistance grants received by a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist under this subchapter may not exceed:

(1) \$6,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a master's degree but not a doctoral degree; or

person licensed as a speech-language pathologist under Chapter 401, Occupations Code.

Sec. 61.9812. REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED. The board shall provide, in accordance with this subchapter and board rules, assistance in the repayment of student loans for speech-language pathologists and audiologists who apply and qualify for assistance.

Sec. 61.9813. ELIGIBILITY. (a) To be eligible to receive repayment assistance, a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist must:

(1) apply to the board; and

(2) at the time the speech-language pathologist or audiologist applies for the assistance:

(A) have been employed as a speech-language pathologist or as an audiologist, as applicable, for at least one year by, and be currently employed in that capacity by, a public school; or

(B) have been employed as a faculty member of a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education for at least one year, and be currently employed in that capacity at such an institution.

(b) The board by rule may 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. 61.9814. LIMITATION. (a) On qualifying for the assistance, a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist may receive repayment assistance grants for each year of employment, not to exceed five years, by:

(1) a public school; or

(2) a communicative disorders program at an institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education.

(b) For each applicable year of employment described by Subsection (a), the total amount of repayment assistance grants received by a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist under this subchapter may not exceed:

(1) \$6,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a master's degree but not a doctoral degree; or

(2) \$9,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a doctoral degree.

Sec. 61.9815. ELIGIBLE LOANS. The board may provide repayment assistance for the repayment of any student loan for graduate-level education at any public or private institution of higher education in or outside of this state received by an eligible speech-language pathologist or audiologist through any lender.

Sec. 61.9816. REPAYMENT. (a) The board shall deliver any repayment made under this subchapter in a lump sum payable to:

(1) the lender and the speech-language pathologist or audiologist, in accordance with any applicable federal law; or

(2) the lender or other holder of the loan on behalf of the speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

(b) A repayment made under this subchapter may be applied to the principal amount and accrued interest of the loan.

Sec. 61.9817. ADVISORY COMMITTEES. The board may appoint advisory committees to assist the board in administering this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9818. PROGRAM FUNDING. (a) The program is funded only from appropriations made specifically to fund the program and from gifts and grants. The board shall 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) The board may solicit and accept gifts and grants for the purposes of this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9819. RULES. (a) The board shall adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter.

(b) The board shall distribute a copy of the rules adopted under this section and pertinent information regarding this subchapter to:

(1) each appropriate institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education;

(2) any appropriate state agency; and

(3) any appropriate professional association.

SECTION 2. This Act takes effect September 1, 2013.

(2) \$9,000 for an eligible recipient who holds a doctoral degree.

Sec. 61.9815. ELIGIBLE LOANS. The board may provide repayment assistance for the repayment of any student loan, as defined by board rule, for education at any public or private institution of higher education in or outside of this state received by an eligible speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

Sec. 61.9816. REPAYMENT. (a) The board shall deliver any repayment made under this subchapter in a lump sum payable to:

(1) the lender and the speech-language pathologist or audiologist, in accordance with any applicable federal law; or

(2) the lender or other holder of the loan on behalf of the speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

(b) A repayment made under this subchapter may be applied to the principal amount and accrued interest of the loan.

Sec. 61.9817. ADVISORY COMMITTEES. The board may appoint advisory committees to assist the board in administering this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9818. PROGRAM FUNDING. The program may be funded solely from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by the board for the purposes of this subchapter.

Sec. 61.9819. RULES. (a) The board shall adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter.

(b) The board shall distribute a copy of the rules adopted under this section and pertinent information regarding this subchapter to:

(1) each appropriate institution of higher education or private or independent institution of higher education;

(2) any appropriate state agency; and

(3) any appropriate professional association.

SECTION 2. Same as introduced version.