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By:  Hernandez H.B. No. 630

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the establishment of the Texas Promise Scholarship Program for certain students at participating two-year public institutions of higher education.

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

SECTION 1.  Chapter 56, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter T to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER T. TEXAS PROMISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Sec. 56.521.  DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1)  "Coordinating board" means the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

(2)  "Eligible institution" means a public junior college, public technical institute, or public state college, as those terms are defined by Section 61.003.

(3)  "Participating institution" means an eligible institution that elects to participate in the program under Section 56.524.

(4)  "Program" means the Texas Promise Scholarship Program established under this subchapter.

Sec. 56.522.  PROGRAM. The Texas Promise Scholarship Program is an optional program under which participating two-year institutions of higher education may provide assistance in the payment of tuition and mandatory fees to enable eligible students to attend those institutions.

Sec. 56.523.  ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM. The coordinating board shall administer the program and adopt any rules necessary to implement the program or this subchapter. The coordinating board shall consult with the student financial aid officers of eligible institutions in developing the rules.

Sec. 56.524.  ELECTION TO PARTICIPATE; AWARD OF SCHOLARSHIP. (a) An eligible institution may elect to participate in the program by notifying the coordinating board of the institution's election.

(b)  From money available for the purpose, each participating institution shall award scholarships to eligible students under the program. In determining who should receive a scholarship under the program, the institution may give priority to awarding scholarships to students in any major or certificate or degree program designated by the institution.

Sec. 56.525.  INITIAL ELIGIBILITY FOR SCHOLARSHIP. (a) To be eligible initially for a scholarship under the program, a person must:

(1)  be a resident of this state as determined by coordinating board rules;

(2)  meet financial need requirements as defined by the coordinating board;

(3)  be enrolled in an associate degree or certificate program at a participating institution;

(4)  be enrolled as an entering student for at least one-half of a full course load for an entering student in the associate degree or certificate program, as determined by the coordinating board;

(5)  have applied for any available financial aid or assistance; and

(6)  comply with any additional nonacademic requirement adopted by the coordinating board under this subchapter.

(b)  A person is not eligible to receive a scholarship under the program if the person has been convicted of a felony or an offense under Chapter 481, Health and Safety Code, or under the law of another jurisdiction involving a controlled substance as defined by Chapter 481, Health and Safety Code, unless the person has met the other applicable eligibility requirements under the program and has:

(1)  received a certificate of discharge by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or a correctional facility or completed a period of probation ordered by a court, and at least two years have elapsed from the date of the receipt or completion; or

(2)  been pardoned, had the record of the offense expunged from the person's record, or otherwise been released from the resulting ineligibility to receive a scholarship under the program.

(c)  A person is not eligible to receive a scholarship under the program if the person has been granted an associate or baccalaureate degree.

(d)  A person may not receive a scholarship under the program for more than 75 semester credit hours or the equivalent.

(e)  A person's eligibility for a scholarship under the program ends on the third anniversary of the initial award of a scholarship under the program to the person and the person's enrollment in a participating institution.

Sec. 56.526.  CONTINUING ELIGIBILITY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS. (a) After initially qualifying for a scholarship under the program, a person may continue to receive a scholarship under the program during each semester or term in which the person is enrolled at a participating institution only if the person:

(1)  meets financial need requirements as defined by the coordinating board;

(2)  is enrolled in an associate degree or certificate program at a participating institution;

(3)  is enrolled for at least one-half of a full course load for a student in an associate degree or certificate program, as determined by the coordinating board;

(4)  makes satisfactory academic progress toward an associate degree or certificate; and

(5)  complies with any additional nonacademic requirement adopted by the coordinating board.

(b)  A person is not eligible to continue to receive a scholarship under this section if the person has been convicted of a felony or an offense under Chapter 481, Health and Safety Code, or under the law of another jurisdiction involving a controlled substance as defined by Chapter 481, Health and Safety Code, unless the person has met the other applicable eligibility requirements under the program and has:

(1)  received a certificate of discharge by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or a correctional facility or completed a period of probation ordered by a court, and at least two years have elapsed from the date of the receipt or completion; or

(2)  been pardoned, had the record of the offense expunged from the person's record, or otherwise been released from the resulting ineligibility to receive a scholarship under the program.

(c)  If a person fails to meet any of the requirements of Subsection (a) after the completion of any semester or term, the person may not receive a scholarship under the program during the next semester or term in which the person enrolls. A person may become eligible to receive a scholarship under the program in a subsequent semester or term if the person:

(1)  completes a semester or term during which the student is not eligible for a scholarship; and

(2)  meets all the requirements of Subsection (a).

(d)  For the purpose of this section, a person makes satisfactory academic progress toward an associate degree or certificate only if:

(1)  in the person's first academic year, the person meets the satisfactory academic progress requirements of the institution at which the person is enrolled; and

(2)  in the subsequent academic year, the person:

(A)  completes at least 75 percent of the semester credit hours attempted in the student's most recent academic year; and

(B)  has earned an overall grade point average of at least 2.5 on a four-point scale or the equivalent on course work previously attempted at institutions of higher education.

(e)  A person who is eligible to receive a scholarship under the program continues to remain eligible to receive the scholarship if the person enrolls in or transfers to another participating institution.

(f)  The coordinating board shall adopt rules to allow a person who is otherwise eligible to receive a scholarship under the program, in the event of a hardship or for other good cause shown, including a showing of a severe illness or other debilitating condition that may affect the person's academic performance or that the person is responsible for the care of a sick, injured, or needy person and that the person's provision of care may affect the person's academic performance, to receive a scholarship under the program:

(1)  while enrolled in a number of semester credit hours that is less than the number of semester credit hours required under Subsection (a)(3); or

(2)  if the student's grade point average or completion rate falls below the satisfactory academic progress requirements of Subsection (d).

Sec. 56.527.  SCHOLARSHIP USE. A scholarship awarded by a participating institution under the program may be applied only to the payment of tuition and mandatory fees at the institution.

Sec. 56.528.  SCHOLARSHIP AMOUNT. (a) The amount of a scholarship awarded by a participating institution to an eligible student under the program for a semester or other academic term in which the student is enrolled at the institution may not exceed the difference between the amount of tuition and mandatory fees charged to the student by the institution for that semester or term and the amount of any other gift aid, including state or federal grants or scholarships, awarded to the student for that semester or term.

(b)  A scholarship may not be awarded under the program to an eligible student for a semester or other academic term until any other gift aid for which the student is eligible has been awarded to the student and the student's unmet financial need has been established for purposes of determining the appropriate amount of the student's scholarship under Subsection (a).

Sec. 56.529.  NOTIFICATION OF PROGRAM; RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS. (a)  The coordinating board, in consultation with all participating institutions, shall prepare materials designed to inform prospective students, their parents, and high school counselors about the program, the institutions participating in the program, and eligibility for a scholarship under the program. The coordinating board shall distribute to each eligible institution and to each school district a copy of the materials prepared under this section.

(b)  Each school district shall notify its high school students, those students' teachers and school counselors, and those students' parents or guardians of the program, the institutions participating in the program, and the eligibility requirements of the program.

Sec. 56.530.  GIFTS, GRANTS, AND DONATIONS.  In addition to other money appropriated by the legislature, each participating institution may solicit, accept, and spend gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of the program.

SECTION 2.  (a)  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules to administer Subchapter T, Chapter 56, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act.

(b)  Each two-year public institution of higher education that elects to participate in the Texas Promise Scholarship Program established under Subchapter T, Chapter 56, Education Code, as added by this Act, shall begin awarding scholarships under that subchapter for the first academic year for which money is available for that purpose, except that an institution may not award scholarships under that subchapter for an academic year before the 2020-2021 academic year.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2019.