By:  Watson, et al. S.B. No. 2231

(Cole, Howard, Toth, Guillen, Dutton, et al.)

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the exemption of tuition and laboratory fees at public institutions of higher education for certain paramedics.

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

SECTION 1.  The heading to Section 54.353, Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

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

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

(a)  The governing board of an institution of higher education shall exempt from the payment of tuition and laboratory fees any student enrolled in one or more courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum who:

(1)  is employed as a firefighter or a paramedic by a political subdivision of this state; or

(2)  is currently, and has been for at least one year, an active member of an organized volunteer fire department participating in the Texas Emergency Services Retirement System or a retirement system established under the Texas Local Fire Fighters Retirement Act (Article 6243e, Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes) and who holds:

(A)  an Accredited Advanced level of certification, or an equivalent successor certification, under the State Firemen's and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas volunteer certification program; or

(B)  Phase V (Firefighter II) certification, or an equivalent successor certification, under the Texas Commission on Fire Protection's voluntary certification program under Section 419.071, Government Code.

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

(f)  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall 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)  relating to the determination of a student's eligibility for an exemption; 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 may be excluded from the exemption under that subsection; and

(2)  a uniform listing of degree programs covered by the exemption under this section.

SECTION 3.  (a)  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall 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)  Section 54.353, Education Code, as amended by this Act, applies beginning with tuition and laboratory fees charged for the 2019 fall semester. Tuition and laboratory fees charged for an academic period before that semester are covered by the law in effect immediately before the effective date of this Act, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 4.  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.