By:  Darby, et al. (Senate Sponsor - Seliger) H.B. No. 1259

(In the Senate - Received from the House April 19, 2021; May 6, 2021, read first time and referred to Committee on Higher Education; May 19, 2021, reported favorably by the following vote: Yeas 9, Nays 0; May 19, 2021, sent to printer.)

COMMITTEE VOTE

               Yea Nay Absent  PNV

Creighton       X

West            X

Birdwell        X

Blanco          X

Miles           X

Paxton          X

Springer        X

Taylor          X

Zaffirini       X

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the rural veterinarian incentive program.

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

SECTION 1.  Chapter 56, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter G, and a heading is added to that subchapter to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER G. RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM

SECTION 2.  Sections 88.621, 88.622, 88.623, 88.624, 88.625, and 88.626, Education Code, are transferred to Subchapter G, Chapter 56, Education Code, as added by this Act, redesignated as Sections 56.101, 56.102, 56.103, 56.104, 56.105, and 56.106, Education Code, and amended to read as follows:

Sec. 56.101 [~~88.621~~].  DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1)  "Account" means the rural veterinarian incentive program account.

(2)  "College" means a college of veterinary medicine located in this state and accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education [~~The Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine~~].

(3) [~~(2)~~]  "Committee" means the rural veterinarian incentive program committee.

(4) [~~(3)~~]  "Eligible participant" means a person eligible to participate in the program under Section 56.104 [~~88.624~~].

[~~(4)  "Fund" means the rural veterinarian incentive fund.~~]

(5)  "General academic teaching institution" has the meaning assigned by Section 61.003.

(6)  "Program" means the rural veterinarian incentive program established by this subchapter.

(7) [~~(6)~~]  "Rural county" means a county in this state with a population of less than 100,000 [~~50,000~~].

(8) [~~(7)~~]  "University system" has the meaning assigned by Section 61.003 [~~means Texas A&M University~~].

Sec. 56.102 [~~88.622~~].  ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM. The Texas Animal Health Commission [~~university~~] shall administer the program in accordance with the rules adopted by the committee.

Sec. 56.103 [~~88.623~~].  RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM COMMITTEE; RULES. (a) The rural veterinarian incentive program committee consists of:

(1)  the executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission, or the executive director's designee;

(2)  the executive director of the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners, or the executive director's designee;

(3)  the dean of each accredited [~~the~~] college of veterinary medicine located in this state, or the dean's designee;

(4)  a veterinarian with a mixed animal practice, representing each university system located in Texas with an accredited college of veterinary medicine, appointed by the board of regents of each university system [~~The Texas A&M University System~~]; [~~and~~]

(5)  a veterinarian with a large animal practice, representing each university system located in Texas with an accredited college of veterinary medicine, appointed by the board of regents of each university system; and

(6)  a practitioner of veterinary medicine who serves as a commissioner of the Texas Animal Health Commission, appointed by the chair of the Texas Animal Health Commission [~~The Texas A&M University System~~].

(b)  The executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission [~~dean of the college~~] serves as the presiding officer of the committee.

(c)  An appointed member of the committee serves a term of two years.

(d)  The committee shall adopt rules:

(1)  establishing criteria to determine whether a person is an eligible participant as the committee considers reasonable, including the person's:

(A)  background and interest in rural practice [~~minimum grade point average~~]; and

(B)  financial need;

(2)  providing for requesting the distribution of money from the account [~~fund~~] for the program;

(3)  establishing the criteria necessary for a community or political subdivision in a rural county to qualify as a student sponsor under Section 56.105 [~~88.625~~];

(4)  governing agreements of financial support between a rural sponsor and an eligible student; and

(5)  establishing other procedures necessary to administer the program.

(e)  In adopting rules under this section related to the selection, submission, or certification of areas identified as having a veterinary shortage for the purpose of this subchapter, the committee shall consider any applicable regulations adopted under 7 U.S.C. Section 3151a and previous work of the Texas Animal Health Commission.

Sec. 56.104 [~~88.624~~].  ELIGIBLE VETERINARY STUDENT OR GRADUATE. (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b), a [~~A~~] person is eligible to participate in the program only if the person:

(1)  is enrolled as a student of the college or applies to participate in the program on or before the fourth [~~first~~] anniversary of the date the person graduates from the college;

(2)  will receive or has received from a student loan at least 50 percent of the funds for tuition and fees for one or more academic years while enrolled in the college; and

(3)  meets any additional qualifications adopted by the committee.

(b)  A person enrolled as a student in an accredited college of veterinary medicine located outside of this state may apply under Subsection (a) to participate in the program if the student graduated from a high school located in this state or a general academic teaching institution located in this state.

Sec. 56.105 [~~88.625~~].  RURAL SPONSORS; AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT. (a) A community or political subdivision located in a rural county that qualifies under the rules of the committee may become a sponsor of an eligible participant and may provide financial support to the eligible participant under the program.

(b)  To participate as a sponsor in the program, the community or political subdivision must enter into an agreement with the eligible participant to provide financial support to the eligible participant in an amount not less than the tuition and fees required for a full academic year for a student enrolled in the college in exchange for the eligible participant's agreement to practice veterinary medicine in the sponsoring community or political subdivision.

(c)  Financial support under this section:

(1)  may be provided in whole or part by a grant, scholarship, or funds provided by a private foundation; and

(2)  shall be deposited in the account [~~fund~~] for distribution to the eligible participant [~~by the university~~].

Sec. 56.106 [~~88.626~~].  FINANCIAL SUPPORT; COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE IN RURAL COUNTY. (a) To participate in the program, an eligible participant must enter into an agreement with the university system that:

(1)  requires the participant to practice veterinary medicine in a rural county for one calendar year for each academic year for which the participant [~~student~~] receives financial support under the program;

(2)  specifies the conditions the participant must satisfy to receive financial support under the program;

(3)  provides that any financial support the participant receives under the program constitutes a loan until the participant satisfies the conditions of the agreement; and

(4)  requires the participant to sign a promissory note acknowledging the conditional nature of the financial support received under the program and promising to repay the amount of the financial support, any applicable interest, and reasonable collection costs if the participant does not satisfy the conditions of the agreement.

(b)  The financial support received by an eligible participant under this subchapter must be used to retire student loan debt or to pay tuition and fees to the university system while the eligible participant is enrolled in the college.

(c)  Financial support from the account [~~fund~~] shall be awarded as a lump sum payable:

(1)  to both the participant and the lender or other holder of the affected loan; or

(2)  directly to the lender or other holder of the affected loan on the participant's behalf [~~in the form of grants~~].

SECTION 3.  Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter OO, and a heading is added to that subchapter to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER OO. RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM ACCOUNT

SECTION 4.  Section 88.627, Education Code, is transferred to Subchapter OO, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act, redesignated as Section 61.9965, Education Code, and amended to read as follows:

Sec. 61.9965 [~~88.627~~].  RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM ACCOUNT [~~FUND~~]. (a) The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall administer the rural veterinarian incentive program account in accordance with Subchapter G, Chapter 56, to provide assistance in the repayment of student loans for eligible veterinarians who apply and qualify for the assistance under the rules of the Texas Animal Health Commission rural veterinarian incentive program committee.

(b)  The rural veterinarian incentive program account [~~fund~~] is an account [~~a special fund~~] in the [~~state treasury outside the~~] general revenue fund.

[~~(b)~~]  The account is composed [~~fund consists~~] of:

(1)  [~~legislative appropriations for purposes of the program,~~] gifts, grants, [~~donations, the market value of~~] in-kind contributions, or real or personal property contributed to the account from any individual, group, association, or corporation or the United States, subject to limitations or conditions set by law, for the purposes of this subchapter;

(2)  earnings on the principal of the account; and

(3)  other amounts [~~sources of revenue~~] deposited to the credit of the account, including:

(A)  money deposited from a community or political subdivision that qualifies under the rules authorized by Section 56.105 to become a sponsor of an eligible participant under the program; and

(B)  legislative appropriations deposited to the account [~~fund by the university~~].

(c)  Money and resources in the account shall be made available and payable as soon as practicable at the request of the Texas Animal Health Commission and may be used only for the following purposes:

(1)  to provide financial support as a lump sum to an eligible participant under Subchapter G, Chapter 56, the lender or other holder of the participant's affected loan, or the participant's university system;

(2)  a reasonable amount, not to exceed seven percent of the account value, to cover the costs of administration of the program; or

(3)  a reasonable amount, not to exceed three percent of the account value, as specifically required for the coordinating board for administration of the account [~~The fund shall be administered by the university in accordance with rules adopted by the committee. The university may use a portion of the money deposited to the credit of the fund, not to exceed 10 percent of that amount, for the administration of the program~~].

(d)  The unexpended balance of the account at the end of a fiscal year remains in the account subject to further appropriation for the purposes described by Subsection (c).

SECTION 5.  The heading to Subchapter I, Chapter 88, Education Code, is repealed.

SECTION 6.  On the effective date of this Act, any obligations, rights, contracts, records, real and personal property, funds, appropriations, and money of the rural veterinarian incentive program are transferred from The Texas A&M University System to the Texas Animal Health Commission.

SECTION 7.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2021.

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