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H.B. No. 1259

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~~].

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

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

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

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

9 (8) ~~[(7)]~~ "University system" has the meaning
10 assigned by Section 61.003 ~~[means Texas A&M University]~~.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 ~~System]; [and]~~

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

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

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

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

15 (d) The committee shall adopt rules:

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

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

21 (B) financial need;

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

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

27 (4) governing agreements of financial support between

1 a rural sponsor and an eligible student; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 Sec. 56.105 [~~88.625~~]. RURAL SPONSORS; AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE
27 FINANCIAL SUPPORT. (a) A community or political subdivision

1 located in a rural county that qualifies under the rules of the
2 committee may become a sponsor of an eligible participant and may
3 provide financial support to the eligible participant under the
4 program.

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

13 (c) Financial support under this section:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 SUBCHAPTER OO. RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM ACCOUNT

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

1 Sec. 61.9965 [~~88.627~~]. RURAL VETERINARIAN INCENTIVE
2 PROGRAM ACCOUNT [~~FUND~~]. (a) The Texas Higher Education
3 Coordinating Board shall administer the rural veterinarian
4 incentive program account in accordance with Subchapter G, Chapter
5 56, to provide assistance in the repayment of student loans for
6 eligible veterinarians who apply and qualify for the assistance
7 under the rules of the Texas Animal Health Commission rural
8 veterinarian incentive program committee.

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

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

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

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

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

22 (A) money deposited from a community or political
23 subdivision that qualifies under the rules authorized by Section
24 56.105 to become a sponsor of an eligible participant under the
25 program; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 SECTION 6. On the effective date of this Act, any
25 obligations, rights, contracts, records, real and personal
26 property, funds, appropriations, and money of the rural
27 veterinarian incentive program are transferred from The Texas A&M

H.B. No. 1259

1 University System to the Texas Animal Health Commission.

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