

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2026
By: Darby
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The 87th Texas Legislature overwhelmingly enacted H.B. 1259, which modernized the rural veterinarian incentive program. According to the bill analysis for H.B. 1259, the program was designed to carefully select and incentivize veterinarians to serve in high-need areas by providing educational loan assistance in exchange for a commitment to practice in areas of shortage. When implementing this legislation, a few issues were identified that require legislative attention, including the fact that program participants must enter into an agreement with a university system, rather than the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), which is the entity actually charged with overseeing the program account, and the second being that the program currently excludes individuals enrolled as students at an out-of-state college of veterinary medicine at the time of application. C.S.H.B. 2026 seeks to address these issues and increase the effectiveness of the program in addressing the shortage of veterinarians in rural Texas by changing the entity with which program participants must enter into an agreement to the THECB, extending program eligibility to certain out-of-state students, and expanding the number of counties considered to be rural counties for purposes of the program.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2026 amends the Education Code to do the following with respect to the rural veterinarian incentive program:

- change the entity with which an eligible participant must enter into an agreement to participate in the program from the applicable university system to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board;
- increase the maximum population of a county classified as a rural county for purposes of the program from less than 100,000 to less than 150,000;
- extend eligibility to participate in the program to a student enrolled in a college of veterinary medicine that is located outside of Texas and accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education; and
- include among the rules the rural veterinarian incentive program committee must adopt for the program rules establishing preferential treatment in the selection process for applicants who, as follows:
 - are Texas residents;

- graduated from a high school located in Texas or a general academic teaching institution located in Texas; or
- graduated from an accredited college of veterinary medicine in Texas.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 2026 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute includes a provision not present in the introduced requiring, among the other rules adopted for the program by the committee, the adoption of rules establishing preferential treatment in the selection process for certain applicants with ties to Texas.

The substitute raises the cap on the population of a county classified as a rural county for purposes of the program, whereas the introduced did not.