88R7131 MM-D

By:  Bryant H.B. No. 4678

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to establishing a social work recruitment and retention program administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

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

SECTION 1.  Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Subchapter LL to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER LL. SOCIAL WORK RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM

Sec. 61.9851.  DEFINITION. In this subchapter, "program" means the social work intern practicum stipend (SWIPS) program.

Sec. 61.9852.  ESTABLISHMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM. The board shall establish and administer a social work recruitment and retention program to provide an intern practicum stipend to assist students at institutions of higher education in obtaining field hours necessary for program coursework related to completing a bachelor's or master's degree in social work.

Sec. 61.9853.  ELIGIBILITY; PRIORITY OF APPLICANTS. (a) To be eligible to receive a stipend under the program, a student must:

(1)  apply to the board in the form and manner prescribed by board rule;

(2)  be enrolled at an institution of higher education in an educational program that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education leading to a bachelor's or master's degree in social work;

(3)  be accepted into a practicum placement approved by the board for purposes of the program;

(4)  enter into a written agreement with the board as provided by board rule; and

(5)  satisfy any other criteria prescribed by board rule.

(b)  The board shall establish a method for prioritizing applicants for practicum stipends in the event the total amount of money available to provide stipends under this subchapter for an academic year is not sufficient to provide a stipend to each applicant who is eligible under Subsection (a). The priority criteria must include:

(1)  qualification for need-based aid based on free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) indicators; and

(2)  practicum placement in a mental health professional shortage area designated by the Department of State Health Services.

Sec. 61.9854.  PRACTICUM STIPEND AWARDS. (a) The amount of a practicum stipend award to which an eligible student is entitled is an amount equal to:

(1)  for a student enrolled in a bachelor's degree program, $15 per hour for each hour of supervised field hours in an approved practicum program, not to exceed a total of $6,000; or

(2)  for a student enrolled in a master's degree program, $20 per hour for each hour of supervised field hours in an approved practicum program, not to exceed a total of $9,000.

(b)  Each academic year, the board shall provide money for the practicum stipends to institutions of higher education with Council on Social Work Education-accredited educational programs based on the institution's anticipated need. Each institution shall determine the timeline and procedure for distributing the money for that academic year to eligible students based on the board's priority criteria adopted under Section 61.9853(b), if applicable.

(c)  An institution of higher education shall remit to the board any unused money received by the institution under the program for an academic year as soon as practicable following that academic year.

Sec. 61.9855.  PRIORITY OF INSTITUTIONS. The board shall establish a method for prioritizing institutions of higher education for distribution of practicum stipends in the event the total amount of money available to provide stipends under this subchapter for an academic year is not sufficient to provide money for stipends at each institution described by Section 61.9854(b). The priority criteria shall include:

(1)  serving a high percentage of students who qualify for need-based aid based on free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) indicators;

(2)  having a high number of students who complete practicum placements in mental health professional shortage areas designated by the Department of State Health Services; and

(3)  designation as a historically black college or university or a Hispanic-serving institution.

Sec. 61.9856.  REPORTS. (a) Each institution of higher education that receives money for practicum stipends under the program for an academic year shall collect and submit data in the form of a report to the board each semester. The report must include information regarding:

(1)  the amount of money distributed by the institution under the program for that semester;

(2)  the number of participants in the program during that semester; and

(3)  any other expenses incurred by the institution related to the program for that semester.

(b)  Not later than September 1 of each even-numbered year, the board shall submit a report on the program to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each standing committee of the legislature with primary jurisdiction over matters relating to finance. The report must include an analysis of the program's effectiveness and any recommendations for legislative or other action.

Sec. 61.9857.  RULES. The board shall adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter.

SECTION 2.  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt rules for the administration of Subchapter LL, Chapter 61, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after this Act takes effect.

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, 2023.