By:  Springer S.B. No. 567

(In the Senate - Filed January 23, 2023; February 17, 2023, read first time and referred to Subcommittee on Higher Education; April 17, 2023, reported favorably from Committee on Education by the following vote: Yeas 11, Nays 0; April 17, 2023, sent to printer.)

COMMITTEE VOTE

                    Yea Nay Absent  PNV

Creighton         X

Campbell             X

Bettencourt          X

Birdwell                       X

Flores               X

King                           X

LaMantia             X

Menéndez             X

Middleton            X

Parker               X

Paxton               X

Springer             X

West                 X

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to firefighters enrolled in fire science courses.

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

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

Sec. 54.353. FIREFIGHTERS ENROLLED IN FIRE SCIENCE COURSES.  (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 by a political subdivision of this state; or

(2)  is a member in good standing in a volunteer firefighter department, registered with Texas Forest Service and providing 911 service to a designated area [~~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)  attends at least 20 hours of annual training;

(B)  attends or provides support services for at least 25 percent of the department's emergencies in a calendar year; and

(C)  holds:

(i) [~~(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

(ii) [~~(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.

(b)  An exemption provided under this section does not apply to deposits that may be required in the nature of security for the return or proper care of property loaned for the use of students.

(c)  Notwithstanding Subsection (a), a student who for a semester or term at an institution of higher education receives an exemption under this section may continue to receive the exemption for a subsequent semester or term at any institution only if the student makes satisfactory academic progress toward a degree or certificate at that institution as determined by the institution for purposes of financial aid.

(d)  Notwithstanding Subsection (a), the exemption provided under this section does not apply to any amount of additional tuition the institution elects to charge a resident undergraduate student under Section 54.014(a) or (f).

(e)  Notwithstanding Subsection (a), the exemption provided under this section does not apply to any amount of tuition the institution charges a graduate student in excess of the amount of tuition charged to similarly situated graduate students because the student has a number of semester credit hours of doctoral work in excess of the applicable number provided by Section 61.059(l)(1) or (2).

(f)  The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt:

(1)  rules governing the granting or denial of an exemption under this section, including rules relating to the determination of a student's eligibility for an exemption; and

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

SECTION 2.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.

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