

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1507
By: Ashby
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

According to a *Texas Tribune* article, volunteer fire departments in rural communities of Texas are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining firefighters, and the situation may get worse due to the aging population and population decline experienced across rural Texas. The bill author has informed the committee that one proposed method of addressing the firefighter shortage is to provide educational incentives for volunteer firefighters. C.S.H.B. 1507 seeks to do so by making the tuition and laboratory fees exemption for certain volunteer firefighters enrolled in courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum at public institutions of higher education more widely available.

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. 1507 amends the Education Code to revise the eligibility requirements for the tuition and laboratory fees exemption for a firefighter enrolled in one or more courses offered as part of a fire science curriculum at a public institution of higher education who is not employed as a firefighter by a political subdivision, as follows:

- provides the option for the firefighter to be a member in good standing of a volunteer fire department that is registered with the Texas A&M Forest Service and responds to 9-1-1 emergency calls in a designated area as an alternative to currently being, and having 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; and
- adds a condition of eligibility that the firefighter does the following:
 - attends at least 20 hours of annual training approved by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas; and
 - attends or provides support services for at least 25 percent of the department's emergencies in a calendar year.

The bill applies beginning with tuition and laboratory fees charged for the 2025 fall semester. Tuition and laboratory fees charged for an academic period before that semester are covered by the law in effect immediately before the bill's effective date, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2025.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 1507 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.

Both the introduced and the substitute revise the eligibility requirements for the tuition and laboratory fees exemption for certain firefighters who are not employed as a firefighter by a political subdivision. However, the introduced replaced the existing condition that the firefighter is currently, and has been for at least one year, an active member of an organized volunteer fire department participating in certain retirement systems with the condition that the firefighter is a member in good standing of a volunteer fire department that is registered with the Texas A&M Forest Service and responds to 9-1-1 emergency calls in a designated area, whereas the substitute does not. Instead, the substitute retains the existing condition but provides an alternative option for the firefighter to be a member in good standing of a volunteer fire department that is registered with the Texas A&M Forest Service and responds to 9-1-1 emergency calls in a designated area.