

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 5333  
By: Bonnen  
Higher Education  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The bill author has informed the committee that Texas is home to a record number of tier one and tier two research institutions. The bill author further reports that this success relies upon the state's ability to attract and retain high-achieving doctoral students, and that providing an opportunity to invest in these students directly will allow the students to unlock their potential and support well-established state goals for building a talent-strong Texas. C.S.H.B. 5333 seeks to invest directly into graduate students by establishing the STEM Excellence Graduate Fellowship program as a merit-based fellowship for high-achieving research doctoral students.

### **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 rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 of this bill.

### **ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 5333 amends the Education Code to establish the STEM Excellence Graduate Fellowship program as a merit-based fellowship for high-achieving research doctoral students in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field. The bill requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer the program and, using money appropriated or otherwise available for such purpose, to award fellowships to eligible students under the program to conduct research at a general academic teaching institution. The bill authorizes the THECB to do the following:

- contract with one or more general academic teaching institutions to assist in administering the program, including receiving and reviewing applications, recommending the distribution of funds to institutions, and developing criteria for the selection of students for the program; and
- establish one or more advisory committees for the purpose of recommending rules for the administration of the program.

C.S.H.B. 5333 requires a student to meet the following criteria to be initially eligible for a STEM Excellence Graduate Fellowship:

- be a U.S. citizen;
- obtain the federal security clearance required for the research the student would be performing under the fellowship, if applicable;
- be a high-achieving student as determined by the institution in which the student is enrolled, based on criteria the institution would otherwise use to award merit-based aid,

including grades, test scores, work, internship, or other experience, other scholarships or awards the student received, or the prior research or publication by the student;

- be enrolled in a research doctoral degree program in a STEM field at a general academic teaching institution; and
- comply with any additional requirement adopted by the THECB.

The bill authorizes the THECB to give preference to a student who is a Texas resident under statutory provisions governing higher education tuition rates.

C.S.H.B. 5333 authorizes a student, after establishing initial program eligibility, to continue participating in the program only if the student does the following:

- maintains a minimum overall grade point average determined by THECB rule;
- maintains the required federal security clearance for the research the student is conducting under the fellowship, if applicable; and
- complies with any additional requirement adopted by the THECB.

The bill prohibits a student from receiving a fellowship under the program for more than five years. The bill authorizes the THECB to solicit, accept, and spend grants, gifts, and donations from any public or private source for the purposes of the program.

C.S.H.B. 5333 requires the THECB, in consultation with general academic teaching institutions and as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, to adopt rules for the administration of the program, including rules providing for the amount and permissible uses of a fellowship awarded under the program. The bill establishes that the THECB is not required to use negotiated rulemaking procedures for the adoption of rules under the bill's provisions.

#### **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. 5333 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 omits provisions that were present in the introduced that established the purpose of the STEM Excellence Graduate Fellowship program. The substitute also omits the introduced version's provisions specifying that the program is a competitive grant program to serve as a merit-based scholarship and instead specifies that the program is a merit-based fellowship.

The substitute includes a definition for the term "STEM," which the introduced does not.

Whereas the introduced version required the THECB to award funding to public institutions of higher education to be used as fellowships to eligible students under the program, the substitute requires the THECB to award fellowships to eligible students under the program to conduct research at a general academic teaching institution. Accordingly, the substitute replaces the authorization in the introduced for the THECB to contract with one or more institutions of higher education to assist in administering the program with an authorization for the THECB to contract with one or more general academic teaching institutions for that purpose.

Both versions of the bill establish initial eligibility criteria for program fellowship. However, the introduced included among those criteria a student submitting to an FBI background check and not being ineligible for a federal security clearance based on that background check, whereas the substitute includes among those criteria a student obtaining the federal security clearance required for the research the student would be performing under the fellowship, if applicable.

Both versions of the bill establish continuing eligibility criteria for program participation. However, the substitute omits the introduced version's provision including among those criteria a student maintaining all applicable eligibility criteria and includes instead among those criteria a student maintaining the required federal security clearance for the research the student is conducting, if applicable.

The substitute prohibits a student from receiving a fellowship under the program for more than five years, whereas the introduced required the rules adopted by the THECB under the bill's provisions to provide that a student may not receive a scholarship under the program for more than five years and that a student meets the requisite eligibility criteria.