

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

S.B. 1401  
By: West  
Higher Education  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The bill sponsor has informed the committee that Texas' mental health care workforce is currently underdeveloped and requires prompt action to accommodate a growing mental health crisis in this state. According to the Health and Human Services Commission Health Professional Shortage Area maps, 246 out of 254 counties in Texas are designated as mental health professional shortage areas. Based on workforce supply and demand projections from the Health Professions Resource Center, the mental and behavioral health professional shortage could grow from 11,449 in 2022 to 33,558 in 2036. S.B. 1401 seeks to address this professional shortage by providing for the Texas Mental Health Profession Pipeline Program to provide clear, guided pathways for public junior college students to pursue degrees required to practice as specified mental health professionals.

### **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**

S.B. 1401 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish the Texas Mental Health Profession Pipeline Program and encourage participating institutions to develop pipeline programs for the purpose of providing a clear, guided pathway for public junior college students to transfer to a participating institution to pursue a baccalaureate degree or a postbaccalaureate degree or certificate leading to licensure and practice as any of the following professional specialties:

- a psychologist;
- a licensed professional counselor;
- an advanced practice registered nurse who holds a nationally recognized board certification in psychiatric or mental health nursing;
- a licensed master social worker or a licensed clinical social worker;
- a licensed specialist in school psychology; or
- a licensed marriage and family therapist.

The bill defines each professional specialty by reference to applicable Occupations Code provisions and defines "participating institution" as a general academic teaching institution or a private or independent institution of higher education that offers baccalaureate degree programs and postbaccalaureate degree and certificate programs.

S.B. 1401 requires a participating institution that develops a pipeline program under the bill's provisions to do the following:

- partner with one or more public junior colleges to create a guided pathway for public junior college students; and
- ensure that a public junior college student who completes a field of study curriculum or is awarded a "Texas Direct" associate degree and transfers to the participating institution does not lose any credits earned before transferring, can earn a baccalaureate degree in less than two years following the transfer, and after earning a baccalaureate degree in an appropriate program as determined by the participating institution, is automatically admitted to a postbaccalaureate degree or certificate program at the participating institution if the following conditions are met:
  - the student meets the minimum academic requirements, as determined by the participating institution; and
  - the postbaccalaureate degree or certificate program has the capacity to admit new students based on student-to-faculty ratios required by state law, federal law, the appropriate accrediting organization, or institutional policy and the availability of clinical placements and the faculty or preceptors that supervise those placements.

S.B. 1401 requires the THECB to determine the existing field of study curricula that a participating institution may accept for purposes of the transfer of an eligible public junior college student to the institution under a mental health profession pipeline program and any additional field of study curricula that a participating institution may develop to enable a public junior college student to fulfill the undergraduate curricular requirements relevant for the professional specialties under the program.

S.B. 1401 requires each participating institution to submit an annual report to the THECB that includes the following information:

- the total number of students in the participating institution's pipeline program;
- the number of students in the participating institution's pipeline program who have transferred from a public junior college to the participating institution without losing any credits previously earned at the public junior college;
- the number of students in the participating institution's pipeline program who in the preceding academic year earned a baccalaureate degree from the participating institution that was completed in two years or less;
- the capacity of the participating institution's pipeline program to prepare more students for licensure and practice as mental health professionals in the specialties under the program;
- the financial resources allocated by the participating institution to increase the number of students who are able to complete their targeted degree or certificate program under the participating institution's pipeline program; and
- the average time for a student to complete the student's targeted degree or certificate program under the participating institution's pipeline program from the date the student enrolls in a public junior college to the date of the student's graduation from the degree or certificate program.

S.B. 1401 requires the THECB to promote the program and maintain on the THECB's website information that clearly displays the following:

- information relating to the field of study curricula accepted by the institution, as determined by the THECB;
- a list of each pipeline program operating in Texas;
- a list of each participating institution that has established a pipeline program;
- a map displaying the location of each participating institution that has established a pipeline program; and

- data regarding each pipeline program based on information provided to the THECB in the required report.

S.B. 1401 requires the THECB, as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, to adopt rules consistent with the bill's provisions as necessary to implement those provisions, including rules for making determinations relating to field of study curricula.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2025.