

Authorizing a summer program for the college of optometry at the University of Houston

HB 1427 by Alonzo (Zaffirini)

DIGEST: HB 1427 would have authorized the University of Houston College of Optometry to operate an optometry career summer program for economically and academically disadvantaged junior-level, senior-level, and post-baccalaureate students from public and private higher education institutions to encourage the pursuit of advanced studies and careers in the field of optometry.

The summer program would have offered study skills and optometry admission test preparation courses as well as courses designed to familiarize students with course work in advanced degree programs in optometry. To the extent possible, the program would have allowed students to obtain course credit from their respective institutions. Students would have been introduced to clinical work and extracurricular activities relating to the field of optometry.

The bill would have allowed the college to solicit and accept gifts and grants to fund the program, and the Legislature could have appropriated money for this purpose.

GOVERNOR'S REASON FOR VETO:

“House Bill 1427 would authorize the University of Houston to create a summer learning program for the College of Optometry through funding identified as a special item. This program has existed since 1987 with federal funding. In 2002, the federal grant ended, leading the university to request additional state funding in order to sustain the program. I believe the university should solicit other funds, or use some of the \$6.4 million it was appropriated for Institutional Enhancement, to fund this program identified as a priority.

“Higher education special item funding has ballooned out of control, increasing from \$66.9 million in FY 1986-87 to more than \$1 billion in FY 2008-09, an increase of 1,406 percent. I have several concerns about these items. First, many of them are advertised to the legislature as one-time requests, but funding of these projects – many of which have limited value to a school’s educational mission – often continues indefinitely. Second, there is limited accountability for these funds, because institutions usually do not report on their performance. Third, many of them address local projects instead of statewide needs. Lastly, some of them are not priorities for the institutions; therefore, they don’t request them. In fact, funding for this item was not requested in the University of Houston Legislative Appropriations Request.”

RESPONSE: Rep. Roberto Alonzo, the bill’s author, had no comment on the veto.

Sen. Judith Zaffirini, the Senate sponsor, said: “Texas likely will have fewer optometrists due to Gov. Rick Perry’s veto of HB 1427 by Rep. Roberto Alonzo. This bill would have assisted economically and academically disadvantaged students in obtaining advance college credit and developing a career path in optometry and, potentially, other health professions. The governor justifies his veto by claiming that ‘the university should solicit other funds’ to support this program and implies that this

legislation will be the basis for special item funding. The bill does not provide for an appropriation to the University of Houston but clearly states that the university may solicit gifts for this purpose. I can conclude only that he and his staff did not care to read the bill carefully before making an ill-advised political point.”

NOTES:

HB 1427 passed the House on the Local, Consent and Resolutions Calendar and was not analyzed in a *Daily Floor Report*.