

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2290
By: Lozano
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Interested parties suggest that adults should be encouraged to return to school to obtain postsecondary education. H.B. 2290 seeks to address this issue by establishing a grant program for certain students enrolled in baccalaureate degree programs at certain postsecondary educational institutions.

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

H.B. 2290 amends the Education Code to establish the Texas returning adult student grant program for the purpose of providing financial assistance to eligible returning adult students enrolling in baccalaureate degree programs at eligible institutions. The bill defines "eligible institution" as a general academic teaching institution or a nonprofit, tax-exempt, regionally accredited college or university operating in accordance with a memorandum of understanding with the state under an executive order issued by the governor and offering competency-based, exclusively online baccalaureate degree programs. The bill defines "returning adult student" as a student who is over the age of 25, has earned college credit but has not obtained a postsecondary degree, and is enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program at an eligible institution.

H.B. 2290 requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to administer the program; to adopt rules using the negotiated rulemaking procedures under the Negotiated Rulemaking Act for determining the allocation of funds under the program among eligible institutions; to adopt any other rules necessary to implement the program or the bill's provisions; and to consult with the student financial aid officers of eligible institutions in developing the rules. The bill authorizes the coordinating board to adopt the initial rules in the manner provided by law for emergency rules. The bill limits the total amount of grants awarded under the program to the amount available for the program from appropriations, gifts, grants, or other funds and requires the coordinating board and the eligible institutions, in determining who should receive a program grant, to give highest priority to awarding grants to students who demonstrate the greatest unmet financial need.

H.B. 2290 makes a person initially eligible for a grant under the program if the person is a resident of Texas as determined by coordinating board rules; meets financial need requirements as defined by coordinating board rules, including a requirement that the person's expected family

contribution for the academic year does not exceed the maximum expected family contribution as established by the coordinating board; is a returning adult student; is not receiving any state-funded student financial assistance for the same academic period; and complies with any additional requirement adopted by the coordinating board. The bill caps the semester credit hours for which a person may receive a program grant at the greater of 135 semester credit hours, 15 semester credit hours in excess of the number required for the degree program in which the person is enrolled, or their respective equivalents.

H.B. 2290 authorizes a person who initially qualifies for a program grant to continue to receive a grant during each semester or term in which the person is enrolled at an eligible institution only if the person meets the criteria for initial eligibility, makes satisfactory academic progress toward a baccalaureate degree, and complies with any additional requirement adopted by the coordinating board. The bill prohibits a person who fails to meet the continuing eligibility requirements after the completion of any semester or term from receiving a program grant during the next semester or term in which the person enrolls but establishes that, unless a person has exceeded the program's semester credit hour cap, the person may become eligible in a subsequent semester or term if the person completes at least 15 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits in a semester or term during which the student is not eligible for a grant and meets all the continuing eligibility requirements. The bill establishes that, for continuing eligibility purposes, a person makes satisfactory academic progress toward a baccalaureate degree only if the person completes at least 15 semester credit hours or an equivalent number of competency units or credits in each semester or term in which the person is enrolled. The bill requires the coordinating board to adopt rules to allow a person who is otherwise eligible for a program grant to receive a grant if the student's completion rate falls below the satisfactory academic progress requirements in the event of a hardship or for other good cause shown.

H.B. 2290 restricts a program grant recipient's use of the grant money to payment of the amount of tuition and required fees and the cost of required textbooks incurred by the student at an eligible institution. The bill authorizes the institution to disburse all or part of the proceeds of a program grant to an eligible person only if the tuition and required fees incurred by the person at the institution have been paid. The bill caps the amount of a program grant award to a person for a semester or other academic term at the lesser of the following: the student's unmet financial need for that semester or term or the difference between the amount of tuition and required fees incurred by the student for that semester or term plus a textbook stipend in an amount determined by the coordinating board and the amount of the federal Pell Grant for which the student is eligible, if any. The bill prohibits an eligible institution from denying admission to or enrollment in the institution based on a person's eligibility to receive or receipt of a program grant.

H.B. 2290 requires the coordinating board to begin allocating funds to eligible institutions under the bill's provisions for the first academic year for which money is appropriated for that purpose, except that the coordinating board may not allocate such funds for an academic year before the 2018-2019 academic year.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2017.