

SUBJECT: Longevity pay for employees of schools for the blind and the deaf

COMMITTEE: Appropriations — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 16 ayes — Junell, West, Coleman, Delisi, Eiland, Farrar, Flores, Gallego, Heflin, Janek, McReynolds, Pickett, Pitts, Puente, Staples, Tillery

0 nays

11 absent — Cuellar, Giddings, Glaze, Gutierrez, Hartnett, Hochberg, Luna, P. Moreno, Mowery, S. Turner, Van de Putte

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, Local and Uncontested Calendar, April 22 — voice vote

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 2613*)
For — None

Against — None

On — Phil Hatlen, Debra Nesbitt, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Jim Smith, Texas School for the Deaf

BACKGROUND: A state employee is entitled to longevity pay if the employee is a full-time employee on the first workday of the month, is not on leave without pay, and has accrued at least five years of lifetime service credit.

DIGEST: CSSB 1354 would authorize longevity pay for an employee of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Texas School for the Deaf for each month that the employee was in a full-time paid status on the first workday for which work has been scheduled for the employee.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1999.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Current state policy unnecessarily penalizes long-time state paraprofessionals who assist teachers at the schools for the deaf and for the blind and visually impaired. The work schedule for these employees is dependent upon the school year and summer sessions, rather than the typical work schedule experienced by most other state employees.

Deaf and blind school employees miss out on longevity pay when the school session resumes on a date other than the first day of the month. For example, they may work a summer session that starts on June 7, but because school does not start on June 1, they miss out on their longevity payment for June. This is a special hardship on school employees because they already experience a significant amount of leave without pay due to long breaks for Christmas, spring break and the summer vacation.

The state should reward long-time employees with longevity pay if they work on the first day they are scheduled to work, regardless of when that day falls in the month. The bill would be limited to a special situation involving relatively few employees of only two state schools and would have no significant fiscal implications for the state.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The Senate-passed version would allow employees longevity pay for any month in which they were on paid status. The House committee substitute added requirements that the employee be on full-time status and employed on the first day of the month in which work was scheduled.