

SUBJECT: Raising the cap on compulsory student-services fees for certain universities

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, West

2 nays — E. Reyna, Uher

1 absent — Farabee

WITNESSES: For — Aaron Cooper; Paul Tran

Against — None

On — Michelle Carbajal, Leo H. Gonzalez, Jeremy Herrod, and Lindsey N. Iles, University of Texas at San Antonio; Mary Evans Sias, University of Texas at Dallas; David Rejino, Texas A&M University System; James Studer, Council of Student Services Vice Presidents

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 54.503(b) enables the governing board of a public higher education institution to charge and collect student-services fees. The fees may be voluntary (only charged to students who use the services) or compulsory (charged to all students). The total of all compulsory student-services fees for institutions other than the University of Texas at Austin or a component of the University of Houston System may not exceed \$150 per student per semester or summer session. If approved by the student body in a general election, the total of all compulsory student fees at UT–El Paso may not exceed \$250.

Any fee increase of 10 percent or greater requires student approval in a general election. Compulsory student-services fees must be assessed in proportion to the number of semester credit hours for which a student is registered. No portion of the compulsory fees may be spent on parking facilities or services, except for shuttle bus services.

DIGEST: HB 2575 would raise the total amount of compulsory student-services fees that could be charged at public higher education institutions other than UT

Austin or a component of the University of Houston System to \$250. It would strike the reference in sec. 54.503(b) that makes this provision applicable only to UT–El Paso.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001. It would apply only to student fees imposed for a semester or term that begins on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 2575 is needed to raise money from increased fees to fund beneficial student activities and services. Not including the universities now excluded from the cap, total student services fees already are at the \$150 per semester cap at 19 of 30 public universities in Texas. For example, at UT–San Antonio, an increase would go to areas of need identified by the student-services fee advisory committee, such as the campus counseling center, student judicial affairs, and equivalent services for the downtown campus.

HB 2575 especially would help universities experiencing rapid growth in student enrollment. At some universities, increased enrollment and the addition of new programs under the student-services fee umbrella have put some services in danger of being cut.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Raising the compulsory fee cap would be a temporary solution that eventually would lead to increases in the cost of higher education. Some students already have difficulty paying for their education, and all would be forced to pay an increased compulsory student-services fee, regardless of whether they utilized student services. For non-traditional students who are supporting families or working full-time, increased fees are especially burdensome.

Institutions that want to raise student fees instead should look for other solutions such as limiting the number of entering freshmen. If the problem exists on specific campuses, then those campuses should be subject to individual review rather than enacting a statewide increase.