

SUBJECT: Adjusting Texas Armed Services Scholarship eligibility and recipients

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Gutierrez, Blanco, Arévalo, Cain, Flynn, Lambert, Wilson

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Charles Puls, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 61, subch. FF establishes the Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program to provide scholarships to undergraduate students who meet certain requirements, such as participating in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs and committing to military service after graduation. Each state representative and state senator may appoint one student per year, while the governor and lieutenant governor each may appoint two.

To continue receiving the scholarship, the student must maintain satisfactory academic progress as determined by his or her college or university. The scholarship recipient also must abide by the terms of an agreement with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which specifies other requirements, such as completing four years of ROTC training, graduating within six years, and committing to military service.

DIGEST: CSHB 66 would allow the governor or the lieutenant governor or a state senator or representative to appoint another student to receive a Texas Armed Services Scholarship award if the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board determined that the initial appointee had become ineligible or no longer met the scholarship requirements. Beginning with the academic year following that determination, the new appointee could

receive any available scholarship funds designated for the original appointee.

The bill also would require the coordinating board, rather than the scholarship recipient's college or university, to define satisfactory academic progress that a student must maintain to remain eligible.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 66 would help ensure that valuable scholarships were put to good use by allowing elected officials to appoint a second Texas Armed Services Scholarship recipient if the official's first appointee became ineligible. Current law results in lost scholarship opportunities because there is no provision for a state official to appoint another deserving student for a scholarship award in place of a student who lost eligibility or no longer meets the requirements.

While the bill might increase participation rates and thus lead to less money per scholarship recipient, giving smaller awards to as many deserving students as possible each year would be a more optimal use of these valuable funds.

Requiring the coordinating board to define satisfactory academic progress would provide a more uniform standard for colleges and universities to use. As the administrator of the scholarship program, the board already has rulemaking authority over the program, including aspects other than satisfactory academic progress. If necessary, the coordinating board could adopt rules to ensure that students did not lose eligibility permanently due to minor violations, such as not participating in ROTC for a semester while studying abroad.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 66 could diminish the amount of scholarship money available for each recipient. The amount of each scholarship is the lesser of \$15,000 or the amount available from appropriated funds, and the current process for determining annual funding assumes a certain level of non-participation. By increasing participation, the bill could reduce the annual scholarship

award per student.

In addition, it might be difficult to determine when a violation should result in a student's complete loss of eligibility. For example, while currently a student might become ineligible in a particular semester but regain eligibility in a future semester — such as while taking a study abroad course that precludes ROTC participation — it is not clear under the bill whether a student in these circumstances still would be eligible upon returning. The bill's September 1 effective date might not provide sufficient time for the Higher Education Coordinating Board to amend or adopt necessary rules.

NOTES:

A companion bill, SB 49 by Zaffirini, was passed by the Senate on March 6.

CSHB 66 differs from the bill as filed by:

- specifying that remaining scholarship funds would be awarded beginning with the academic year following the academic year the initial scholarship recipient became ineligible; and
- requiring the coordinating board, rather than the scholarship recipient's college or university, to determine whether the scholarship recipient was maintaining satisfactory academic progress.