

- SUBJECT:** Continuing the Nurse Innovation Grant Program
- COMMITTEE:** Appropriations — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 19 ayes — Zerwas, Longoria, C. Bell, Buckley, Capriglione, Cortez, S. Davis, Howard, Miller, Minjarez, Muñoz, Schaefer, Sheffield, Smith, Stucky, Toth, J. Turner, VanDeaver, Wu
- 0 nays
- 8 absent — G. Bonnen, M. González, Hefner, Jarvis Johnson, Rose, Sherman, Walle, Wilson
- WITNESSES:** For — Leigh Goldstein, Texas Nurses Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Ray Martinez, Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas; Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.; Andrew Cates, Nursing Legislative Agenda Coalition; Jessica Schleifer, Teaching Hospitals of Texas; Jennifer Banda, Texas Hospital Association; Allison Brooks, Western Governor's University)
- Against — Robert McLaughlin
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code ch. 63, subch. C establishes the permanent fund for higher education nursing, allied health, and other health-related programs as a special fund outside the general revenue fund.
- Sec. 63.202(f) requires that grants awarded from the permanent fund for higher education nursing programs go to programs preparing students for initial licensure as registered nurses, programs preparing certain qualified faculty members for the program, or to the nursing resource section established in statute. The grant program is set to expire September 1, 2019.

DIGEST: HB 1401 would extend the nursing grant program through the fiscal biennium ending August 31, 2023. The program would expire September 1, 2023.

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, 2019.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1401 would continue the Nursing Innovation Grant Program, a valuable initiative that addresses the expected shortage of nurses in Texas by dedicating funding to nursing education. Continuing this program would help ensure that nurses had access to the training and resources they needed and that the state was able to train and retain nurses to care for Texans.

When the permanent fund for higher education nursing, allied health, and other health-related programs was created in 1999, initial grants did not produce significant results. Consequently, the Legislature decided to dedicate the fund to nursing programs in 2001 because the nursing profession had the largest shortage. Today, Texas faces another nursing shortage, and HB 1401 would allow nursing programs to grow in response to this demand. Without this bill, the fund would only be available to public institutions of higher education with graduate level programs in nursing and allied health, significantly restricting its potential.

OPPONENTS SAY: HB 1401 would continue a restriction on the permanent fund for higher education nursing, allied health, and other health-related programs that was not intended to be permanent. The fund's availability should be expanded to include allied health professions, which have grown significantly since the initial restriction in 2001. These professions, which include substance abuse counselors, physical therapists, and cardiovascular technologists, should be able to access funding from the permanent fund.