

**SUBJECT:** Paying the cost of a high school equivalency exam for test takers over 21

**COMMITTEE:** International Relations and Economic Development — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 6 ayes — Anchia, Frullo, Blanco, Perez, Raney, Romero

1 nay — Cain

2 absent — Larson, Metcalf

**WITNESSES:** For — Richard Farias, Alamo Colleges District; Chandra Villanueva, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Helen Vera, San Antonio College; Deborah Middleton; Sabrina Renteria; Luis Enrique Rincon; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Priscilla Camacho, Dallas Regional Chamber; Traci Berry, Goodwill Central Texas; Caroline Joiner, Rackspace; Sophie Torres, San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Lori Henning, Texas Association of Goodwills; Mike Meroney, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — Kerry Ballast, Texas Workforce Commission

**BACKGROUND:** 19 TAC part 2, ch. 89, subch. C allows authorized contracted testing centers to administer high school equivalency examinations under applicable state law and rules of the State Board of Education.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 441 would require the Texas Workforce Commission to pay the cost of one high school equivalency examination on behalf of any individual at least 21 years old taking the examination from an approved test vendor contracted by the State Board of Education, including an exam that was administered in multiple parts.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 441 would help low-wage earners to advance their careers or continue their education by subsidizing the cost of one high school equivalency examination. For those who have not finished high school or obtained an equivalency diploma, employment opportunities are limited and an examination fee of \$137 can be a significant barrier. By eliminating this barrier, the bill would assist people trying to advance their education, which in turn would reduce their reliance on government benefits, promote workforce development, and result in a more educated adult population.

CSHB 441 would tackle the principal barrier facing many seekers of a high school equivalency certification, cost, while also providing motivation. Because the bill only would cover the cost of one test attempt, exam takers would have a financial incentive to succeed on the first attempt. The bill's fiscal note represents a minimal investment that would be worthwhile in view of the bill's anticipated social and economic impact.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

CSHB 441's objective could be accomplished instead by creating a reimbursement program that paid test takers for the cost of their test only if they passed. This would incentivize test takers to succeed.

**NOTES:**

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$1.6 million on general revenue related funds though fiscal 2020-21.