

- SUBJECT:** Creating a council to improve access to certain educational opportunities
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — C. Turner, Stucky, Frullo, Howard, E. Johnson, Pacheco, Schaefer, Smithee, Wilson
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Button, Walle
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 10 — 30-0
- WITNESSES:** *On House companion bill, HB 3932:*
For — Chris Masey, Coalition for Texans with Disabilities; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jacque Benestante, Autism Society of Texas; Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas; Lisa Flores, Easterseals Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent; Kevin Stewart, Texas Psychological Association; Jimmie Chatham)
- Against — None
- On — Ashley Ford, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jerel Booker, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- BACKGROUND:** Some have called for Texas to improve access to postsecondary education for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- DIGEST:** SB 1017 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish an advisory council to advise the board on improving access to postsecondary educational opportunities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The bill would require the board, with the assistance of the advisory council, to periodically review the policies and practices that increased access to higher education opportunities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to distribute educational outreach materials developed by the council to increase awareness of such opportunities.

Advisory council. The executive director of the Texas Workforce Commission, the commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, and the governor would each appoint one member to the advisory council, as specified in the bill. THECB also would appoint council members, including:

- a representative of a University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities program in Texas;
- a representative of a disability advocacy group;
- a parent or guardian of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability;
- a parent or guardian of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability that was enrolled in an institution of higher education;
- a person with an intellectual or developmental disability enrolled in an institution of higher education;
- a high school counselor;
- a specialist in the transition to employment from a regional education service center, school district, or other state agency; and
- additional representatives with relevant experience, as needed.

Council members would serve two-year terms and would not be entitled to compensation. Members could receive reimbursement for expenses related to conducting council business.

Members would elect a presiding officer and meet at least quarterly at the call of the presiding officer. Council members would have to be appointed by January 1, 2020.

Duties. The advisory council would be required to study the accessibility

of higher education for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, provide advice on resolving barriers to access for these individuals, and develop recommendations to address barriers to accessing higher education for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities who were or who had been in the foster care system.

The advisory council annually would have to submit to THECB a report that included information regarding:

- the advisory council's activities;
- any relevant rule changes necessary to decrease barriers to accessing higher education for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and
- recommendations for potential outreach and education materials to increase public awareness of the availability of higher education opportunities and resources for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, including information on available grants, loan programs, and other resources.

By December 1 of each even-numbered year, the council would have to provide a report to THECB and to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the House speaker, the members of the Legislature, and, as necessary, other state agencies or relevant stakeholders. The report would have to include historic and current higher education data regarding individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, including graduation rates, the geographic distribution of institutions of higher education providing appropriate opportunities, a description of available programs, and any other relevant data.

The report also would have to include recommendations for changes to support success and achievement for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in accessing higher education, including recommendations for addressing gaps in data and identifying problems with and barriers to accessing higher education.

The advisory council would have to complete the initial reports required

by the bill by December 1, 2020.

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.