

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 247
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Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Independent school districts in Texas currently face an extreme shortage of the full-time, qualified speech-language pathologists and audiologists necessary to meet the educational needs of students with speech disorders, especially in under-resourced inner-city and rural districts. The situation is critical, with some districts reporting that job postings remain open for months or even years, and others having to make do with costly contract workers. A key reason for the shortage in these districts is that practicing in the profession requires an advanced degree, and practitioners often graduate with considerable student loan debt, causing them to gravitate toward positions that pay more than smaller and less wealthy school districts are able to offer.

To help address the problem, in 2013, the legislature created a student loan repayment assistance program for speech-language pathologists and audiologists employed by public schools or, in certain programs, at public institutions of higher education. The program has had some success in attracting qualified persons to work in historically under-served areas but is limited by the fact that current law provides no public funding for the program; funding must come "solely from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by" the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. So far, substantially all of the program's funding has come from a one-time, non-repeatable donation by the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the leading trade association for the profession.

S.B. 247 remedies this situation by amending the Education Code to provide that, in addition to gifts, grants, and donations, the student loan repayment assistance program also may be funded from fees collected under the chapter of the Occupations Code that regulates audiologists and speech pathologists in excess of what is necessary to administer that chapter.

As proposed, S.B. 247 amends current law relating to funding sources for the repayment of certain speech-language pathologist and audiologist education loans.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 61.9818, Education Code, to authorize the Texas emergency and trauma care education partnership program (program) to be funded from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for the purposes of this subchapter and fees collected to cover the costs of administering programs or activities for speech-language pathologists and audiologists under Chapter 51, Occupations Code, in excess of the money required to pay the expenses for the administration of those programs or activities, rather than solely from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by THECB.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 51.202, Occupations Code, by adding Subsection (d) to authorize any money collected by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation under this chapter to cover the costs of administering programs or activities for speech-language pathologists and audiologists that remains after payment of the expenses for the administration of those programs

or activities to be used to fund the loan repayment program established under Subchapter II (Repayment of Certain Speech-Language Pathologist and Audiologist Education Loans), Chapter 61 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board), Education Code.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2017.