

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
85R23261 JRJ-F

C.S.S.B. 247  
By: Zaffirini  
Higher Education  
4/27/2017  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **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. (Original Author's / Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

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

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Commission of Licensing and Regulation in SECTION 1 (Section 61.9818, Education Code) of this bill.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Section 61.9818, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 61.9818. PROGRAM FUNDING. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text. Authorizes 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 (Repayment of Certain Speech-Language Pathologist and Audiologist Education Loans) and a portion of the fees collected under Chapter 51 (Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation), as determined under Subsection (b). Deletes existing text authorizing the program to be funded solely from gifts, grants, and donations solicited and accepted by THECB for the purposes of this subchapter.

(b) Authorizes the Texas Commission of Licensing and Regulation, by rule, in consultation with the speech-language pathologists and audiologists advisory board established under Subchapter C (Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists Advisory Board), Chapter 401 (Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists), Occupations Code, to provide that a portion of the fees collected under Chapter 51, Occupations Code, from persons regulated under Chapter 401, Occupations Code, is authorized to be allocated to fund the program, provided that the portion is in an amount that does not result in an increase in fees paid under Chapter 51, Occupations Code, by those persons.

SECTION 2. Prohibits a rule adopted under Section 61.9818(b), Education Code, as added by this Act, from taking effect earlier than the fiscal year beginning September 1, 2019.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2017.