

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

Austin, Texas

FISCAL NOTE, 81ST LEGISLATIVE REGULAR SESSION

May 30, 2009

TO: Honorable David Dewhurst , Lieutenant Governor, Senate
Honorable Joe Straus, Speaker of the House, House of Representatives

FROM: John S. O'Brien, Director, Legislative Budget Board

IN RE: HB2347 by Thibaut (relating to tuition and fee exemptions at public institutions of higher education for certain peace officers enrolled in criminal justice or law enforcement course work and for certain educational aides.), **Conference Committee Report**

No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.

Under provisions of the bill, higher education institutions would certify the eligibility of certain educational aides to receive an exemption from tuition and fees charged by the institutions. Under current law, the Higher Education Coordinating Board makes the determination. These provisions would be implemented within current resources.

The bill would also extend the tuition and laboratory fee exemption program currently for firefighters enrolled in fire science curricula to peace officers employed by political subdivisions of the state who enroll in a course or courses offered as part of a criminal justice or law enforcement management-related curriculum designed for peace officers. The governing board of an institution of higher education may not provide exemptions to students enrolled in a specific class in a number that exceeds 20 percent of the maximum student enrollment designated by the institution for that class. Changes in the tuition and laboratory fees would be effective beginning in the 2011 fall semester (fiscal year 2012).

The bill would require the Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop rules governing the granting or denial the exemption and a uniform listing of degree programs covered the exemption. Under provisions of the bill, if the legislature does not specifically appropriate funds to an institution to pay the institution's costs associated with the exemption, the governing board of each institution shall report the estimated costs to the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriations Committee for that semester.

Based on information provided by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, in fiscal year 2008 a total of 1,706 paid firefighters were reported as receiving exemptions totaling \$1,394,202. Approximately 87%, or 1,487, of the firefighters attended public community colleges and 11%, or 193, of the firefighters attended public universities. The average awards were \$1,569 at universities and \$707 at community colleges. Over the past three years, the awards have grown by approximately 25% per year.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission, there are 26,250 persons in Texas employed as firefighters and 54,600 employed as peace officers. The Higher Education Coordinating Board assumed the same share of volunteer firefighters would use the exemption as of paid firefighters. To estimate the number of recipients they multiplied the number of peace officers (54,600) by the share of paid firefighters receiving exemptions (1,706/26,250). Based on these calculations 3,548 peace officers would eventually use the exemption but taking into account the limits established in the bill (20% capacity of the class), the Higher Education Coordinating Board estimates that 468 would enroll in fiscal year 2012, increasing to 563 and 674 in 2013 and 2014.

Based on these assumptions, the Higher Education Coordinating Board has calculated that

total tuition exemption for all students in all sectors, to be \$361,779 for fiscal year 2012, \$462,788 in fiscal year 2013, and \$585,326 in fiscal year 2014. These amounts are not considered significant.

Local Government Impact

No fiscal implication to units of local government is anticipated.

Source Agencies: 781 Higher Education Coordinating Board, 720 The University of Texas System Administration, 758 Texas State University System, 769 University of North Texas System Administration

LBB Staff: JOB, KK, RT, GO, ESi