

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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H.B. 3083
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Higher Education
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Texas suffers from a severe lack of mental health professionals, leaving an estimated 25 million Texans without the health care that they need. H.B. 3083 makes two changes.

1. It adds licensed chemical dependency counselors to the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program.
2. Strikes the word "one" in the eligibility section of the loan program, therefore requiring a minimum of two years of service in order to be eligible for loan forgiveness.

Currently, psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, and advanced practice nurses certified in psychiatric or mental health nursing, are eligible to receive loan repayment assistance through this program if they commit to working with Medicaid or CHIP patients or incarcerated individuals with mental health needs and work in medically underserved areas.

However, the program is not currently available to those who seek specified training in addiction. Over the course of the interim, the Select Committee on Mental Health discussed addiction and recovery and how the opioid crisis is driving the need for more professionals with addiction training.

Licensed chemical dependency counselors receive in-depth education and training specific to addressing drug and alcohol addiction, but Texas also has a shortage of these professionals.

H.B. 3083 amends current law relating to repayment of certain mental health professional education loans.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 5 (Section 61.608, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 61.601, Education Code, to redefine "mental health professional" to include a chemical dependency counselor, as defined by Section 504.001 (Definitions), Occupations Code.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 61.604, Education Code, by adding Subsection (d), to authorize the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), notwithstanding Subsection (c) (relating to a maximum of 30 percent of the number of repayment assistance grants paid being awarded to mental health professionals), if in a state fiscal year not all funds available for purposes of the program are used, to allocate any unused funds to award repayment assistance grants to mental health professionals in any of the professions listed in Section 61.601 (Definition).

SECTION 3. Amends Section 61.607(b), Education Code, as follows:

(b) Prohibits the total amount of repayment assistance received by a mental health professional under this subchapter from exceeding:

(1) \$160,000, for assistance from the state received by, rather than for assistance received by, a licensed physician;

(2) through (4) makes conforming changes; and

(5) \$10,000, for assistance from the state received by a licensed chemical dependency counselor, if the chemical dependency counselor has received an associate degree related to chemical dependency counseling or behavioral science.

SECTION 4. Amends the heading to Section 61.608, Education Code, to read as follows:

Sec. 61.608. RULES; ADMINISTRATION.

SECTION 5. Amends Section 61.608, Education Code, by adding Subsections (c) and (d), as follows:

(c) Requires THECB to adopt rules establishing a process for allocating any unused funds under the program in accordance with Section 61.604(d).

(d) Requires THECB to administer the program under this subchapter in a manner that maximizes any matching funds available through the state loan repayment program under the National Health Service Corps program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration.

SECTION 6. Amends Section 61.609, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 61.609. SOLICITATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF FUNDS. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text and makes no further changes to this subsection.

(b) Requires THECB annually to seek the maximum amount of funds available through the state loan repayment program under the National Health Service Corps program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration.

SECTION 7. Effective date: September 1, 2017.