

**SUBJECT:** Allowing increased tuition for optometry programs

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 9 ayes — Rangel, Cuellar, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, Wohlgemuth

0 nays

**WITNESSES:** For — None

Against — None

On — Jerald W. Strickland, University of Houston College of Optometry

**BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 54.008(e) allows the governing boards of higher education institutions to set tuition for optometry programs at rates ranging between the appropriate undergraduate tuition rate and three times that amount.

**DIGEST:** HB 2686 would allow optometry programs to charge tuition ranging between the appropriate undergraduate tuition rate and four times that amount.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 2686 would allow higher education institutions to increase tuition for optometry programs. In 1999, a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board study found that in comparison to national averages, student-to-faculty ratios in Texas were high while faculty salaries and tuition rates were low. The University of Houston College of Optometry could use the tuition increase to provide smaller classes and more competitive pay for faculty.

Because financial aid for optometry programs is readily available, asking students to pay tuition rates closer to the national average would be reasonable and realistic. Optometry students at the University of Houston graduate with average debts about \$23,000 below the national average for optometry students who receive loans.

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The University of Houston College of Optometry has requested the tuition increase for the fall 2000 semester. Advance notice of the increase would allow the schools to make plans for the additional funding.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Tuition rates already put the cost of education out of reach for many students. Raising tuition would increase the divide between those who can afford an education and those who cannot.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Because the admissions process already has begun for the 1999 entering class, the tuition changes should not go into effect until fall 2000. This would ensure truth in advertising the cost of an optometry education to students recruited on the basis of current tuition rates. The bill should specify the fall 2000 date for the tuition increase.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 1326 by Gallegos, passed the Senate on April 19 on the Local and Uncontested Calendar and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House Higher Education Committee on April 22, making it eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 2686.