

SUBJECT: Revising selection and terms of nonvoting student regents

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Morrison, McCall, F. Brown, Alonzo, Aycock, Giddings,
D. Howard, Patrick, Rose

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Brian Haley

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Bekki Lammert, Office of the Governor, Appointments Office)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, secs. 51.355 and 51.356, added in 2005, establish a nonvoting student regent for each university system as well as for the general academic teaching institutions that are not part of a university system.

A student regent is an officer of the state but not a member of the board of regents. Student regents have the same powers and duties as the members of the board except that the student regent is a nonvoting member on matters before the board and may not make or second any motion before the board. Student regents also are not counted in determining a quorum.

The student government of each institution solicits applicants for the position by September 1 of each year. Five applicants are recommended and sent to the university system chancellor or the president of the institution by November 1. From those applicants, the chancellor or the president selects at least two applicants and sends the applications to the governor by December 1. On February 1, if possible, the governor appoints one of the applicants to serve for a one-year term expiring on the next February 1.

Student regents must be enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students at the time of appointment and throughout their terms.

DIGEST: HB 3924 would amend Education Code, secs. 51.355 and 51.356 to modify the timeline for the selection process for a student regent on the board of regents for university systems and universities that are not part of a system.

Student governments would have to solicit applicants for appointment to the next term by November 1, rather than September 1. By January 1, rather than November 1, the student government would have to recommend five applicants to the chancellors, who in turn would be required to select at least two applicants and send their applications to the governor no later than February 1, rather than December 1. The governor could request an applicant to submit additional information. On June 1, rather than February 1, the governor would appoint one of the applicants to serve as student regent for a one-year term expiring May 31 rather than February 1.

To be eligible to serve as a student regent, a person would have to be in good academic standing as determined by the institution and remain in good academic standing throughout the person's term as student regent. Student regents would have to maintain a grade point average of at least 2.5 throughout their terms and make satisfactory academic progress toward degrees in the programs in which they were enrolled.

The president of the institution could grant exemptions for good cause, but if the president determined the student regent was failing to maintain the required qualifications without good cause, the president would be required to notify the governor, who would declare the position vacant and fill the vacancy as soon as practical, using established procedures.

The bill specifies that student regents would serve without compensation but could receive reimbursement for actual expenses incurred by attending the meetings of the board of regents, subject to the approval of the chairman of the board.

The term of a student regent that was set to expire on February 1, 2008, would be extended to expire May 31, 2008.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

HB 3924 would make a good program even better and more sustainable. Student regents offer the boards of regents an important perspective. Their presence ensures that the boards act fairly and in the best interests of students. The selection process has been successful, and the student regents have performed exceptionally well. However, it is necessary to make a few adjustments to the timeline of the student regent's term of office.

Currently, student regents serve one-year terms from February of one year to February of the next year. HB 3924 would modify that timeframe to establish the term to begin in June and expire on the next May 31, which would align terms with the academic school year.

Moving the solicitation process forward two months from September to November also would better align the process with the academic school year and allow someone who was interested in applying for a student regent position more time in the fall to make the decision. Likewise, the governor would make appointment by the end of the spring semester so that the entire application and selection process would be completed by the end of the academic year.

Although student regents have performed well academically, requiring student regents to maintain academic progress would match requirements for other higher education programs, including grant and loan programs. It would add fairness and parity by requiring student regents to follow the same rules that other students must follow.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 276 by Wentworth, passed the Senate on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on April 12 and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House Higher Education Committee on May 7.