

SUBJECT: Extending free pre-K eligibility to children of certain first responders

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 11 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Bohac, Deshotel, Dutton, Gooden, K. King, Koop, Meyer, VanDeaver

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Chris Jones, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT); (*Registered, but did not testify*): David Anderson, Arlington ISD Board of Trustees; Joel Romo, Association of Texas EMS Professionals; Mark Wiggins, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Mike Jones, Burleson Professional Firefighters Association; Marshall Kenderdine, Christian Life Commission; Melanie Rubin, Dallas Early Education Alliance; Virginia Martinez Schaefer, Dallas Regional Chamber; Joseph McMahan, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Jesse Ayala, Greater Houston Partnership; Johnny Villarreal, Houston Fire Fighters Local 341; Marlene Lobberecht, League of Women Voters of Texas; Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Heather Bryant, Momentous Institute; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Deborah Caldwell, North East Independent School District; Jimmy Rodriguez, San Antonio Police Officers Association; Diane Ewing, Texans Care for Children; Ted Melina Raab and Dwight Harris, Texas AFT (American Federation of Teachers); Courtney Boswell, Texas Aspires; Megan Burk, Texas Association for the Education of Young Children; Miranda Goodsheller, Texas Association of Business; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Grover Campbell, Texas Association of School Boards; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Janna Lilly, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Mitch Landry and Noel Johnson, Texas Municipal Police Association (TMPA); Ellen Arnold, Texas PTA; Colby Nichols, Texas Rural Education Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Glenn Deshields, Texas State Association of Fire

Fighters; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Deborah Ingersoll, Texas State Troopers Association; Max Jones, The Greater Houston Partnership; Stephanie Mace, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas; James Thurston, United Ways of Texas; Aidan Alvarado; Joey Gidseg; Ted Hillin; Kimberly Saldivar; Rolando Solis)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Marnie Glaser, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 29.153 requires a school district with at least 15 eligible children to offer free prekindergarten classes. A child is eligible for enrollment if he or she does not speak or understand English, qualifies for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, is homeless or in foster care, or is the child of an active-duty member of the military or a member of the military who was injured or killed on active duty.

Government Code, ch. 3106 requires the Star of Texas Award to be awarded to peace officers, firefighters, and emergency medical first responders who are seriously injured or killed in the line of duty.

DIGEST: HB 357 would extend eligibility for free prekindergarten programs to a child of a peace officer, firefighter, or emergency medical first responder eligible for the Star of Texas Award. The bill would apply beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

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, 2017.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 357 would extend free prekindergarten eligibility to include children whose parents or guardians were first responders killed or severely injured in the line of duty. In light of recent events in Dallas and across the state, it is important to value the lives, sacrifices, and families of first responders. Studies have shown that prekindergarten is fundamental for a

successful educational experience, and the support provided by HB 357 would be especially necessary to help stabilize homes that have been affected by the trauma of losing a parent.

The fiscal impact of HB 357 to Texas would be negligible because the Star of Texas Award is given to only a few dozen first responders annually, some of whom do not have children. The bill would not create a new program but merely would extend eligibility for an existing program to a handful of children.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 357 could increase the scope and cost of government by expanding state-subsidized prekindergarten programs. It would give preferred treatment to a certain group by moving their prekindergarten costs to taxpayers already paying the full cost of their own children's education.