

TICUA Policy Update

May 4, 2006

Lottery Action

Both the House and Senate are beginning to coalesce around common themes when it comes to changing the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship programs. Both have adopted lottery omnibus bills that include: 1) Increasing the scholarship amounts to \$4,000 for four year colleges and universities and \$2,000 for two year colleges; 2) Allow dependents of overseas religious workers to become eligible; and 3) Makes eligible students living in Tennessee but graduating from a high school in an out-of-state county contiguous to Tennessee.

The Senate Education Committee and the House Budget Sub-committee passed a bill extending the foster care scholarship provision to TICUA member institutions. The respective Finance Committee's are next to review the bill.

For Profit Colleges Stopped by Lack of Support

The movement to include non-regionally accredited for-profit colleges in the lottery scholarship programs was brought to an end Wednesday. Rep. Johnny Shaw withdrew his bill from the House Education Committee after it was clear that he did not have the votes to move forward. TICUA, TBC, and UT collaborated to work against their inclusion.

For-profit institutions can participate in TELS if they are regionally accredited. South College in Knoxville is currently classified as an eligible institution. TICUA argued against lowering the regionally accreditation standard for participation.

On-line Nursing Program Defeated

After nearly three hours of testimony, the Senate General Welfare Committee defeated a bill that would allow a Virginia based on-line nursing program to operate in Tennessee. TICUA testified against the bill for one of those three hours. The diploma program operated by Southside Regional Medical Center (SRMC) has had below standard passage rates on the national nursing exam for the past two years. TICUA was notified by the Virginia Board of Nursing that this past March the SRMC program was put on notice for low pass rates and is required to submit a plan of correction to the Virginia Board by June 1, 2006.

SRMC petitioned the Tennessee Board of Nursing to operate their newly created online program in Tennessee. The Board denied their application. SRMC has sought an appeal while also seeking to have the legislature to overrule the Board's decision by passing legislation that would allow them to operate without Board approval.

TICUA collaborated with other higher education partners as well as the Tennessee Association of Nurses and the Tennessee Center for Nursing to oppose the bill. Vanderbilt's Nursing Dean Colleen Conway-Welch also testified successfully against the bill.

TBC Gains Relief

The TICUA Benefit Consortium struck a deal with the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance to gain relief from two key cost-drivers of the health plan. The Department has agreed to no longer assess premium taxes on employee contributions and no longer require the plan to comply with mandated benefits. The TBC, however, did not gain regulatory relief in the agreement.

The agreement is in the form of a bill being sponsored by Rep. Mark Maddox in the House and Senator Mike Williams in the Senate. Rep. Maddox has championed our cause throughout the process.

The House bill is expected to be before the full House this next week. In the Senate, Williams has put the bill on notice and will begin to move it through the committee structure once it passes the full House.