House Bill 2920
Testimony Before the Texas House Committee on Higher Education

By Erin Davis Valdez, Education Policy Director

Chairman Kuempel, Vice Chair Paul, and Members:

My name is Erin Davis Valdez, and I am an education policy director at Texas Public Policy Foundation. I'm here today to voice our support of HB 2920.

At a time when having postsecondary education is more important than ever, we have seen two concerning trends in Texas: declining enrollment directly from high school and a loss of public trust in higher education.

Recent data from the Higher Education Coordinating Board point to a decline in the number of high school students enrolled in higher education the fall after graduation, from 55.5% enrolled in public and private colleges in the fall of 2011 to 45% in the fall of 2021.

A recent (March 2023) *Wall Street Journal* poll revealed that "56% of respondents said that a four-year college degree wasn't worth the cost because people often graduate without specific job skills and with heavy debt."

Inside Higher Ed reported in August of last year that among four generation groups surveyed by Morning Consult, the Gen Z cohort was the least trusting of higher education.

The lack of trust in institutions is a larger phenomenon of our age and addressing it must be a top priority for our elected officials.

One step that this Legislature could take to help young people and their families have more confidence in their decisions about postsecondary education would be to increase transparency about outcomes from various majors at various institutions. Program-level data on graduate debt vs. earnings have been available from the federal government since 2019, and TPPF's Dr. Andrew Gillen publishes annually updated research ranking academic fields at public higher education institutions based on them. In addition, Dr. Gillen created a webtool based on College Scorecard data that allows students and parents a chance to compare the earning potential of various majors vs. median and mean student loan debt.

HB 2920 calls on the state to compile and share information on the value of postsecondary credentials with students before they graduate from high school and make decisions about their next steps. In other words, this bill would allow students to "know before they go." We believe being able to compare the outcomes for an engineering major at one institution vs. another institution helps students get past the "name brand" of an institution to understand which institutions have excellent programs in the fields they want to study. The data compiled will include information such as total cost of tuition, median student loan debt, typical debt to income ratio of alumni, and graduation rates.

We believe that increasing trust in institutions begins with transparency. Parents and students must be informed consumers before making a substantial investment of time and resources. HB 2920 will empower families to make better choices for their futures.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak for this important legislation. I am happy to take any questions.

Erin Davis Valdez is the Policy Director for Next Generation Texas, an initiative of the Foundation. She has been passionate about the transformational power of education all her life, having been given the gift of being homeschooled. She taught for over a decade in Austin-area schools and served as an assistant principal at a charter school in Lewisville. These experiences have given her the opportunity to see first-hand how students can thrive when they have excellent options.

Since joining the Foundation, Valdez has conducted research on career and technical education at the secondary and post-secondary levels, civics education, and welfare to work programs in Texas.

Valdez earned an M.A. in classics from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a B.A. in classical studies from Hillsdale College.

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