

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1987
By: Menéndez
Transportation
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

When a police officer pulls over a vehicle for a traffic violation, the officer typically approaches the vehicle from the rear using lights and sirens. There is concern that this approach may not adequately alert drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing to an officer's orders or instructions. This may lead the officer to believe that the driver is being obstinate or adversarial when there is simply just a communication barrier. Interested parties note that current mechanisms in place to help an officer identify a driver who is deaf or hard of hearing, such as a driver identification visor card and restriction codes placed on a driver's license, require the officer to communicate directly with the driver before becoming aware of the fact that the driver is deaf or hard of hearing. S.B. 1987 seeks to remedy this situation.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 1987 amends the Transportation Code to require the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles to design and issue specialty license plates for a motor vehicle that is regularly operated by a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. The bill requires such a specialty license plate to include an emblem indicating that the person operating the vehicle is deaf or hard of hearing and establishes an \$8 fee for a set of the specialty license plates. The bill requires the initial application for the specialty license plates to be accompanied by a written statement from a physician who is licensed to practice medicine in Texas or in a state adjacent to Texas or who is authorized by applicable law to practice medicine in a hospital or other health facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs and requires the statement to certify that the person making the application is deaf or hard of hearing.

S.B. 1987 amends the Occupations Code to require the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), as part of the minimum curriculum requirements for law enforcement training programs and schools, to establish not later than March 1, 2016, a statewide comprehensive education and training program on procedures for interacting with drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing, including identifying specialty license plates issued to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The bill requires an officer to complete the program not later than the second anniversary of the date the officer is licensed by TCOLE or the date the officer applies for an intermediate proficiency certificate, whichever date is earlier.

EFFECTIVE DATE

January 1, 2016.