

SUBJECT: Creating the Texas Volunteer Health Corps

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Berlanga, Hirschi, Coleman, Delisi, Glaze, Janek, Maxey,
McDonald

0 nays

1 absent — Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — Ramiro R. Casso, M.D.; Tona L. Vasquez

Against — none

DIGEST: HB 1192 would require the Texas Department of Health to establish the Texas Volunteer Health Corps. The corps would promote public health by such activities as involving citizens in preventive care, expanding citizens' capacity for self-help, arranging transportation and clinic appointments and identifying community resources and links to those resources.

Volunteers recruited for the corps could include high school or college students, senior citizens, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) job training participants and VISTA, AmeriCorps, business and community volunteers. To support corps activities the department could employ volunteer coordinators, use public or private grant funds, provide public health information and identify vital health care issues. The department would be required to encourage health care professionals to volunteer as mentors in the Texas Volunteer Health Corps.

The bill would take immediate effect if approved by two-thirds of the membership of each house.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1192 is an innovative, low-cost approach to reduce health care costs, improve citizen health and provide better access to health care services. It would provide a much needed coordination and communication link between existing medical knowledge and services and medically underserved or unaware populations. The corps would also provide

volunteering citizens with an opportunity to contribute to society and gain health care experience.

A coordinated network of trained volunteers could help link Texans to the knowledge or the services they need to improve or maintain their health. The Texas health care delivery system can be confusing and inefficient due to the fragmentation of services between various public and private providers and programs and the maldistribution of services across the state. Some areas of the state have an abundance of medical resources while other areas, such as inner cities and rural areas, have insufficient resources. Some populations need more help than others to learn how to take care of themselves and their families and to access health care services.

The volunteer corps would build upon and expand current outreach activities and training through the Texas Department of Health of VISTA volunteers, who have been working in 33 underserved areas to convince low income women with children to participate in public nutrition, medical screening and immunization programs. The volunteers would be trained by health professionals at the Texas Department of Health and supervised by health department personnel at the local, regional and central offices.

Liability risks would be minimal because the volunteers would provide only communication and transportation linkages; they would not provide health care services. All health department volunteers would be covered for accident, liability and excess automobile insurance up to \$1 million per occurrence.

This bill is community-oriented. It would allow communities to identify priority health care issues and use an organized corps of volunteers who could effectively communicate with their neighbors how to best access health services. It would also help build public-private networks of individuals and businesses committed to furthering public health initiatives.

Preventive care and improved public health will lower not only health care costs, but could improve children's school performance and reduce lost job time due to worker or family member illness.

Volunteering is an activity that promotes a cohesive society and can reward volunteers with personal satisfaction, improved self-esteem and experience that may be applied in future jobs and interpersonal relationships. Volunteers may become motivated to become health professionals in underserved areas.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1192 does not specify how the volunteers would be screened, trained or managed at the state or local level. Unless adequate screening, training and supervisory controls are in place, even well-intentioned volunteers could mistakenly mislead someone about their health care service needs, further jeopardizing that person's health, or add to the confusion, fragmentation and expenses in health care delivery. Potential mistakes also could add to state liability risks.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 482 by Zaffirini, has been referred to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.