

SUBJECT: Local birth certificate fee for family care clearinghouse

COMMITTEE: Economic Development — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Yarbrough, Davis, Luna, Moffat, Raymond, Shields, Solomons, Van de Putte

0 nays

1 absent — Oliveira

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — Carol McDaniel, Texas Work and Family Clearinghouse

BACKGROUND: The Child Care Resource Clearinghouse was established in 1987 to explore options for providing child care as a benefit to both private and public employees. In 1991 the Legislature expanded the clearinghouse's mission and changed its name to the Texas Work and Family Clearinghouse to reflect its additional functions. The clearinghouse is now mandated to provide public and private employers, state agencies, policymakers and individual workers with technical assistance and information on dependent care and to provide other assistance on job-related family issues.

Funding for the clearinghouse comes from a \$2 surcharge on certified copies of birth certificates issued by the state Bureau of Vital Statistics, in-kind contributions and contracts with state and federal agencies. In addition, the Texas Employment Commission provides fiscal, legal and other support services to the clearinghouse. Monies collected through the surcharge are deposited in the work and family policies fund in the State Treasury.

DIGEST: HB 1341, as amended, would require that local registrars or county clerks charge the same fee (currently \$9) for a certified copy of a birth certificate as the state Bureau of Vital Statistics charges. Local registrars or county clerks also would be required to assess the \$2 surcharge. The requirement

would also apply to wallet-sized birth certificates and searches for birth certificates.

Of each \$2 surcharge collected locally, \$1.80 would have to be sent to the state comptroller for deposit into the work and family policies fund in the State Treasury to benefit the Work and Family Policies Clearinghouse. The other 20 cents would be retained by the local registrars or county clerks to cover administrative costs.

The clearinghouse would be allowed to establish a grant program to provide funds to public and private persons to conduct demonstration child care projects. The clearinghouse would be authorized to adopt rules governing the criteria for awarding grants, including requirements for their submission, approval and cancellation.

To receive a grant, an applicant would have to execute an interagency agreement or contract with the clearinghouse. The contract would have to include provisions requiring that the person receiving the grant perform the services called for in the approved grant request and contain appropriate provisions relative to program and fiscal monitoring.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1995 and would apply to only those fees collected for birth certificates on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1341 would create uniformity in charges for birth certificates by imposing the same \$2 surcharge on locally issued certificates now charged by the state Bureau of Vital Statistics to help an important statewide project. The Work and Family Policies Clearinghouse helps provide much needed assistance to Texas workers and their employers. More and more workers in Texas are juggling work and child-rearing responsibilities. Many households with minor children have either two parents in the workforce or are headed by working, single parents. Many Texas companies, including 336,000 classified as small businesses, do not have the resources to do long-range planning to meet the dependent care needs of their workers. The clearinghouse provides an important service to workers and employers by providing technical assistance relative to dependent care and other employment-related family issues.

Requiring county clerks and local registrars to collect local fees when issuing birth certificates would allow the clearinghouse to provide even more assistance to workers and employers, including the establishment of a dependent care grant program.

HB 1341 would not burden county clerks and local registrars with cumbersome new requirements since they already collect fees that are earmarked for important state programs. For example, county clerks and local registrars now collect marriage license fees, sending half to the state in order to help fund the Children's Trust Fund. The clerks and registrars would retain part of the fee to help them defray administrative costs associated with collecting the fee.

The bill would make birth certificate charges uniform statewide and alleviate the problem that arises when someone calls the state Bureau of Vital Statistics and is quoted the \$11 price and mistakenly sends that amount to the local county clerks, where the price is almost always less. Often clerks must do additional administrative work to disburse refunds. To maintain uniformity, the committee amendment would delete a provision in the original bill creating an exception from paying the local fee for more than one birth certificate when a person obtains multiple certificates in a single application.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1341 would raise local fees on those who would not necessarily benefit from the Work and Family Policies Clearinghouse program.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would delete a section of the original bill exempting individuals who obtain duplicate certified copies of birth certificates under a single application from paying an additional fee for each additional copy after having paid the increased fee on the first copy.

The Legislative Budget Board estimates that for fiscal 1996-2000, the probable revenue gain from the fee would be \$567,000 a year for the state and \$63,000 a year for local government units.