

**SUBJECT:** Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

**COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — Hilderbran, Naishtat, Davila, J. Jones, Krusee, Maxey, Wohlgemuth

0 nays

2 absent — Denny, Park

**WITNESSES:** For — Richard Garbacz, Texas Deaf Caucus; Hector Brual, Timothy Rarus and Fran Herrington-Borre, Texas Symposium on Deaf or Hard of Hearing Texans; Lucille Koehl; Michael Fehmer

Against — None

On — David Myers and Billy Collins, Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired

**DIGEST:** HB 2859 would change the name of the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The definitions of deaf and hard of hearing would be clarified. "Deaf" would mean a hearing impairment of such severity that an individual must depend on visual methods to communicate. "Hard of hearing" would mean a hearing impairment that results in a loss of hearing function to an individual requiring the individual to rely on residual hearing or visual methods of communication.

The majority of the members of Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing would be required to be deaf or hard of hearing. Members of the commission would not be entitled to compensation, but would be entitled to reimbursement of their traveling expenses, as provided in the General Appropriations Act.

In addition to its current duties, the commission would be required to maintain a registry of available interpreters for persons who are deaf or

hard of hearing, update the registry at least quarterly and make the registry available to interested persons at cost.

The commission would also be required to assist institutions of higher education in initiating training programs for interpreters and in developing guidelines for instruction to promote uniformity of sign language teaching. It would also be required to develop standards for evaluation of those programs with the assistance of the Central Education Agency.

The commission would be allowed to charge and collect authorized fees for expanding and improving services and to cover the cost of training interpreters.

During its annual review of its recommended schedule of fees for interpreters, the commission would adopt, by rule, a schedule of maximum allowable hourly fees to be paid to interpreters with varied skill levels by state agencies, courts, or political subdivisions of the state.

The number of board members administering the certification program for interpreters would be increased from five to seven. The commission could not discipline an interpreter certified by the commission unless it received a recommendation of the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters to do so.

HB 2859 would repeal the current code provision providing for a sliding fee scale for interpreter services that are provided in a nongovernmental setting and that are reimbursed by the commission. Current sections regarding interpreters in agency or court proceedings would be repealed. Provisions requiring the Board of Evaluation of Interpreters to work with the Texas Rehabilitation Commission (TRC) to develop a communication competency evaluation for vocational rehabilitation counselors and other TRC staff would be repealed as well as the provisions relating to telecommunication devices for the deaf in state agencies and local government units.

NOTES: The committee amendment would require that a majority of the commission be deaf.