

SUBJECT: Creating a work/family facilitator for state agencies

COMMITTEE: Economic Development — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Oliveira, Yarbrough, Keffer, Luna, Raymond, Seaman, Siebert, Van de Putte

0 nays

1 absent — Greenberg

WITNESSES: For — Ed Bloom, Texas Association for the Education of Young Children

Against — None

BACKGROUND : In 1991, the Legislature created the Work and Family Clearinghouse within the Texas Employment Commission, now the Texas Workforce Commission. The clearinghouse provides technical assistance and information on dependent and elder care and other work/family issues to public and private employers, state agencies, policy makers, and individuals. The clearinghouse's activities are overseen by a 12-member advisory committee composed of corporate, consumer, and provider representatives from the public and private sectors.

The clearinghouse is funded through a fee on birth certificate copies and grants from state and federal sources.

In 1993, the Legislature created the Child Care Development Board to oversee providing child services for state employees. The board is composed of representatives of the governor, the lieutenant governor, the attorney general, the state treasurer, the comptroller, and the land commissioner.

DIGEST: HB 425 would create the position of work/family facilitator in the Work and Family Clearinghouse to help state agencies develop policies aimed at assisting employees balance their work and family demands. This position would be funded by state agencies, excepting institutions of higher education, through a 75-cent fee for each full-time equivalent employee.

These fees could be spent only on expenses associated with the work/family facilitator. The clearinghouse would be required to report to the Legislature by January 15, 1999, on agencies' progress to create flexible, family-friendly workplaces for state employees. The reporting requirement would expire on January 1, 2000.

HB 425 also would change the composition of the advisory committee to require that two members be state employees and one member be a representative of the Child Care Development Board.

HB 425 would take effect September 1, 1997. The clearinghouse would be required to hire a work/family facilitator by January 1, 1998, and the Texas Workforce Commission would have to adopt rules for assessing and collecting fees from state agencies by December 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 425 would help state agencies adopt family-friendly policies, a move that would benefit thousands of state employees as well as the agencies themselves. Employers that offer flexible programs to meet family demands generally find that the benefits of such programs — lower turnover, reduced sick leave and tardiness, and greater worker morale and productivity — far outweigh the costs.

Recognizing these benefits, private employers often hire consultants to evaluate their organizations and develop family-friendly policies adapted to the specific needs of their company. HB 425 would, in effect, provide all state agencies with this service by creating in the Work and Family Clearinghouse the position of work/family facilitator with responsibility for state agencies. Under current law, state agencies have the option of consulting with the clearinghouse on work/family issues, but the clearinghouse does not have the resources to aggressively focus on the needs of state agencies.

The 75-cent fee that would be assessed for each full-time employee would be a small price to pay for the benefit of having a work/family expert available to all state agencies. A state agency with 100 employees would pay only \$75 per year for this service. Larger agencies would pay more, but they have more employees who would benefit from the service.

HB 425 would implement recommendations included in *Disturbing the Peace*, the Texas Performance Review's latest report on state government. According to the report, state employees between the ages of 30 and 49 make up nearly 60 percent of the workforce. In a 1994-95 survey by the University of Texas School of Social Work, employees in this age bracket indicated that aside from medical insurance and retirement, policies allowing time away from work to support family and personal needs were the most desired employment benefit. The survey also suggested that workers who believe their agency fosters an environment that allows for balancing work and personal life are more likely to stay with their agency.

Some state agencies have already adopted such programs as compressed work weeks, flextime, and job-sharing to help their employees juggle work and family demands, but policies vary widely among agencies. As a result, some state employees have greater job flexibility than others, even though they all work for the state of Texas.

The current statute requires that the advisory committee be made up of representatives from the public and private sector, but the committee is now composed only of members from the private sector. HB 425 would ensure that state agencies' interests were represented by requiring that two members of the committee be state employees and that at least one member be a representative of the Child Care Development Board. HB 425 would incorporate these three representatives within the existing 12-member board rather than creating a 15-member board, which would be an unwieldy number of volunteers from throughout the state.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

If state agencies want to develop family-friendly policies, they are free to do so, but they should not be required to raid their operating budgets to pay for this expertise. HB 425 would place an additional financial burden on state agencies at a time when many have limited resources that are stretched just to meet their basic mission. State agencies are already free to consult with the Work and Family Clearinghouse at no cost. The state should not have to pay for a service that private employers have used for years at no cost.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

Current members of the advisory committee should be retained, and the committee should be expanded to include two state employees and a representative of the Child Care Development Board. In this way, the committee would include a variety of interests and expertise.

NOTES:

In the fiscal note, the LBB estimated that a 75-cent annual fee charged for each of the 153,985 full-time equivalent state employees, excluding higher education employees, would raise a total of \$115,000, which would come from existing agency appropriations.

The Senate State Affairs Committee by 6-4 did not report the companion bill, SB 828 by Ellis et al., on March 13 because the bill did not receive the necessary majority of the 13-member committee.