

**SUBJECT:** Coordinating state agency activities in colonias

**COMMITTEE:** Economic Development — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 9 ayes — Oliveira, Yarbrough, Greenberg, Keffer, Luna, Raymond, Seaman, Siebert, Van de Putte

0 nays

**SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 3 — 31-0

**WITNESSES:** For — None

Against — None

On — Sofia Hernandez, Texas Department of Health; Dan Torrez, Attorney General's Office

**BACKGROUND**  
:

Colonias are residential subdivisions in unincorporated areas of counties located predominantly along the Texas-Mexico border. They are often characterized by substandard housing and the absence of sewers, water, electric and gas utility services, and paved roads. In a 1996 report, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) estimated that there are over 1,400 colonias in Texas with a total population of more than 325,000 residents.

Many state agencies administer programs in colonias to improve the health, safety and quality of life for colonia residents:

- The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) operates self-help centers that provide training, guidance and resources to teach colonia residents how to make housing improvements.
- The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the University of Texas-Pan American (UT-Pan Am) both administer education programs to colonia residents.
- The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has enforcement authority to prevent development of substandard subdivisions.

- The TWDB coordinates the Economically Distressed Areas Program, Colonias Assistance and Management Support Program, and the Colonia Plumbing Loan Program.
- The Texas Department of Health (TDH) administers programs to ameliorate health and safety problems in colonias.
- The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) has authority over contested cases for water and wastewater service and issues certificates of convenience and necessity to utility projects.
- The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) operates job training and retraining programs in colonias.

**DIGEST:**

CSSB 1514 would require certain state agencies to designate an officer or employee as coordinator of colonia initiatives to coordinate efforts with other agencies, including OAG, TEA, TDH, TDHCA, TNRCC, TWDB, TWC, and UT-Pan Am. Each agency coordinator would have to be a deputy executive director or equivalent. The OAG's coordinator would preside over the group, which would have to meet at least twice each year.

Local representatives of the agencies in offices near the Texas-Mexico border would meet regularly to coordinate colonia initiatives at the local level.

CSSB 1514 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership in each house.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSSB 1514 would create a state level coordinating body to facilitate communication between agencies on colonias issues. While there are a myriad of public programs enhancing colonia living conditions and economic opportunities, there is very little formal coordination between state agencies operating programs in colonias. State programs could be more seamlessly integrated if more closely coordinated. A coordinating group also would help eliminate duplication of efforts. No new employees would be needed — existing agency employees with equivalent authority would be designated to act as coordinators.

In addition to enhancing delivery of services, the coordinating group would be able to provide oversight on the state's colonia efforts and make recommendations to the Legislature on the progress of colonia initiatives. This would ensure the continued efficacy of state agency cooperative efforts.

However, while state coordination is important, local input and implementation is necessary. CSSB 1514 would ensure solutions to colonia concerns were developed and implemented at the local level by formalizing the current ad hoc meetings between agencies with border offices. These local initiatives at coordination need to be given the authority to continue pursuing joint efforts to improve delivery of much needed public services.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the Senate-passed version of the bill to delete the geographical requirement that a colonia be located within 150 miles of the Texas-Mexico border.