

- SUBJECT:** Allowing consolidation of emergency communication districts
- COMMITTEE:** Public Safety — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — B. Turner, Keel, Berman, Gutierrez, Hupp, P. King, Najera  
0 nays  
2 absent — Carter, Driver
- WITNESSES:** None
- BACKGROUND:** In 1983, the Legislature authorized the creation of special-purpose emergency communication districts (ECDs) to coordinate and fund 9-1-1 services in metropolitan areas. Texas has 24 ECDs that provide 9-1-1 service to 29 counties.
- In 1987, the Legislature created the Advisory Commission on State Emergency Communications (ACSEC) to coordinate 9-1-1 service across the state. The 24 ECDs were not required to join this system and they continue to offer 9-1-1 services in their districts. After creation of ACSEC, other areas in the state without 9-1-1 service were not allowed to create new ECDs — they either had to join the state system or go without service. Texans pay for 9-1-1 services, whether provided by ECDs, cities, or councils of government overseen by ACSEC, through fees assessed on their telephone bills.
- DIGEST:** HB 1984 would amend the Health and Safety Code, chapter 772 to allow two or more ECDs to consolidate into a single district, with voter approval.
- If the board of managers of one or more such districts decided they would benefit from consolidation, they could call and hold an election in each district to approve the consolidation. Each election would have to be held on the same uniform election date, and each district would have to pay election expenses for its participating jurisdictions. Election ballots would have to permit voting for or against the consolidation with other named districts. A consolidated district would have to be created within one year of the election approving it.

If voters approved the consolidation, the boards of the districts to be consolidated would have to hold a joint planning meeting open to the public. At the meeting, the boards would have to devise a plan to combine the debts and assets of the districts, pay outstanding bonds, issue refunding bonds, impose a uniform 9-1-1 emergency service fee, and adjust the membership and qualifications of the board of managers of the new consolidated district.

Once each board adopted the same consolidation plan, the boards would have to declare the consolidated district created. If a board did not agree to the consolidation plan, the remaining districts could consolidate on the terms of a mutually agreeable plan.

Until the initial board of managers was appointed, the consolidated district would be operated and administered by a temporary board composed of the boards of managers of all the consolidated districts.

Within 45 days of the district's creation, the temporary board would have to adjust the board's membership by order, attempting to preserve the pre-consolidation proportional representation of the consolidated boards. This order would have to specify the number of board members, the entity or combination of entities that would appoint each member, whether each member could vote, and the term of each member of the initial board. To the greatest extent practical, half of the initial board members' terms would have to expire in even-numbered years and the other half in odd-numbered years.

The consolidated district and its board would be governed by the statutory provisions that applied to the most populous of the districts before consolidation.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1984 would allow ECDs to consolidate on a purely voluntary basis. This would enable them to eliminate duplicative costs for administration and equipment and to increase efficiency. A consolidated district, for example, could use economies of scale to obtain better prices for equipment and could consolidate and locate Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) where they would be most efficient.

In a 1998 report on the statewide 9-1-1 system, the state auditor identified opportunities for increased efficiency through regional consolidation of entities that provide 9-1-1 service. Functions that could be consolidated include customer database management, fiscal services, and executive management. The report also said that the state's PSAPs were not organized efficiently or coordinated centrally and that, as a result, they incur duplicative costs for equipment, maintenance, and personnel.

The Sunset Advisory Commission recommended the voluntary consolidation of ECDs during sunset review of ACSEC. Since ECDs are outside of ACSEC's authority, however, this issue was not included in HB 1983 by Bosse, the sunset bill continuing ACSEC.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

**NOTES:**

The companion bill, SB 768 by Madla, has been referred to the Senate Economic Development Committee.

HB 1983 by Bosse, the ACSEC sunset bill, passed the House with floor amendments on April 20 and has been referred to the Senate Economic Development Committee.