

SUBJECT: Regulating use of subsidized dial-up Internet service

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hardcastle, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Randy Wayne Meche, Internet Management Services
Against — Carlyn Gray; Gloria Meraz, Texas Library Association

BACKGROUND: Education Code, secs. 8.051-8.053 direct regional education service centers to deliver a set of core services that include basic curriculum, special education services, bilingual education, and a gifted and talented program and to implement initiatives as directed by the Legislature. A regional education service center also may offer additional services that are requested and purchased by any school district in the state.

DIGEST: CSHB 1330 would require regional education service centers that provide home Internet service to students, faculty, or other personnel to adopt appropriate methods to verify that each subscriber to the Internet service is in one of those categories and to adopt rules to ensure that the Internet service blocks out access to web sites containing obscene materials.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001. It would apply only to contracts with Internet service providers entered into or renewed on or after the effective date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 1330 would ensure that subsidized Internet access through the state's regional education service centers is accessible only by its intended users. Students, faculty, and staff may obtain the service through dial-up accounts, but nothing prevents other people from using the services. This bill would help prevent abuses by requiring verification of the service's subscribers.

The bill also would prevent use of these subsidized services to view or download obscene materials. Internet access through the regional education service centers is designed to provide education-related information, not pornography. The use of filtering software could prevent students from obtaining inappropriate material.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 1330 would create a state law for a problem that is being addressed at a local level. Children should not have access to obscene materials, but prevention is the responsibility of school districts and is being implemented through different approaches, including filtering software and usage agreements. This allows local areas to use the system that works best for them. The state should not create a single inflexible standard but should leave this responsibility to the school districts.

NOTES:

The committee substitute would restrict the scope of the bill to home access. It deleted a provision in the filed version that would have required the regional education service center to limit a person's use of the Internet service to 35 hours per week.