

- SUBJECT:** Expanding financial assistance for grandparents
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 5 ayes — Naishtat, Chavez, Ehrhardt, Noriega, Villarreal
2 nays — J. Davis, Wohlgemuth
2 absent — Raymond, Telford
- WITNESSES:** For — Mildred Bogle, Sedalia Carey Johnson, and Therathia Smith, Grey Eagles Grandparents; *Registered but did not testify:* Patrick Bresette, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Susan Craven, Texans Care for Children; Alison Dieter, Texas Gray Panthers

Against — None

On — Judy Denton, Texas Department of Human Services; *Registered but did not testify:* Janis Brown, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services
- BACKGROUND:** In 1999, the 76th Legislature enacted SB 1423 by West, creating a financial aid program for low-income grandparents who take care of a grandchild. Human Resources Code, sec. 31.0041(a) allows the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide financial assistance to grandparents age 50 or older with incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty level who take care of a grandchild and have resources below \$2,000.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 902 would lower to 45 the age of eligibility for low-income grandparents to receive financial assistance and would raise the income ceiling to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. It would direct state agencies to seek any necessary federal waivers or authorizations needed to implement the bill's provisions. The agency could delay implementation until the federal waivers or authorization was granted.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 902 would allow more grandparents to be eligible for financial assistance through this program. Increasing numbers of grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren for a host of reasons. Often these grandparents live on fixed or low incomes that make it difficult to provide care for children. The state should expand eligibility so that as many grandparents as possible can take in grandchildren, rather than relying on the state to place these children in foster care or adoption, which is more expensive in the long run.

OPPONENTS SAY: HB 902 would expand public assistance programs. The state places limits on eligibility for public assistance to ensure that the people assisted by the state are those who need it most. Given that the state's resources may be stretched more thinly if the economy falters, the state should not expand program eligibility at this time.

NOTES: The bill's fiscal note estimates that expanding eligibility for the program would cost the state \$1.5 million in fiscal 2002-03 and would cost \$190,000 to \$200,000 per year thereafter.

The companion bill, SB 297 by West, passed the Senate by voice vote on April 17 and was reported favorably, without amendments, by the House Human Services Committee on April 20, making it eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 902.