

SUBJECT: Emergency services funding for certain cities

COMMITTEE: Urban Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Carter, Bailey, Burnam, Ehrhardt, E. Jones, Najera

1 nay — Hill

2 absent — Callegari, Edwards

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 1 — by voice vote

WITNESSES: None

DIGEST: CSSB 1564 would allow certain cities to assess municipal utility customers a fee of up to \$2 per month to fund emergency medical services. This authority would apply only to a city that on January 1, 2001, had a population of at least 5,000, provided emergency medical services through full-time employees of the city's fire department, was not within a district that already provided emergency medical services, and was located in a county of less than 60,000.

The city's governing body could assess the fee by ordinance on water, sewer, gas, or electrical services. If imposed, the fee would have to be collected in the same manner as any other utility payment. A city would have to enact the fee before November 1, 2002.

Funds collected from the fee would have to be accounted for in a separate proprietary fund and could be used only to provide emergency medical services within the city or the county.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Current funding methods for some cities are not adequate to support appropriate emergency medical services. If authorized to enact a fee on certain utilities not to exceed \$2, these cities would be better able to pay for essential services for their communities. The fee would have to be enacted

by November 1, 2002, and the city council would have to decide whether or not to assess the fee after public hearings and a vote.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSSB 1564 would enable some cities to place an additional tax on city residents. It would be more appropriate to require a referendum than to allow a city council to vote on whether or not to assess the fee. Additional charges on utility bills for the purpose of funding emergency services should left to the discretion of community residents.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the Senate engrossed version by adding the requirement that the fee be enacted by November 1, 2001, and by specifying that the bill would only apply to cities who met the coverage requirements as of January 1, 2001.

The bill's fiscal note identifies Big Spring and Kerrville as meeting the coverage criteria specified in CSSB 1564. The Legislative Budget Board was unable to determine whether other cities that met the population criteria would be eligible to charge the fee for emergency medical services.