

SUBJECT: County or city salary supplements for protective services employees

COMMITTEE: County Affairs — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Ramsay, G. Lewis, B. Brown, Chisum, Farabee
1 nay — Shields
3 absent — Hilderbran, Krusee, Salinas

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 20 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Jim Allison, County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas; Lee Jackson, Dallas County Commissioners Court and Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Donald Lee, Texas Conference of Urban Counties
Against — None
On — Otto Kingsbery, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services

BACKGROUND: In 1999, the 76th Legislature enacted Government Code, sec. 659.020, which prohibits a full-time state worker from receiving a salary supplement from any other source unless provided specifically by the general appropriations act or other law.

DIGEST: SB 961, as amended, would authorize a county or city to use its own funds to pay salary supplements to Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS) employees who perform duties related to child or adult protective services. A DPRS employee who had worked in the same position for DPRS in a different region would not be eligible for such a salary supplement until six months after assuming the position in the new region.

The restrictions under Government Code, sec. 659.020 would not apply to county or municipal salary supplements for DPRS employees. DPRS could not require a salary supplement as a condition for creating or maintaining a

caseworker position in a region.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Allowing counties and cities to supplement DPRS salaries would make these workers' pay more competitive and would help retain trained caseworkers. Across the state, annual turnover for DPRS caseworkers averages 26 percent. Dallas County reports a turnover rate of more than 43 percent each year. In many cases, these caseworkers go to work for school districts and private agencies with higher pay and better benefits.

Overworked and underpaid caseworkers often face dangerous situations in protecting vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect. Their brave efforts contribute to a community's overall well-being. Thus, it would be appropriate for local taxpayers to provide the funding to supplement these caseworkers' salaries.

SB 961 would not lead to urban counties drawing caseworkers away from other areas of the state by using the supplements as a "signing bonus." The bill would prevent caseworkers from other regions from collecting a salary supplement until they had been in the new region for at least six months. Cost-of-living differentials and the costs of uprooting a family make it unlikely that a large number of caseworkers would relocate from rural to urban areas merely to collect a salary supplement.

SB 961 would not create an unfunded mandate. Counties and cities would decide whether to participate in the salary supplement program. The bulk of the caseworkers' salaries would remain the state's responsibility, and the bill specifically would prohibit the state from requiring a local salary supplement as a condition for creating or maintaining a caseworker position.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 961 could create an unfair advantage for wealthier counties that decided to pay the salary supplement to keep or attract DPRS caseworkers. Poorer counties often have a greater need for these caseworkers. In cases where the state requests matching local funds, such as for highway projects, poorer counties often find themselves at a disadvantage in competing for scarce state resources.

A “voluntary” request for funding serves effectively as an unfunded mandate in shifting the financial burden from the state to local governments. It should be the state’s responsibility to raise the salaries of underpaid and overworked caseworkers.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would add to the Senate-passed bill the provision that DPRS could not require a salary supplement in making a decision as to whether to create or maintain a caseworker position in a region.