

SUBJECT: Regional emergency medical dispatch resource center pilot program

COMMITTEE: Defense Affairs and State-Federal Relations — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Corte, Campbell, Herrero, Hodge, Leibowitz, Merritt
0 nays
3 absent — Berman, Moreno, Noriega

WITNESSES: For — Ernesto Rodriquez, American Heart Association
Against — None
On — Steve Janda, Texas Department of State Health Services; Steve Shelton , East Texas Area Health Education Center, University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

BACKGROUND: Health and Safety Code, ch. 771 establishes guidelines for state administration of 911 emergency communications. The Commission on State Emergency Communications oversees regional emergency plans, develops minimum performance standards, recommends minimum training standards, and provides grants or contracts for services that enhance effectiveness of the system.

The 77th Legislature in 2001 enacted HB 3312 by Dunnam, which required the former Texas Department of Health (TDH) to establish a pilot program to test the effectiveness of using medical dispatchers in a regional emergency dispatch resource center to provide life-saving and other emergency medical instructions to those who need guidance while waiting on the arrival of emergency medical personnel.

The requirement to establish, conduct, and evaluate the pilot program is contingent on having sufficient funding. The pilot program is authorized to receive funding from 911 service fees and grants, and from political subdivisions that participate in the pilot program.

DIGEST:

CSHB 1332 would amend Health and Safety Code, ch. 771, by transferring the emergency medical dispatch resource center pilot program from the Department of State Health Services (formerly TDH) to the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. The AHEC would have the authority that the Department of State Health Services has now, including being able to select program participants and determine which public safety answering points are interested in participating in the pilot program.

The bill would authorize a public safety answering point to participate in the program and serve as a regional emergency medical dispatch resource center. As the department is now authorized to do, AHEC could appoint a pilot program work group to help develop, implement, and evaluate the pilot program. AHEC, rather than the department, would report its findings to the Legislature no later than January 1 of each odd-numbered year through 2009. The bill would add the governor and the advisory council to the list of entities that receive d the report. The AHEC would share information regarding a public safety answering point's abilities with the advisory council.

The bill would clarify that the pilot program work group was not subject to Government Code, ch. 2110, which regulates state agency advisory committees.

The bill would extend the expiration date for the pilot program to 2009.

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, 2005.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

The pilot program for the regional emergency medical dispatch resource center was established during the 2001 regular session, but due to an oversight, the appropriation for the program was not available. This oversight was corrected during the 2003 regular session, and the pilot program was extended for another two years and additional funding options were provided in a rider to the agency. However, because of confusion about the language in the rider, the funding could not be used to implement the pilot program.

HB 1332 is needed to clarify the funding structure for the pilot program and to transfer the program to an entity that is well suited to take responsibility for it.

The AHEC at UTMB - Galveston has expressed the desire to house the pilot program because it fits very well with similar operations already established, such as a 24-hour nursing call center. The center provides triage medical assistance through a 1-800 telephone number for all UTMB patients, no matter where in the state they are located.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute modified the original version by extending the pilot program until 2009, rather than 2005, and would transfer the program to the Area Health Education Center of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. The substitute would require AHEC to share information with the advisory council and added the advisory council and the governor's office to the entities receiving the evaluation reports.

The companion bill, SB 523 by Deuell, passed the Senate on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on March 31.