

SUBJECT: Revising Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hupp, Eissler, A. Allen, Goodman, Naishtat, Paxton, Reyna

0 nays

2 absent — J. Davis, Gonzalez Toureilles

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 13 — 30-0

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: The Interagency Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders was established in 1987. Autism is one of five disorders under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD), a category of neurological disorders characterized by severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development, including social interaction and communications skills. The five disorders under PDD are Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett's Disorder, and PDD-Not Otherwise Specified.

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) provides administrative support for the Interagency Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders. The council is composed of seven governor-appointed, at-large members who are family members of a person with autism or PDD. In addition, there is one representative from certain state agencies, appointed by the commissioner of the respective agencies. The council must meet at least quarterly in Austin and develop a state plan that identifies and articulates the needs of individuals with autism and other PDD and recommends mechanisms to meet the needs of those people and their families statewide at least every two years.

The council also addresses contemporary issues affecting services, including:

- intervention and treatment strategies;

- personnel training and education;
- referral, screening, and evaluation services;
- day, respite, and residential care services;
- vocational and adult training programs;
- public awareness strategies;
- contemporary research;
- early identification and diagnosis strategies;
- family counseling and case management; and
- recommendations for monitoring service programs.

The council makes recommendations to the agencies providing services to those with autism and other PDD and advises the Legislature about legislation needed to develop and maintain quality intervention and treatment services.

The advisory task force, established by the council, includes professionals, advocacy groups, and family members of people with autism and other PDD. It advises the council on implementing its duties.

DIGEST:

SB 882 would change the name of the Interagency Council on Autism and Pervasive Development Disorders to the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

The council could require state agencies represented on the council to employ staff to carry out the responsibilities of the council. The executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) would have authority to determine which agency would employ staff for the council and what funding resources the council would use.

The council chair, rather than the advisory task force, would appoint the chair of the task force, and a member of the task force could be appointed or removed without cause by a majority vote of the public members of the council present at a council meeting. Under the bill, the council would provide recommendations to the HHSC and other appropriate state agencies, including recommendations on providing services to people with autism or other PPD. The council would have to use input from people with autism and other PPD, their families, and related advocacy organizations in addressing contemporary issues affecting available services and advising the Legislature.

The council would have to prepare and deliver a report summarizing recommendations to the executive commissioner of HHSC and other state

leadership by November 1 of each year. Requirements identified through the review and assessment and through input from the advisory task force, people with autism and related PPD, their families, and related advocacy organizations, would be used by the council to develop a strategy for establishing programs.

The council could use funds appropriated from available resources to provide recommendations to HHSC and other appropriate agencies responsible for implementing services to people with autism or other PPD. HHSC or any other agency designated by it could work with the council to develop procedures for allocating available funds to programs.

Any members of the council serving terms before the effective date of the bill could continue to serve the rest of those terms until February 1, 2007, if that was when the term was set to expire. SB 882 would require the governor to appoint seven members to the council for terms beginning February 1, 2007, with three members appointed to terms expiring February 1, 2008, and four appointed to terms expiring February 1, 2009.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Autism is the most common of the PPDs, affecting as many as six out of every 1,000 individuals. This means that as many as 132,000 Texans today are believed to have some form of autism and other PDD. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other governmental agencies, autism is on the rise and growing at a rate of 10-17 percent per year.

SB 882 would make necessary changes and updates to increase the involvement of persons with autism or other PPD and their families in the services provided by the council. The bill also would strengthen the council and provide for which agency staff members would be responsible for implementing the council's duties.

The mission of the council remains important and is more pressing than ever before. However, the mission will remain unattainable unless the recommendations of this council are adopted and the council has the resources necessary to implement its mandates. In its current form, the council lacks the necessary resources to accomplish its statutory duties. Funds should be committed to accomplish the mission of the council. SB 882 would allow for more specified funding to be appropriated to the

council for providing recommendations to the HHSC and other state agencies.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

While the proposed changes to the council would be worthwhile, funding also should be made available to create and maintain an Internet website dedicated to autism and other PDD that would contain information and links to service providers. There is currently no website dedicated solely to pulling together information in this state about services for persons with autism or other PDD. Parents of newly diagnosed children are generally overwhelmed and desperate for information about services and treatment options, but there is no single source of information that describes the services available or gives contact numbers. This website should describe the various services offered by each of the agencies and provide eligibility requirements for each of the services. It should also provide contact information about each of the service programs, give links to the websites of each of the agencies and other helpful websites, and provide information about current treatment options and research.