

- SUBJECT:** Creating a statewide autism spectrum disorders resource center
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Herrero, Darby, Hernandez, Hughes, Legler, Naishtat, Walle
0 nays
1 absent — Elkins
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Miryam Bujanda, Methodist Healthcare Ministries; Jennifer Canaday, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Dwight Harris, Texas-American Federation of Teachers; Steve Levin; Lisa Lewis-Nourzao, Texas PTA; Noelita Lugo, Texans Care for Children; Nagla Moussa, The ARC of Texas; Donald Smith, Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition; Monica Thyssen, Advocacy, Inc.; Fil Valderrama; Shanna Weisfeld, Texas State Teachers Association)
Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** The Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders was established in 1987 by the 70th Legislature. 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 communication skills. The five disorders under PDD are Autistic Disorder, Asperger’s Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett’s Disorder, and PDD-Not Otherwise Specified.

The council makes recommendations to 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.
- DIGEST:** HB 1574 would establish the Autism Spectrum Disorders Resource Center to coordinate resources for individuals with autism and other PDD and their families. The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)

would consult with the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders and other appropriate state agencies to create and administer the center. The center would be designed to:

- collect and distribute information and research regarding autism and other PDD;
- conduct training and development activities for schools, medical and law enforcement personnel, and others who, in the course of their work, interact with individuals with autism and other PDD;
- coordinate with local entities that provide services to individuals with autism and other PDD; and
- provide support for families affected by autism and other PDD.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

With the creation of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Resource Center, HB 1574 would enable families and professionals who deal with autism to have access to training, information, and resources in one designated location.

Early diagnosis is critical in the treatment of autism and is the key to better outcomes. Most children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) spend years misdiagnosed because parents do not understand the symptoms they are observing. When they seek professional help, many medical and educational professionals are not trained to recognize the disorder, so valuable time is wasted when treatment could have been provided. HB 1574 would address these issues by providing education and training for medical and education professionals to ensure early diagnosis of ASD and increase awareness of the disorder.

In addition, few understand the impact that ASD has on the entire family. Care of a child with ASD requires 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Relationships suffer as families struggle to cope with the disorder and its implications. The state resource center established by the bill would not only provide education and training but offer support for the entire family.

Without intervention, children with ASD have difficulty developing the life skills necessary to make employment and independent living possible as adults. These adults then often require the state to provide care and services at great cost to taxpayers. As is often the case with early intervention programs, paying some now would save a lot later. One

recent study indicated that Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI), over 18 years, would save the state of Texas \$208,500 for each child with ASD, a total savings of more than \$2 billion. This was based on 2002 prevalence data for Texas school children, which has since doubled.

Texas ranks 50th in states providing services to children with autism. A centralized and comprehensive resource center, as established by the bill, could make enormous strides to counter this statistic by providing vital information to families, physicians, colleges, social services agencies, day cares, and schools, thus improving the lives of Texas children now and in the future. In the fiscal note, the LBB found that any cost to implement this program could be absorbed within existing resources.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.