

**SUBJECT:** Study of costs and benefits of a pilot program for adults with autism

**COMMITTEE:** Human Services — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Herrero, Darby, Hernandez, Hughes, Legler, Naishtat, Walle  
0 nays  
1 absent — Elkins

**WITNESSES:** For — Joyce Gruger, Ronnie Schleiss, Autism Society of Greater Austin; Nagla Moussa, The Arc of Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Miryam Bujanda, Methodist Healthcare Ministries; Angela Day; Jeff Garrison-Tate, Community Now!; Steve Levine; Michelle Romero, Texas Medical Association; Judy Schlotzhauer; Monica Thyssen, Advocacy, Inc.; Fil Valderrama, on behalf of Christopher Valderrama, Blanca Rodriguez, Yolanda Valderrama, David Rodriguez, Angie Valderrama, and Marti Jennings)  
Against — None

**DIGEST:** CSHB 1905 would require the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to determine the costs and benefits of initiating a pilot program to provide services to adults with autism and other related disabilities with similar support needs.

The study would examine a pilot program designed to:

- promote continued individual development and avoid regression;
- encourage sustainable employment and community integration through services and supports coordination to increase job skills and competitive employment opportunities;
- develop meaningful community-based activities for individuals for whom competitive employment was not a goal;
- promote self-determination and independence;

- coordinate services and behavioral supports across all areas of need; and
- allow for flexible funding and services to meet individual needs.

The executive commissioner would be required to:

- describe a pilot program with supports to provide options for independent living, community-based housing, employment training, and leisure and recreational activities;
- identify the potential benefit to individuals who would receive services from the pilot program;
- research and analyze best practices and programs from other states;
- consult with key stakeholders, including advocacy groups, potential service recipients, and parents;
- address the barriers that may prevent adults with autism and related disabilities from living in their local community, including:
  - housing needs and living arrangements;
  - behavioral services;
  - social and communication services and supports;
  - transportation issues; and
  - health and medical care;
- identify the existence and cause of service gaps in the state;
- develop recommendations and determine costs associated with eliminating service gaps; and
- identify potential federal funding for the pilot program.

A report would be submitted, no later than September 1, 2010, by the executive commissioner to the governor and various legislative leaders detailing the findings and conclusions of the study, including recommendations for the structure of the pilot program and an appropriate agency to design and administer it. Also included would be an estimation of the number of individuals who could benefit from the program if it were instituted statewide, as well as the potential cost to the state and whether it could lead to savings. Finally, the report would include a method of determining who would be eligible to participate, and which Medicaid waiver programs would be appropriate to the pilot program or whether new waiver programs would be required.

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, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1905 would establish a pilot program to examine and recognize the special needs of adults with autism. While public school systems have instituted successful programs for children with autism, adult autism services are lacking in Texas. Children with autism who have made tremendous strides while in school programs regress and lose the ability to function in the community without services as adults. Adults with autism are unable to receive services targeting their specific disability under the current waiver programs offered by the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). An increased incidence in autism began around 1990. One in every 150 children is now diagnosed with the disorder. A flood of individuals with autism is about to hit the adult services system, and the bill would be an effort to get ahead of the problem.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.