

SUBJECT: Establishing a center for public safety training in the Rio Grande Valley

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security and Public Safety — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Phillips, Nevárez, Burns, Dale, Johnson, Metcalf, Moody,
M. White, Wray

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Ruben Villescás, City of Pharr Police Department; Shirley Reed,
Mario Reyna, and Victor Valdez, Jr., South Texas College; (*Registered,
but did not testify*: Holly Deshields, City of McAllen; Sergio Contreras,
City of Pharr; Elizabeth Lippincott, Texas Border Coalition; Lon Craft,
TMPA)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kim Vickers, Texas Commission
on Law Enforcement)

BACKGROUND: HCR 219 by Muñoz, enacted by the 83rd Legislature in 2013, outlined the
development of the Regional Center for Public Safety Excellence. The bill
described the growing need for law enforcement personnel in the Rio
Grande Valley region and the collaboration that would take place to
develop the regional center's training programs.

DIGEST: HB 1887 would amend the Education Code to create the Regional Center
for Public Safety Excellence to provide education and training for law
enforcement personnel in the Rio Grande Valley. The instruction provided
by the regional center would include:

- education and training toward an associate of applied science
degree or certificate or another public safety or law enforcement-
related associate degree or certificate;
- a baccalaureate degree for applied science or applied technology
authorized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board;

- a Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) officer certification; and
- a continuing education certification.

The bill would require South Texas College to administer the regional center in partnership with political subdivisions and participating school districts in the Rio Grande Valley. The headquarters of the regional center would be located at the South Texas College in Pharr, Texas. The center could use property and facilities at other locations in Hidalgo and Starr counties.

The program or course curriculum developed by the regional center would be required to satisfy any requirements imposed by TCOLE for the center to operate as a commission-approved training provider.

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement could authorize reimbursement to a political subdivision or state agency for expenses incurred by personnel attending training offered by the regional center.

The regional center would be allowed to solicit and accept gifts and grants from any public or private source for the regional center, and the Legislature also could appropriate money for the regional center.

This 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, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1887 would increase necessary access to training opportunities for officers in the Rio Grande Valley region and, in turn, improve public safety and border security. The Texas Workforce Commission projects an estimated 22 percent increase in police officer positions in the South Texas region in the next 10 years, but only four police academies in the counties of Hidalgo and Starr offer basic police officer courses certified by TCOLE. In fact, 28 agencies in South Texas lack police academies. HB 1887 would provide law enforcement in the region with nearby training.

The training provided at the regional center also would provide officers with college credit toward either an associate's or a bachelor's degree, while the four police academies in the area would not. The training programs would satisfy any official education standards imposed by the commission.

HB 1887 would provide specialized training and continuing education that officers in the region currently must travel far to obtain. Officers in the Rio Grande Valley usually have to travel to College Station or San Antonio for specialized training or continuing education courses at the expense of local police departments. The bill would ensure officers did not have to leave the region for necessary training. The city of Pharr is donating between 50 and 60 acres of land to make the center large enough to house various specialized facilities.

Although South Texas College already has the authority without the passage of HB 1887 to establish the regional center, there are many benefits to codifying the center into statute. The statute would serve as a model for future development of more regional centers of this kind that provide specialized training and college credit. Having the regional center in statute also would provide access to state and federal funding, including from the Department of Homeland Security.

The bill could be amended to remove a provision that would allow the commission to authorize reimbursements to political subdivisions or state agencies for officer training costs, making the availability of funding for these reimbursements no longer a concern.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1887 is not necessary because South Texas College already has full authority to establish such a center and provide courses for college credit.

The provisions in HB 1887 that would allow the commission to reimburse a political subdivision or state agency would be difficult to implement if funds were not appropriated to the commission. There is currently no other funding that is provided to TCOLE to make these reimbursements.

NOTES:

The author intends to offer a floor amendment to remove sec. 130.093(e) from section 1 of the bill, eliminating a provision that would allow the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement to authorize reimbursement to a political subdivision or state agency for expenses incurred by personnel attending training programs at the regional center.