

- SUBJECT:** Grant program to fund domestic violence high-risk teams
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Raymond, Rose, Keough, Klick, Naishtat, Peña, Price, Spitzer
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — S. King
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Judy Powell, Parent Guidance Center; Aaron Setliff, The Texas Council on Family Violence; Michael Gutierrez)
- Against — None
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Debra Owens, Office of Attorney General)
- DIGEST:** HB 3327 would add Government Code, subch. B, ch. 402 to create the Domestic Violence High Risk Teams Grant Program. Under the program, the attorney general would be responsible for using appropriated money to award grants to domestic violence high-risk teams. The bill would define a domestic violence high-risk team as a multidisciplinary team that coordinates efforts to make victims of family violence safer by monitoring and containing perpetrators, sharing information, and providing victim services. The team could be composed of:
- law enforcement officers;
 - prosecutors;
 - community supervision and corrections departments;
 - victim advocates;
 - nonprofit organizations that provide services or shelter to victims of family violence; and
 - medical personnel.

Grant recipients could use the grant money only to fund a domestic high-risk team's efforts to reduce or prevent incidents of domestic violence and provide domestic violence services to victims.

The bill would require the attorney general to:

- request and evaluate proposals for grants;
- award grants based on need for domestic violence services in the community where the team is located and the effectiveness or potential effectiveness of the team;
- establish procedures to administer the grant program, including for submitting and evaluating proposals; and
- apply for any available federal grant funds for the prevention of domestic violence to supplement any appropriations for the program.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 3327 would help prevent homicides of high-risk domestic violence victims. Victims of domestic violence face one of the greatest risks of preventable homicide in Texas. This bill would put to use extensive research that helps identify and predict when a potentially lethal incident is likely to occur.

The bill would interrupt the pattern of escalation in domestic violence cases by addressing victim safety and offender accountability equally. For example, in addition to identifying high-risk cases and supporting victims, the bill would allow for the coordinated monitoring and containment of offenders.

Confidential information could be shared through secure systems with team members in the community, communication that is vital for achieving a fast and appropriate response in cases of domestic violence. Sharing of information could lead to the early identification of high-risk offenders, which is critical for preventing homicides.

Money to fund these grants would not come from the attorney general's existing budget. Even if the Legislature did not appropriate funding for this program, which currently appears in Article 11 of the House-passed fiscal 2016-17 general appropriations bill, the attorney general still could apply for federal funding to award grants under the program.

The proposed Domestic Violence High Risk Teams Grant Program is modeled on a similar program developed in Massachusetts that has proved extremely successful at using risk assessments to identify and monitor domestic violence victims at the highest risk of homicide. The Department of Justice has identified this model as one of the most promising practices for the nation, and the Massachusetts program already has provided training for 4,000 criminal justice professionals and advocates.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 3327 could create an unfunded mandate. Federal grant money is not guaranteed and might not be sufficient for the program to function effectively without an appropriation from the Legislature for the attorney general to use in awarding grants.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note, the fiscal implications of HB 3327 cannot be determined at this time due to a number of unknown variables, including the number and value of the grants that would be awarded. The House-passed budget bill includes \$4 million under Article 11 for the Domestic Violence High Risk Teams Grant Program during fiscal 2016-17.

A similar bill to create a grant program to fund domestic violence high-risk teams, SB 1706 by Huffman, was approved by the Senate State Affairs Committee on April 14 and recommended for the local and uncontested calendar.