

- SUBJECT:** Creating a voluntary specialty certification for insurance agents
- COMMITTEE:** Insurance — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Phillips, Muñoz, Anderson, Gooden, Oliverson, Paul, Sanford, Turner, Vo
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Deborah Polan, AIG; Lee Loftis, Independent Insurance Agents of Texas; Tim Von Kennel, National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors, NAIFA; Amanda Martin, Texas Association of Business; Jamie Dudensing, Texas Association of Health Plans; Lee Manross, Texas Association of Health Underwriters; Jennifer Cawley, Texas Association of Life and Health Insurers; Clayton Stewart, Texas Medical Association; David Reynolds, Texas Osteopathic Medical Association; Bonnie Bruce, Texas Society of Anesthesiologists; Greg Herzog, Texas Society of Gastroenterology and Endoscopy and Texas Neurology Society)
- Against — None
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jamie Walker, Texas Department of Insurance)
- DIGEST:** HB 1297 would require the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) to establish a voluntary specialty certification program for insurance agents who have completed training regarding self-insured health benefit plans. The specialty certification would be open to general life, accident, and health license holders. Those certified by the specialty certification program could advertise, as specified by TDI rule, that they had been specially trained regarding self-insured health benefit plans.
- To receive the certification, an individual would be required to:
- complete training in the law applicable to self-insured health

- benefit plans;
- complete a course applicable to self-insured health benefit plans as prescribed and approved by the insurance commissioner; and
  - pass an examination testing the individual's knowledge and qualification.

The commissioner of insurance would certify that the individual had completed the course and passed the examination and could adopt rules as necessary to administer the specialty certification. The bill would require individuals to continue to hold a general life, accident, and health license in order to maintain the certification.

Individuals could obtain the specialty certification without completing the required course and examination if they demonstrated to TDI that they held a designation as a registered health underwriter (RHU), certified employee benefit specialist (CEBS), or a registered employee benefits consultant (REBC).

To renew the specialty certification, a certified individual would be required to complete continuing education relevant to self-insured health benefit plans within the two-year certification period. The commissioner would rule to set requirements for continuing education. Each hour of education completed to obtain or renew the specialty certification could be used to satisfy an hour of continuing education otherwise applicable to insurance agents.

TDI would maintain and publish a list on its website of all individuals who held the specialty certification in self-insured plans, together with each individual's business address, phone number, and service area.

TDI could begin issuing these specialty certifications by January 1, 2018. The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1297 would provide insurance agents with the opportunity to receive a certification that acknowledged their expertise in "self-insured" health plans. These health plans are different from conventional fully insured

health plans in that they provide financial protection for employers, not medical benefits for employees. With these plans, employers retain all risk of medical care costs for those covered by the plan but they offer small businesses a way to cut costs.

Many employers are familiar only with fully insured plans and need information about the vast differences between self-insured plans and other health benefit plans. A recent study also found that consumers lacked information about the definition of a copay, deductible, and other common insurance terms. The bill would promote health literacy and understanding of this insurance option among consumers and patients by creating this voluntary designation.

Insurance agents and brokers are often trusted resources for health plan information, and this specialty certification would increase the ability of agents to share information with employers regarding the specifics of these plans, resulting in a clearer, deeper understanding by employers on this option.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

A companion bill, SB 770 by Watson, was referred to the Senate Business and Commerce Committee on February 22.