

- SUBJECT:** Creating the County Jail Telemental Health Fund
- COMMITTEE:** County Affairs — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Coleman, Springer, Biedermann, Hunter, Neave, Stickland, Thierry, Uresti
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Roberts
- WITNESSES:** For — Jim Allison, County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Dennis D. Wilson, Sheriffs' Association of Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Reginald Smith, Communities for Recovery; Latosha Taylor, Grassroots Leadership; Grace Chimene, League of Women Voters of Texas; Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas; Eric Kunish, National Alliance on Mental Illness; Rick Thompson, Texas Association of Counties; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Sara Gonzalez, Texas Hospital Association; Joseph Green, Travis County Commissioners Court; Woodrow Gossom, Wichita County)
- Against — None
- On — Brandon Wood, Texas Commission on Jail Standards
- BACKGROUND:** Some observers have suggested that while a significant percentage of inmates have a mental illness or substance abuse disorder, county jails may lack certain access to mental health services, especially in rural areas.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 4117 would create the County Jail Telemental Health Fund as a dedicated account in the general revenue fund. The fund would consist of appropriations by the Legislature and gifts, donations, and grants, including federal grants.

The bill also would require the Commission on Jail Standards to adopt reasonable rules and procedures to ensure prisoner safety, including those requiring a county jail to have the ability to access a mental health professional on site or through a telemental health service 24 hours a day. The commission also could establish a grant program by rule to fund county programs, training, or capital improvements in a county jail.

Money in the County Jail Telemental Health Fund could be appropriated to the commission only for programs, training, and capital improvements necessary to implement or improve telemental health services in county jails with a certified capacity of 96 or fewer prisoners.

The commission would be required to adopt rules and procedures provided by this bill by September 1, 2018. County jails would have to comply with these rules and procedures beginning September 1, 2020.

To the extent of any conflict, the bill would prevail over another act of the 85th Legislature relating to nonsubstantive additions and corrections to code.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note, there could be an indeterminate cost to the state to establish a telemental health dedicated fund, depending on the funding provided by certain sources. The Texas Commission on Jail Standards would require an additional full-time employee to administer the grant program which would cost an estimated \$83,782 in fiscal 2018 and \$82,682 each subsequent year.

The fiscal impact to some local governments also could be significant. According to the commission, 130 county jails currently do not employ or contract for a mental health professional.