

- SUBJECT:** Defining school social work services in the Education Code
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 11 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Bohac, Deshotel, Dutton, Gooden, K. King, Koop, Meyer, VanDeaver
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — Rachel Gandy, Disability Rights Texas; Ashley Howard, National Association of Social Workers; Lara Hulin; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mark Wiggins, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Chandra Villanueva, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Ashlea Graves, Houston ISD; Celina Moreno, MALDEF; Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers Texas; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Kyle Ward, Texas PTA; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Aidan Utzman, United Ways of Texas)
- Against — None
- On — Jan Friese, Texas Counseling Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kara Belew and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency)
- BACKGROUND:** Occupations Code, sec. 505.0025 defines the practice of social work.
- Education Code, sec. 21.003(b) establishes that licensed social workers may perform specific services within the social work profession for a school district.
- DIGEST:** HB 743 would define “social work services” within the Education Code to mean services specialized to assist students and families and designed to alleviate barriers to learning; connect the home, community, and school; promote advocacy; strengthen relationships; and assist with basic and psychosocial needs.

The bill would state that a social worker could provide social work services to students and families in a school or district and would collaborate with school administrators and other school professionals in order to enhance students' learning environments.

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, 2017, and would apply beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 743 would define the role of social workers in schools, providing clarity and guidance on the significant part social workers play in assisting students and families. Social workers across Texas have noted that school administrators do not always understand the role of these professionals in schools, which may be due to the lack of a clear definition of social work services in the Education Code.

The bill would recognize in statute the vital role school social workers play in the lives of many children and families. School social workers can serve an important function in assessing students' needs, facilitating their access to resources such as state and federal agencies and community-based organizations, and helping to strengthen relationships among students' families, the community, and schools. Placing a definition of social work services in the Education Code would help increase awareness about the impact social workers can have in schools.

While the Occupations Code defines social workers in general, it does not describe school social workers in particular. The Education Code already provides a definition for school counselors, and this bill would bring similar clarity to the role of school social workers. Many states already include a separate definition of school social workers in their statutes and HB 743 would mirror that practice in Texas.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 743 is unnecessary because the Education Code currently grants school districts the authority to hire social workers. Further, the role and scope of social workers already is defined in the Occupations Code, and

adding another definition could result in regulatory confusion. A better and clearer approach would be to amend the Occupations Code to address social workers in school settings.