

SUBJECT: Allowing first responders to access own immunization history in disasters

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — S. Thompson, Wray, Coleman, Frank, Guerra, Lucio, Price, Sheffield, Zedler

0 nays

2 absent — Allison, Ortega

WITNESSES: For — Ray Callas, Texas Medical Association, Texas Public Health Coalition; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Joel Romo, Association of Texas EMS Professionals; Aimee Bertrand, Harris County Commissioners Court; Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.; Mike Wisko, Texas Fire Chiefs Association; Sara Gonzalez, Texas Hospital Association; Rekha Lakshmanan, The Immunization Partnership)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Imelda Garcia, Department of State Health Services)

BACKGROUND: Health and Safety Code sec. 161.00707 requires the Department of State Health Services to develop a program for informing first responders about the department's immunization registry and educating first responders about the benefits of being included in the registry, including ensuring first responders receive necessary immunizations to prevent the spread of communicable diseases to which they may be exposed during emergency situations and preventing duplication of vaccinations.

DIGEST: HB 1256 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to establish a process granting first responders direct access to the Department of State Health Services' immunization registry during a disaster for verification of a first responder's immunization history.

During the preparation for or response to a disaster, as declared by the president of the United States, the governor of Texas, or the governor of another state, and with the first responder's electronic or written consent, the bill also would permit the first responder's employer or supervisor to access the registry under the process established by HHSC.

By January 1, 2020, the executive commissioner of HHSC would have to adopt rules to implement the bill's provisions.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1256 would ensure first responders had access to their immunization status during declared disasters, when first responders can be exposed to potentially serious or deadly communicable diseases. During Hurricane Harvey, many first responders found themselves unaware of their vaccination status. The lack of access to their immunization information delayed first responders' efforts in rendering aid and increased risks to their own and others' personal health and safety. The bill would establish necessary protocols to ensure timely access to first responders' immunization information, meeting the demands of disaster response and preventing similar confusion.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No concerns identified.