

SUBJECT: Training for persons who may interact with individuals with autism

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Clardy, Deshotel, Klick, Miller, Noble, Rose

0 nays

1 absent — Meza

WITNESSES: For — Kisha Wilson; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dennis Borel, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Eric Kunish, NAMI Austin; Julia Egler, NAMI Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent; Clayton Travis, Texas Pediatric Society)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Liz Kromrei, Department of Family and Protective Services; Curtis Walters, Health and Human Services Commission)

BACKGROUND: Human Resources Code sec. 114.013 requires the Health and Human Services Commission to conduct training and development activities for individuals who may interact with an individual with autism or another pervasive developmental disorder in the course of their employment, including school, medical, or law enforcement personnel.

DIGEST: HB 1386 would add Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) personnel to the list of employees required to receive training conducted by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) on how to interact and communicate with an individual with autism or another pervasive developmental disorder.

The bill would require that the training developed and conducted by

HHSC was:

- evidence-based;
- applicable to the professional role of each type of personnel receiving the training; and
- instructive regarding means of effectively communicating and engaging with individuals with limited social or verbal abilities.

The bill would require HHSC, in consultation with an institution of higher education, to revise the materials and methods for the training and development activities by September 1, 2024, and at least once every five years thereafter.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

HB 1386 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to provide Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) employees with training on how to effectively communicate or engage with individuals with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. This would help personnel to better protect and serve these individuals.

Some individuals with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders may be non-verbal or have limited social abilities, and it can be difficult for professionals who interact with these individuals to communicate with and serve them well. Because individuals with developmental disabilities are at a higher risk for abuse and neglect than their peers, it is imperative that personnel who interact with them, including DFPS personnel, be trained to serve them effectively.

The bill would ensure that the provided HHSC training was evidence-based and relevant to the professionals receiving it. By requiring the HHSC to revise the efficiency and applicability of their training every five years, the bill would ensure that personnel were educated and equipped to the best degree possible to effectively communicate with individuals with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

HB 1386 would add another training requirement for DFPS personnel, who already receive many different kinds of training. While the training required by the bill would be helpful, it might be better to include ways to more efficiently deliver it in order to protect against overburdening caseworkers, such as by removing other training requirements or combining new training with existing requirements.