

SUBJECT: Requiring HHSC to provide co-navigation services for deaf-blind persons

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Hull, Meza, Neave, Noble, Rose

1 nay — Shaheen

1 absent — Klick

WITNESSES: For — Kim Powers, Deaf Blind Service Center of Austin; Erik Hammer; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Dennis Borel, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Lucy Robles, Deaf Grassroot Movement of Texas; Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent; Amy Litzinger)

Against — None

On — Ron Lucey and Randi Turner, Office of the Governor-Committee on People with Disabilities; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Lorraine Breslow, HHSC)

BACKGROUND: Interested parties note that about 2,500 Texans are challenged with hearing and vision loss and not all qualify for existing state-supported services such as the Deaf-Blind with Multiple Disabilities Medicaid waiver program. As a result, these individuals rely primarily on volunteers whose services often are difficult to obtain. Suggestions have been made to establish a co-navigator services program within the Health and Human Services Commission.

DIGEST: HB 3287 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) by September 1, 2022, to operate a statewide co-navigation services program through which the commission would reimburse trained co-navigators for providing certain services to deaf-blind individuals.

Definition. The bill would define "co-navigation services" as services provided to a deaf-blind person that assisted the person to physically

access the person's environment and to make informed decisions. The term would include providing visual and environmental information or sighted guide services and assisting with communication accessibility by communicating in the deaf-blind person's preferred language and communication mode.

The term would not include performing any of the following for the person:

- providing personal care services;
- completing ordinary errands;
- making decisions;
- teaching or otherwise instructing; or
- interpreting in a formal setting, including a medical, legal, or business setting.

Duties of HHSC. The bill would require HHSC to ensure that quality co-navigation services were provided by:

- monitoring co-navigators' compliance with program rules;
- developing funding sources that were in addition to state sources and that would reduce reliance on the state sources for the program's continuation; and
- providing funding and technical assistance for training programs for co-navigators and deaf-blind persons.

The executive commissioner of HHSC by rule would have to establish reimbursement rates for co-navigators using a tiered wage scale based on a co-navigator's level of training in certain communication techniques.

Other provisions. The bill would authorize the executive commissioner to establish an advisory committee to advise the commission in developing and operating the program. The committee would be required to include persons who are deaf-blind and other stakeholders.

By September 1, 2022, the executive commissioner would have to adopt

rules to implement the co-navigation services program.

Under the bill, the executive commissioner could adopt rules to operate the program efficiently and ensure that co-navigators receiving reimbursement had adequate training to provide services.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$1.4 million to general revenue through fiscal 2023.