

SUBJECT: Establishing the Texas Interoperability Council

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 14 ayes — King, Hernandez, Anchía, Darby, Y. Davis, Geren, Guillen, Hull, McQueeney, Metcalf, Raymond, Smithee, Thompson, Turner

0 nays

1 absent — Phelan

WITNESSES: For — Jordan Ghawi, BCESD2; Stephen Sample, Bexar County; Tom Oney, Lower Colorado River Authority; Jeremy Mazur, Texas 2036; Mikal Watts (*Registered, but did not testify*: Isaac Albarado, Kelly Sadler, American Electric Power Texas; Mark Bell, Association of Electric Companies of Texas; Caroline Messer, AT&T; Melissa Shannon, Bexar County Commissioners Court; Jeff Bonham, CenterPoint Energy, Inc.; Carrie Rogers, City of Austin; Adam Haynes, Conference of Urban Counties; Elisa M. Tamayo, El Paso County; Scott Hutchinson, Entergy Texas; Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club; Mindy Carr, Oncor; Katherine Yoder, Parkland; Michael Lozano, Permian Basin Petroleum Association; Sloan Byerly, RapidDeploy; Michael Ruggieri, Southwestern Elec. Power Co. (SWEPCO); J Pete Laney, State Firefighters' & Fire Marshals' Association; Kelly Rasti, Texas Association of School Boards; Julia Harvey, Texas Electric Cooperatives; Monty Wynn, Texas Municipal League; Ben Utley, Texas-New Mexico Power (TNMP); Elisa Hernandez, University Medical Center of El Paso; Damon Withrow, Xcel Energy)

Against — None

On — Nim Kidd, Texas Division of Emergency Management

DIGEST: CSHB 13 would establish the Texas Interoperability Council to develop and implement a statewide strategic plan for governing the interoperability of emergency communication equipment and infrastructure, develop and

implement emergency alert systems, and incorporate communication technologies into the state's emergency communication network. The Council also would administer a grant program to help local governments acquire interoperable emergency communication equipment and construct infrastructure for effective emergency communication among first responders.

**Council organization.** The Council would be composed of the chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) as presiding officer and six other members, including two each appointed by the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House of Representatives. Appointed members would serve staggered six-year terms. The bill would establish that certain state laws related to open meetings requirements and administrative procedures for state agencies would not apply to the Council, and the bill would exempt information held by the Council from public disclosure under the Public Information Act.

**Strategic plan.** The Council would be required to develop a statewide strategic plan to govern the interoperability of emergency communication equipment and infrastructure, including plans:

- for the construction of communication infrastructure, including the acquisition of land as necessary;
- to ensure that first responders were equipped with interoperable communication equipment throughout the state; and
- to ensure that any new equipment and infrastructure could be adapted to or integrated with existing equipment and infrastructure.

The plan also would have to include training programs to ensure that state and local governments had the skills and resources needed to access and use available emergency communication equipment and infrastructure.

The bill would require the Council to consider including in the plan the use of outdoor warning sirens, an emergency alert system capable of alerting persons in an area affected by fire through messages sent to

communication devices, and broadband service as part of the state's emergency communications network.

**Grant program.** The Council would have to establish a program to provide grants to local governments to purchase and construct emergency communication equipment and infrastructure and to train employees in effective use of the equipment during an emergency. The Council would be required to establish procedures to administer the program, including eligibility criteria, guidelines for grant amount, and procedures for submitting and evaluating proposals.

The Council would have to enter into a contract with each grant recipient that included performance requirements and would be required to monitor and enforce the contract's terms. The bill would authorize the Council to require as a condition of a grant award that the recipient's officers or employees completed certain training programs and the recipient adopted standardized procedures for incident command or management. The Council could delegate grant program administration to a state agency. The bill also would establish authorized uses and sources of grant program funding.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

By establishing the Texas Interoperability Council to plan and fund efforts to make emergency communication equipment interoperable throughout the state, CSHB 13 would help ensure that first responders in Texas can effectively communicate during emergencies. Lack of communication and interoperability has been a leading problem hindering effective response to emergencies like the devastating 2024 wildfires in the Texas Panhandle. Research suggests that wildfire season may get longer and affect a greater portion of the state in coming years, and seamless communication among first responders will be essential to saving lives and preserving property.

Multiple first responder entities are involved in combatting major disasters, but these entities often use incompatible communication

systems that operate on different radio frequencies. The Council that would be established by CSHB 13 would improve coordination during emergencies by creating a statewide plan to provide emergency responders with the equipment and training necessary to communicate with each other across state agency and local government lines. The grant program under CSHB 13 would help entities with limited resources, such as volunteer fire departments, leverage the buying power of the state to enhance their emergency communication capabilities while ensuring that first responders were trained to use new equipment effectively.

CRITICS  
SAY:

No concerns identified.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of \$5,750,781 to general revenue related funds through the biennium.