

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1712
By: Ellis
State Affairs
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As Filed

DIGEST

Currently, state agencies do not coordinate efforts to respond to questions by the citizenry and have developed separate approaches for helping customers over the phone. Duplication of agency effort and citizen frustration with government are reasons cited as being the result of the current system. This bill would establish the Access Texas Information Center (center), to be administered by the General Services Commission, to provide around-the-clock, toll-free assistance to citizens searching for state information and services.

PURPOSE

As proposed, S.B. 1712 establishes a common information center for state government through which public inquiries can be transferred to the appropriate state governmental entity and frequently requested information can be forwarded.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 2170, Government Code, by adding Subchapter C, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER C. ACCESS TEXAS INFORMATION CENTER

Sec. 2170.101. INFORMATION CENTER. Requires the General Services Commission (commission) to staff and operate an Access Texas information center (center), which is in addition to and does not supplant information centers operated by other state agencies. Requires the center to establish and the commission to publicize a toll-free telephone number to receive public inquiries. Requires the center to remain continuously open and take certain action in response to telephone calls made to the center. Requires the center to establish and maintain an electronic database, and train employees of the center on its use in performing their duties. Requires the database to contain certain information related to governmental entities and employees. Requires the commission to establish and maintain an Internet site that allows for public access to the electronic database. Authorizes the commission to recover the costs of developing and operating the center through interagency contracts. Authorizes the center to charge a certain fee after August 31, 2001 to recover operating costs, if the commission does not receive direct appropriation to operate the center.

Sec. 2170.102. COORDINATION WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES. Requires the commission to ensure that other state agencies have access to the electronic database. Requires the center and other state agencies to enter into contracts to facilitate mutual assistance.

Sec. 2170.103. PRIVATIZATION OF CENTER. Authorizes the State Council on Competitive Government (council) to solicit bids or proposals from private vendors to operate the center. Requires the commission to assist the council in evaluating bids and proposals. Authorizes the council to award a contract to a private vendor if the bid or proposal offers the best value to the state and the vendor will operate the center in a more efficient and effective manner than the state. Authorizes the council to conduct a feasibility study on the consolidation of other state agency information centers into the center. Authorizes the council to consolidate other state agency information centers into the center operated by a private vendor, if the council determines it

feasible.

SECTION 2. Prohibits the commission from receiving a direct appropriation for the center for the state fiscal biennium ending August 31, 2001. Sets forth provisions for the funding of the center.

SECTION 3. Requires the electronic database, Internet site, equipment, and software necessary for the operation of the center to be operational not later than September 2000. Requires the center's telephone number to be listed in all telephone directories in the state by December 2000.

SECTION 4. Emergency clause.
Effective date: upon passage.