

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1693
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Health & Human Services
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 1693 originates from the hearings of the Legislative Committee on Aging during the 2016 interim hearings. The committee heard testimony from advocates for the elderly and those who are visually impaired and blind on the state's effort to address the needs of the 424,000 legally blind elderly in Texas. The Aging Committee was informed that "over the next 15 years the number of people over the age of 65 is expected to grow by 60 percent, which means there will be approximately 60 percent more older Texans who lose their vision, which means there will be some 680,000 legally blind seniors living in Texas by the year 2030."

Concerned stakeholders contend that under the status quo there are no concerted plans by the state to meet this challenge and that existing resources can be built upon to address the present need of the blind and visually impaired in Texas. Testimony provided to the Aging Committee indicated that state agencies and nonprofits are presently able to provide services to only 10 percent of this population.

S.B. 1693 strives to address this concern by developing a statewide initiative that allows the state to better address the needs of visually impaired and blind seniors in the state.

As filed, S.B. 1693 creates the Visual Impairment Task Force (task force) to develop and make recommendations for providing services, including independent living services, to the growing number of seniors in this state with a visual impairment. S.B. 1693 directs the task force to conduct a study to determine the projected growth and geographic distribution of seniors with a visual impairment and methods for improving and expanding services to those seniors.

As proposed, S.B. 1693 amends current law relating to the establishment of the Seniors with a Visual Impairment Task Force.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. (a) Defines "task force."

(b) Requires the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to establish the Seniors with a Visual Impairment Task Force (task force) to develop and make recommendations for providing services to the growing number of seniors in this state with a visual impairment.

(c) Requires the commissioner of state health services (commissioner) to appoint an odd number of members to the task force. Authorizes the commissioner to only appoint a person who volunteers to serve on the task force. Requires the commissioner to appoint members who represent certain institutions, agencies, groups, organizations, and professions.

(d) Provides that a task force member is not entitled to compensation for service on the task force but is entitled to reimbursement for actual and necessary expenses incurred in performing task force duties. Authorizes the task force to accept gifts, grants, and donations to pay for those expenses.

(e) Requires the commissioner to designate a member of the task force to serve as presiding officer. Requires the members of the task force to elect any other necessary officers.

(f) Requires the task force to meet at least quarterly at the call of the presiding officer.

(g) Authorizes the task force to meet by telephone conference call, videoconference, or other similar telecommunication method, notwithstanding Chapter 551 (Open Meetings), Government Code, or any other law. Provides that a meeting held by certain telecommunication methods is subject to the requirements of Sections 551.125(c) (relating to telephone conference call meetings being subject to notice requirements), (d) (relating to the notice requirements for telephone conference call meetings), (e) (relating to requirements for public telephone conference call meetings), and (f) (relating to requiring certain telephone conference call meetings to require two-way communication and identification of the parties), Government Code.

(h) Requires the task force to conduct a study to determine the projected growth and geographic distribution of seniors with a visual impairment in the next 5 to 10 years and methods for improving and expanding services to those seniors. Requires the study to include certain information.

(i) Requires the task force to develop, in collaboration with private entities and other organizations that assist individuals with a visual impairment, methods to publicize the services available to seniors with a visual impairment. Authorizes DSHS to solicit and accept funding for and contract with a private entity for implementing a task force recommendation under this subsection.

(j) Requires the task force to develop recommendations to address the problems of seniors with a visual impairment. Requires the recommendations to be in the form of a new initiative, an immediate proposed regulatory change by a state agency, a proposed statutory amendment, or a suggested funding level.

(k) Requires the task force to develop and submit a written report on the study, publicity methods, and recommendations developed by the task force to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the legislature not later than November 1, 2018.

(l) Provides that the task force is abolished and this Act expires June 1, 2019.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2017.