

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1109
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Health & Human Services
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 2018, the Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee (ATWAC), under the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), issued a report to the legislature that found that there are limited available resources in the state for older adults with vision impairment. ATWAC found that this was the case since many of the existing programs for adults are focused on employment and not necessarily broader needs of an older individual navigating the community and seeking social engagement and independent living outside of employment-related settings.

ATWAC reported that survey feedback and literature review indicated the issue of stigma poses a significant barrier to individuals and families accessing programs. Additionally, an individual's choice to seek assistance may be stopped by the fear of loss of independence related to visual impairment. Additionally, Texas lacks a statewide informational campaign and website for older adults with visual impairments and their families. This gap in information extends to professionals and community stakeholders who may be referral sources.

In order to address these findings, S.B. 1109 directs HHSC to strengthen its outreach efforts to better serve the elderly and blind population in Texas by establishing awareness campaigns aimed at older adults with visual impairment and their families, healthcare providers, aging network partners, and broader community stakeholders such as faith-based communities.

To support the outreach campaign, S.B. 1109 provides for HHSC to establish a toll-free telephone number for providing counseling and referrals to appropriate services for aging adults who are blind or visually impaired, and to post on its website information and training resources for aging adults, community stakeholders, and health care and other service providers that generally serve aging adults.

S.B. 1109 also seeks to develop a tailored approach for outreach by establishing multiple resources by which older adults with visual impairments and their families, or anyone interested, can receive information and can be better assisted to participate in the services available to them.

As proposed, S.B. 1109 amends current law relating to a public outreach campaign for aging adults with visual impairments.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission in SECTION 1 (Section 531.0319, Government Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter B, Chapter 531, Government Code, by adding Section 531.0319, as follows:

Sec. 531.0319. OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS FOR AGING ADULTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS. (a) Requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to conduct public awareness and education outreach campaigns designed to provide information relating to the programs and resources available to aging adults who are blind or visually impaired in this state. Requires the campaigns to be:

(1) tailored to targeted populations, including aging adults with or at risk of blindness or visual impairment and the families and caregivers of those adults, health care providers, including home and community-based services providers, health care facilities, and emergency medical services providers, community and faith-based organizations, and the general public; and

(2) disseminated through methods appropriate for each targeted population, including by attending health fairs and working with organizations or groups that serve aging adults, including community clinics, libraries, support groups for aging adults, veterans organizations, for-profit providers of vision services, and the state and local chapters of the National Federation of the Blind.

(b) Requires HHSC, to support campaigns conducted under this section, to:

(1) establish a toll-free telephone number for providing counseling and referrals to appropriate services for aging adults who are blind or visually impaired;

(2) post on HHSC's Internet website information and training resources for aging adults, community stakeholders, and health care and other service providers that generally serve aging adults, including links to Internet websites that contain resources for persons who are blind or visually impaired, existing videos that provide awareness of blindness and visual impairments among aging adults and the importance of early intervention, best practices for referring aging adults at risk of blindness or visual impairment for appropriate services, and training about resources available for aging adults who are blind or visually impaired for the staff of aging and disability resource centers established under the Aging and Disability Resource Center initiative funded in part by the federal Administration on Aging and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; and

(3) designate an ombudsman in HHSC to assist aging adults who are diagnosed with a visual impairment and are losing vision and the families of those adults with locating and obtaining appropriate services.

(c) Authorizes the executive commissioner of HHSC to adopt rules necessary to implement this section.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2019.