

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1745
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Local Government
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Per the Office of the Attorney General, colonias are defined as residential areas lacking some basic infrastructure such as drinking water supply, sewage treatment, or paved roads. There are more than 2,200 colonias along the Texas-Mexico border.

To date there have been three Secretary of State reports regarding colonias as required by S.B. 827 (2005) and S.B. 99 (2006). These reports were released in 2006, 2010, and 2014. The 2014 report gave recommendations for improving conditions in colonias, including maintaining funding for social welfare programs that assist colonia residents and supporting funding necessary to survey Texas colonias to document available services comprehensively. Despite this work, since 2017 Texas has divested nearly \$860,000 that had been used to fund the colonias initiatives program, and little to no action has been taken on these recommendations. What's more, although S.B. 99 requires the secretary of state to release a report on the status of state-funded colonias projects every four years, it has been more than six years since the last report was released.

According to advocates, these reports left many questions unanswered, such as how a designated colonia eventually may lose that designation and whether there is a need for a comprehensive colonia definition to be used by agencies statewide, rather than allowing each agency to use its own definition. This issue is even more pressing now because of the acute impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on colonia residents due to lack of infrastructure, along with above-average uninsured and unemployment rates. Statistics also have shown that Latinos are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than the average American.

Poor living conditions in colonias can have statewide consequences. The economic stability of South Texas is compromised when a significant number of its residents lack basic infrastructure, especially during a global pandemic. Stakeholders cite worrying trends in the region, including declining fertility and an increasing number of residents moving away, threatening the region's economic longevity and the state as a whole.

S.B. 1745 thus would authorize a joint interim committee to conduct a study regarding colonias to consider issues such as updating the colonia classification system, assessing the definition of colonias across state agencies, adopting new metrics to track conditions in colonias, and reviewing the particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on colonia residents.

As proposed, S.B. 1745 amends current law relating to the creation of a joint interim committee to study colonias and colonia initiatives in this state.

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. INTERIM COMMITTEE; STUDY. (a) Defines "colonia."

(b) Provides that a joint interim committee is established to study colonias and colonia initiatives in this state.

(c) Provides that the joint interim committee is composed of the members of the standing committees of the legislature with primary jurisdiction over colonias and colonia issues. Requires the committee members to select a presiding officer from among the membership.

(d) Requires the joint interim committee, in conducting the study under this section, to:

(1) determine the best methods for updating and maintaining colonia identification systems and for identifying and classifying colonias in which the highest public health risks exist;

(2) consider whether colonias should be defined uniformly across all relevant state agencies and whether that definition should include essential metrics such as economic mobility levels, poverty levels, mortality rates, health professional shortage area scores, and the average level of education attained by colonia residents;

(3) assess best practices and funding needs for surveying the services and infrastructure available in, and demographics of, each colonia, to address the enduring lack of services and infrastructure in colonias;

(4) assess the status of state agency tracking and reporting of state-funded colonia projects and whether improvements to the tracking or reporting mechanisms are necessary;

(5) determine and assess any non-infrastructure needs within colonias and options for this state to address those needs; and

(6) assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on colonias and whether additional state services are necessary to address those impacts.

(e) Provides that the joint interim committee has all other powers and duties provided to a special or select committee by the rules of the senate and house of representatives, by Subchapter B (Committees and Committee Procedure), Chapter 301 (Legislative Organization), Government Code, and by policies of the senate and house committees on administration.

(f) Requires the joint interim committee, not later than September 1, 2022, to prepare and submit to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and the legislature a written report that includes the findings of the committee under this section, including any legislative recommendations.

SECTION 2. ABOLITION OF COMMITTEE. Provides that the joint interim committee established by Section 1 of this Act is abolished and this Act expires November 1, 2022.

SECTION 3. EFFECTIVE DATE. Effective date: September 1, 2021.