

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 161
By: Gonzales
Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Currently, no statewide oral interpreter service is available to our physicians, hospital employees or other healthcare providers in the event that an onsite interpreter is unavailable to patients whose primary language is Spanish.

HB 161 establishes a toll-free number for healthcare providers to assist them in supplying expedient healthcare services to persons with limited English proficiency and ultimately reduces medical liability associated with miscommunication. The toll-free number will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week and will be answered by a healthcare interpreter trained to orally communicate with physicians, hospital employees and other healthcare providers attempting to administer medical services to individuals whose primary language is Spanish.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Executive Commissioner (executive commissioner) of the Health and Human Services Commission in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

HB 161 defines a health care interpreter (interpreter) as a person who is trained to orally communicate with a person whose primary language is Spanish by accurately conveying the meaning or oral health care related statements in English and Spanish. The bill requires the Department of State Health Services (department) to establish a telephone number that is answered by an interpreter 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The interpreter shall provide certain services to physicians, hospital employees, and other health care providers to assist those individuals in communicating with patients whose primary language is Spanish. The bill requires the executive commission to adopt rules to implement the bill, including establishing qualifications required for interpreters who answer the toll-free telephone number.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2008.