

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 1556
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Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In recent years, alert systems, such as the Amber Alert, Silver Alert, and Blue Alert, have been adopted by agencies nationwide. Those used in Texas were developed to broadcast notice on Texas' dynamic messaging signs for the purpose of quickly disseminating information about missing children and senior citizens, and criminals who kill or attack police officers.

H.B. 1556 requires the development and implementation of an alert system to inform citizens of public health emergencies, such as water contamination, chemical spills, plant explosions, or toxic vapor releases, so that proper precautions can immediately be taken. The bill requires the Department of Public Safety to create the system for municipalities and counties to issue local public health and public safety alerts through existing dynamic message signs.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the public safety director of the Department of Public Safety in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 1556 amends the Government Code to require the Department of Public Safety (DPS), with the cooperation of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and emergency management directors, to develop and implement a system for municipalities and counties to issue local public health and safety alerts through an existing system of dynamic message signs. The bill establishes the public safety director as the statewide coordinator of the alert system and requires the director to adopt rules and issue directives to ensure proper implementation of the system and to prescribe forms for use by an emergency management director for a municipality or county in requesting activation of the alert system. The bill requires the rules and directives to include the procedures to be used by a health authority to verify a threat to public health within the authority's jurisdiction, the procedures to be used by a local law enforcement agency to verify a threat to public safety within the agency's jurisdiction, and the procedures to be used by an individual or entity to report information about a threat to public health or safety.

H.B. 1556 requires TxDOT to cooperate with DPS and emergency management directors and assist in developing and implementing the alert system and establish a plan for providing relevant information to the public in affected areas of Texas through an existing system of dynamic message signs. The bill authorizes TxDOT to coordinate the implementation of its duties with the implementation of the silver alert system for missing senior citizens.

H.B. 1556 authorizes an emergency management director to notify DPS if the emergency management director receives notice from a health authority of a verified threat to public health within the authority's jurisdiction or a local law enforcement agency of a verified threat to public safety within the agency's jurisdiction. The bill requires the emergency management director to determine that the information provided poses a credible threat to the municipality or county.

H.B. 1556 requires DPS, on request of an emergency management director, to activate the alert system, to notify appropriate participants in the alert system, and to send the alert to designated media outlets in the affected area. The bill authorizes participating media outlets, following receipt of the alert, to issue the alert at designated intervals.

H.B. 1556 requires a local public health or public safety alert to include all appropriate information that is provided by the emergency management director and information on whom an individual in the affected area can contact for more information. The bill requires the director to terminate any activation of the alert not later than the earlier of the time at which the threat is resolved or the notification period as determined by DPS rule ends. The bill requires an emergency management director that requests activation of the alert system to notify DPS as soon as possible that the threat is resolved. The bill defines "department," "director," "emergency management director," and "health authority," as they relate to the alert system.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.