

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 1948
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Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The population of Texas that resides along the Texas-Mexico border and the Gulf Coast from Laredo to Corpus Christi, in Health Service Region 11, has extremely limited public health and medical infrastructure and faces unique and critical security challenges that impact Texas and the nation. This area is slow to recover from disasters, and dynamic populations, migration, and new rural communities enhance the immediate need for disease control, biodetection, environmental toxicologic management, hazardous materials management, and local medical preparedness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention refers to threats from infectious disease, environmental exposure, and terrorism to identify areas of increased risk. By this measure, Health Service Region 11 could be considered a "biosecurity hot spot" with recent events relating to increased risk of dengue fever, tuberculosis, mercury poisoning, and pesticide exposures, and reported factors that complicate disease surveillance in the area.

H.B. 1948 requires the Department of State Health Services to establish a public health extension service pilot program in Health Service Region 11 to support the local public health and medical infrastructure and address biosecurity threats. The bill authorizes the department to contract with The Texas A&M University System or The University of Texas System, or both systems, to implement or administer all or any part of the program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

ANALYSIS

H.B. 1948 amends the Health and Safety Code to require the Department of State Health Services to establish a public health extension service pilot program in Health Service Region 11 to support local public health and medical infrastructure and promote disease control and medical preparedness and biosecurity and the detection of the introduction of dangerous biological agents, enhanced availability of environmental and toxicologic pathology services, and management of hazardous materials; and to evaluate the effectiveness of a public health extension service program for regions of Texas that may be particularly vulnerable to biosecurity threats, disaster, and other emergencies.

H.B. 1948 authorizes the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to adopt rules for the implementation and administration of the program. The bill authorizes the department to contract with The Texas A&M University System or The University of Texas System, or both systems, to implement or administer all or any part of the program.

H.B. 1948 authorizes the department to implement projects and systems to accomplish the purposes of the program and to provide support for regional disaster medical assistance teams

and tactical medical operations incident management teams; establish a disaster training and exercise program; establish and equip caches to ensure local availability of necessary medical supplies and equipment for use in disasters and other emergencies; establish a regionally based system of emergency medical logistics management to support state and federal emergency management authorities that includes local patient triage sites and local emergency medical operations; and establish a regionally based system to provide technical assistance for disaster mitigation and recovery.

H.B. 1948 requires the department to report on the program to the governor, lieutenant governor, and speaker of the house of representatives not later than December 1, 2010. The bill requires the report to include recommendations for continuation of the program and expansion of the program to other regions of the state that may be particularly vulnerable to biosecurity threats, disaster, and other emergencies. The bill specifies that its provisions expire and the program is abolished September 2, 2011.

H.B. 1948 defines "department," "executive commissioner," and "program."

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the act does not receive the necessary vote, the act takes effect September 1, 2009.