

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2862
By: Kuempel
Public Safety
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Current law requires the unsolved crimes investigation team (UCIT) to be located in Austin, Texas, at the Texas Rangers' headquarters. Due to initial difficulty in filling team positions with experienced peace officers, the Texas Ranger Division of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) requested a change in venue to allow a more suitable location than Austin; San Antonio, Texas, was selected. However, this resulted in a situation in which a majority of the cases being investigated by the team were submitted from agencies near and around the San Antonio area. This arrangement did not appear to provide a fair and equitable means of rendering UCIT services and resources in rural areas, where these services are especially needed. As a result, in January 2008, the members of this team were decentralized from San Antonio, and one UCIT officer was assigned to each of the seven field companies across Texas.

Stationing UCIT personnel in each of the field companies across the state provides better access for smaller agencies and rural agencies seeking assistance with unsolved cases and allows management to assign experienced field officers from within the division to conduct these investigations. These field officers are more familiar with specific geographic prosecutorial and law enforcement agencies in which these cases are submitted, investigated, and prosecuted. Stationing UCIT personnel across Texas allows the division to command and manage UCIT resources in the most effective and productive manner possible.

H.B. 2862 changes the name of the unsolved crimes investigation team within DPS to the unsolved crimes investigation program and removes the specification that the team is located at the headquarters of the Texas Rangers in Austin, Texas. The bill modifies the requirements for a peace officer to be eligible for employment with the program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 2862 amends the Government Code to change the name of the unsolved crimes investigation team within the Department of Public Safety to the unsolved crimes investigation program. The bill provides that the program is a function of the Texas Rangers and removes the specification that the team is located at the headquarters of the Texas Rangers in Austin, Texas. The bill requires a peace officer, to be eligible for employment with this program, to be a sergeant or higher-ranked officer of the Texas Rangers and to have two or more years of experience in the investigation of homicides or other major felonies, rather than to have not less than four years of experience as a peace officer and a degree from an accredited institution of higher education in law, accounting, or computer science or to have two or more years of experience in the investigation of homicides or other major felonies.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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