

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 3950
By: Turner, Chris
Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Currently, six of the 10 major Veterans Health Administration medical facilities are located either on or within 50 miles of Interstate 35. The other four are located near Midland, Amarillo, El Paso and Houston. With over 1.7 million veterans in Texas, this leaves countless veterans in East, West and South Texas without convenient access to a major U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care facility. Often veterans are forced to drive long distances to receive needed care. When not staying in the hospital overnight, veterans are burdened with either acquiring their own lodging or driving several hundred miles back home that same day. Allowing certain veterans to stay overnight free of charge in a vacant room of a university housing facility would relieve a major burden to rural veterans by eliminating the cost of overnight commercial lodging and the dangers of excessive driving, and may also lessen the number of veterans who go without needed medical care.

C.S.H.B. 3950 authorizes veterans who live more than 100 miles from a VA medical facility and, if applicable, their primary or other necessary caregivers to stay overnight free of charge in a vacant room of an institution of higher education housing facility, upon approval of the institution, located a reasonable distance from the hospital, health clinic, or other facility providing health care services to the veteran.

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

C.S.H.B. 3950 amends the Education Code to authorize a veteran receiving health care services from a hospital, health clinic, or other facility operated by the Veterans Health Administration of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and, if applicable, the veteran's primary or other necessary caregiver, to stay, free of charge, in a vacant room of a university housing facility located at and operated by an institution of higher education while the veteran is receiving the health care services if the institution is able to accommodate and approves the veteran's and caregiver's request for temporary housing, the institution is located a reasonable distance from the facility providing health care services to the veteran, and if the veteran resides more than 100 miles from that facility. The bill authorizes the veteran's primary or other necessary caregiver also to stay, free of charge, in a vacant room of a housing facility while the veteran is receiving services from the facility and subject to the same conditions if the veteran is staying at the facility providing health care services. The bill defines "institution of higher education" for these purposes.

EFFECTIVE DATE

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

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 3950 adds a provision not in the original specifying that the vacant room used by an authorized veteran be located at, in addition to operated by, an institution of higher education. The substitute decreases to 100 the minimum number of miles that a veteran has to travel from the veteran's home to a health care facility in order to stay, free of charge, in a vacant room of a university housing facility, from 200 miles in the original. The substitute adds a provision not in the original authorizing the veteran's primary or other necessary caregiver to stay, free of charge, in a vacant room of a university housing facility if certain conditions are met.