

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 205
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Culture, Recreation & Tourism
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

There is a growing awareness of the disconnection between children and the natural world and a growing desire to find policy solutions to the problem. Over the past 20 years, the amount of time children spend outside has fallen by 50 percent, and the time the average child spends plugged into electronic media each day has grown to more than six hours. During the same period, the rate of obesity among adolescents has more than tripled. Other public health implications of sedentary indoor lifestyles include the onset of medical conditions associated with adults, such as Type 2 diabetes, in children. At the same time, there is an increasing body of research pointing to the developmental, health, and educational benefits of learning and playing in natural settings.

Environmental education is a proven strategy to enhance a child's connection to the outdoors, improve academic performance, and increase interest in science and math. Reconnecting children with nature is a solution to many problems facing children today. Children who play outdoors are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, and perform better in school.

C.S.S.B. 205 creates the Texas Partnership for Children in Nature to promote the well-being of Texas children by providing children with opportunities to spend more time outdoors and learn about the environment. The bill requires the partnership to develop and assist in the implementation of a state environmental literacy plan and provide recommendations to the governor and legislature prior to each legislative session.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Partnership for Children in Nature in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 205 amends the Government Code to create the Texas Partnership for Children in Nature. The bill requires the partnership to promote the well-being of Texas' children by providing children with opportunities to spend more time outdoors and to learn about the environment through experiential activities outdoors and formal and informal education concerning the environment. The bill requires the partnership to develop and assist in the implementation of a plan to provide children with structured and unstructured opportunities for outdoor recreation, scientific study, and learning; to develop and assist in the implementation of a state environmental literacy plan; to devise a method to measure baseline data concerning the amount of time children spend outdoors and any increased time children spend outdoors as a result of the partnership's efforts; and to identify opportunities for and barriers to implementing environmental literacy programs in public schools and on public land.

C.S.S.B. 205 establishes the composition of the partnership, sets forth provisions regarding member eligibility, the terms of members, and grounds for removal of a public member of the partnership, and designates the executive director of the Parks and Wildlife Department or the

executive director's representative as the presiding officer of the partnership. The bill authorizes the presiding officer to appoint one or more working groups for any purpose consistent with the duties of the partnership. The bill sets forth provisions regarding partnership meetings, voting, public access to the partnership, reimbursement of member expenses, staff coordination and reporting requirements of the partnership. The bill authorizes the partnership to accept gifts and grants from a public or private source for the partnership to use in performing the partnership's powers and duties.

C.S.S.B. 205 provides that the partnership, in implementing its powers and duties, functions only in an advisory capacity and that membership in the partnership does not constitute public office. The bill exempts the partnership from provisions governing state agency advisory committees. The bill provides that the partnership is subject to the Texas Sunset Act and is abolished September 1, 2021, unless continued in existence as provided by that Act. The bill requires the partnership to adopt rules as necessary for its own procedures. The bill defines "partnership."

C.S.S.B. 205 requires appointments of public members to be made as soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill and establishes that the terms of initial public members expire February 1, 2013.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.S.B. 205 provides that a public member of the Texas Partnership for Children in Nature serves a term of four years, rather than two years as in the original.

C.S.S.B. 205 adds a provision not in the original specifying that the Parks and Wildlife Department is not required to reallocate staff or funding to the detriment of other programs in providing staff support to the partnership.

C.S.S.B. 205 provides that the terms of initial public members appointed to the partnership expire February 1, 2013, rather than February 1, 2011 as in the original.

C.S.S.B. 205 differs from the original in nonsubstantive ways by using language reflective of certain bill drafting conventions.