

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2819
By: King, Susan
Human Services
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) determines eligibility for Texas residents who apply for benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), commonly referred to as the food stamps program. Observers point to the dramatic increase in the number of applications submitted to SNAP and note that HHSC has experienced difficulties in meeting federal timeliness and accuracy requirements for the application process. Interested parties assert that the use of outdated and inefficient procedures greatly hinders SNAP's ability to effectively respond to the immediate needs of applicants. C.S.H.B. 2819 seeks to address this issue by making changes relating to the operation and efficiency of the eligibility determination process for SNAP benefits.

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. 2819 amends the Human Resources Code to require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to develop procedures to ensure that clear guidance on program eligibility requirements is provided to supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP) applicants and prospective applicants and mechanisms are established, including Internet and e-mail mechanisms, as appropriate, by which applicants can obtain answers to basic program-related questions and to ensure that information is provided to each applicant in person, by e-mail, by telephone, or through the mail, as appropriate, about information the applicant is required to submit for purposes of the eligibility determination process. The bill requires HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using office personnel or an automated system or systems to support the eligibility determination process by contacting an applicant in advance of an applicant's scheduled interview to remind the applicant of the interview and the documentation that must be presented at the interview.

C.S.H.B. 2819 requires HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using readily available document scanning technology to reduce storage and maintenance costs and potential loss of data by creating electronic case files for SNAP cases instead of maintaining physical files for those cases and requires HHSC to use that technology if determined feasible and cost-effective. The bill requires HHSC to implement, if feasible and cost-effective, a risk scoring program for SNAP applications to streamline the eligibility determination process, reduce errors, and strengthen fraud detection. The bill requires a risk scoring program implemented by HHSC to be capable of ranking applications based on complexity so that more experienced eligibility determination staff members can be used to process more difficult cases and cases with fraud characteristics and applications ranked as low-risk on fraud characteristics can be processed more expeditiously.

C.S.H.B. 2819 requires HHSC to improve its management of SNAP eligibility determination

staff by establishing clear performance expectations that can serve as the basis for performance assessments, planning for anticipated staffing needs, revising policies regarding overtime and accrual of compensatory time to ensure that eligibility determination staff members have access to supervisors as necessary, assessing the effectiveness of training provided to new eligibility determination staff members, and evaluating the compensation of eligibility determination staff members to determine if the compensation is sufficient to recruit qualified staff members and retain experienced staff members.

C.S.H.B. 2819 requires HHSC, in conjunction with state, regional, and local eligibility determination offices, to identify eligibility determination program performance indicators with respect to which data should periodically be collected. The bill requires HHSC to implement a process for collecting data on the identified performance indicators. The bill requires HHSC to provide periodic management reports generated by the automated eligibility system to eligibility determination offices. The bill requires the reports to include information regarding the number of pending SNAP applications and the number of those applications that have not been processed within applicable timeliness standards. The bill requires HHSC to use the data collected and the reports regarding pending applications to develop and assess strategies for streamlining the SNAP eligibility determination process, improving timeliness of eligibility determinations, and accommodating increases in applications received. The bill defines "commission," and "supplemental nutrition assistance program."

C.S.H.B. 2819 requires HHSC to use supplemental federal funding provided for the administration of SNAP, to the extent available for this purpose, to implement the bill's provisions relating to eligibility determination process efficiency.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2011.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 2819 omits a provision included in the original defining "eligibility determination office."

C.S.H.B. 2819, in a provision requiring the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to develop certain procedures relating to the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) eligibility determination process, omits a specification included in the original making such procedures applicable to local eligibility determination offices. The substitute, in a provision requiring the commission to ensure that information regarding the information the applicant is required to submit for purposes of the eligibility determination process is provided to each applicant, differs from the original by requiring such information to be provided in person, in addition to by e-mail, by telephone, or through the mail, as appropriate, whereas the original requires the information to be provided by e-mail, by telephone, or through the mail.

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by requiring HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using office personnel or an automated system or systems to support the eligibility determination process by contacting an applicant in advance of an applicant's scheduled interview to remind the applicant of the interview and the documentation that must be presented at the interview, whereas the original requires HHSC to develop procedures applicable to local eligibility determination offices to ensure that office personnel support the eligibility determination process by contacting an applicant in advance of an applicant's scheduled interview to ensure the applicant understands the documentation that must be presented at the interview.

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by requiring HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using readily available document scanning technology to reduce storage and

maintenance costs and potential loss of data by creating electronic case files for SNAP cases instead of maintaining physical files for those cases, whereas the original requires HHSC to consider the feasibility of such technology.

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by requiring HHSC to implement a risk scoring program for SNAP applications to streamline the eligibility determination process, reduce errors, and strengthen fraud detection, if feasible and cost-effective, whereas the original requires such implementation if feasible.

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by requiring HHSC to improve its management of SNAP eligibility determination staff by evaluating the compensation of such staff members to determine if the compensation is sufficient to recruit qualified staff members and retain experienced staff members, whereas the original requires HHSC to improve such management of staff by ensuring that the compensation scale is sufficient to recruit qualified staff members and retain experienced staff members.

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by specifying that the indicators required to be identified by HHSC with respect to which data should be periodically collected are eligibility determination program performance indicators, whereas the original specifies the indicators as eligibility determination system performance indicators.

C.S.H.B. 2819 omits a provision included in the original requiring HHSC to maintain programming, distribution, and management reports generated by the System for Application, Verification, Eligibility, Referral, and Reporting (SAVERR).

C.S.H.B. 2819 differs from the original by requiring HHSC to provide periodic management reports that include information relating to the number of pending SNAP applications and the number of those applications that have not been processed within applicable timeliness standards generated by the automated eligibility system to eligibility determination offices, whereas the original requires HHSC to ensure that eligibility determination offices generate periodic reports regarding such information.