

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 3379
By: Paddie
State Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Interested parties contend that recent legislation did not provide electric providers and certified telecommunications utilities who want to offer assistance to low-income customers with a mechanism to verify the income of applicants to the assistance programs. H.B. 3379 seeks to address this issue by providing for the development of an automatic process for the identification of low-income customers to retail electric providers and certified telecommunications utilities.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

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. 3379 amends the Utilities Code to remove the requirement that the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) by rule provide for an integrated eligibility process for customer service discounts, including discounts under statutory provisions relating to the system benefit fund and relating to lifeline service. The bill instead requires an applicable health and human services agency, on request of the PUC, to assist in developing an automatic process to provide for identification of low-income customers to retail electric providers and certified telecommunications utilities to enable those providers to offer customer service, discounts, bill payment assistance, or other methods of assistance. The bill requires a member of the PUC and the applicable health and human services agency to continue the memorandum of understanding in effect on January 1, 2017, that establishes the respective duties of the PUC and the agency in relation to the automatic process and authorizes a member of the PUC and the applicable agency to amend the memorandum of understanding as necessary to achieve the goals of the bill. The bill prohibits the PUC from requiring a retail electric provider or certified telecommunications utility to offer customer service discounts, bill payment assistance, or other benefits for which the provider is not reimbursed.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2017.