

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1693
By: Lucio
Health & Human Services
6/13/2017
Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 1693 originates from the hearings of the Legislative Committee on Aging (committee) during the 2016 interim hearings. The committee heard testimony from advocates for the elderly and those who are visually impaired and blind on the state's effort to address the needs of the 424,000 legally blind elderly in Texas. The committee was informed that "over the next 15 years, the number of people over the age of 65 is expected to grow by 60 percent, which means there will be approximately 60 percent more older Texans who lose their vision, which means there will be some 680,000 legally blind seniors living in Texas by the year 2030."

Concerned stakeholders contend that under the status quo there are no concerted plans by the state to meet this challenge and that existing resources can be built upon to address the present needs of the blind and visually impaired in Texas. Testimony provided to the committee indicated that state agencies and nonprofits are presently able to provide services to only 10 percent of this population.

S.B. 1693 addresses this concern by developing a statewide initiative that allows the state to better address the needs of visually impaired and blind seniors in the state.

As filed, S.B. 1693 creates the Visual Impairment Task Force (task force) to develop and make recommendations for providing services, including independent living services, to the growing number of seniors in this state with a visual impairment. The bill directs the task force to conduct a study to determine the projected growth and geographic distribution of seniors with a visual impairment and methods for improving and expanding services to those seniors.

The committee substitute directs the Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee (advisory committee), which is within the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), to undertake a study relating to seniors with a visual impairment. Overall the advisory committee will assist HHSC to determine the appropriate level of independent living services for the state's growing senior population with visual impairment and provide recommendations to address the appropriate level of services. The advisory committee will also conduct a study that will be submitted to the legislature to determine the projected growth and geographic distribution of this noteworthy population. The study will identify methods for improving and expanding services, including independent living services, and identify the barriers to expanding health care services, recommend training curriculum and identify and recommend strategies to better serve our seniors with vision impairment.

S.B. 1693 amends current law relating to a study of seniors with a visual impairment by the Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. (a) Defines "advisory committee."

(b) Requires the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (executive commissioner; HHSC) to direct the Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee (advisory committee) to assist HHSC to determine the appropriate level of independent living services for the growing number of seniors in the state with visual impairment and make recommendations on the provision of services to those seniors.

(c) Authorizes the advisory committee, in implementing its duties under this Act, to meet by telephone conference call, videoconference, or other similar telecommunication method, notwithstanding Chapter 551 (Open Meetings), Government Code, or any other law. Provides that a meeting held by certain telecommunication methods is subject to the requirements of Sections 551.125(c) (relating to telephone conference call meetings being subject to notice requirements), (d) (relating to the notice requirements for telephone conference call meetings), (e) (relating to requirements for public telephone conference call meetings), and (f) (relating to requiring certain telephone conference call meetings to require two-way communication and identification of the parties), Government Code.

(d) Requires the advisory committee to conduct a study to determine the projected growth and geographic distribution of seniors with a visual impairment in the next 5 to 10 years and methods for improving and expanding services, including independent services, to those seniors. Requires that the study include certain information.

(e) Requires the advisory committee to develop, in collaboration with private entities and other organizations that assist individuals with a visual impairment, methods to publicize the services available to seniors with a visual impairment. Authorizes HHSC to solicit and accept funding for and contract with a private entity for implementing an advisory committee recommendation under this subsection.

(f) Requires that the recommendations required by Subsection (b) of this section be in the form of a new initiative, an immediate proposed regulatory change by a state agency, a proposed statutory amendment, or a suggested funding level.

(g) Requires the advisory committee to develop and submit a written report on the study, publicity methods, and recommendations developed by the advisory committee to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the legislature not later than November 1, 2018.

(h) Provides that this Act expires June 1, 2019.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2017.