

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

S.B. 976  
By: Hughes  
Homeland Security & Public Safety  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

It has been noted that transportation independence and the ability to drive are critical for many individuals with disabilities to fully integrate into their community. Individuals with a disability that affects their ability to effectively communicate with law enforcement may be at a higher risk for a potential misunderstanding when involved in a traffic stop since peace officers are generally not aware of an individual's communication ability until they approach the vehicle and ask to see the individual's license, which may be too late in the interaction for the officer to properly implement training on effectively communicating with individuals who have disabilities. S.B. 976 seeks to address this issue by providing an opportunity for drivers to voluntarily indicate on their vehicle registration application that they have a health condition or disability that may impede effective communication with a peace officer and by providing for such information to be entered into a system for use by peace officers making traffic stops.

### **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**

S.B. 976 amends the Transportation Code to require a vehicle registration application to provide space for the applicant to voluntarily indicate that the applicant has a health condition or disability that may impede effective communication with a peace officer. The bill authorizes the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) to request from a person who makes such an indication verification of a condition in the form of a written statement from an applicable professional, as specified by the bill.

S.B. 976 requires TxDMV to provide to the Department of Public Safety (DPS) the vehicle registration information of a person who voluntarily indicated on an application that the person has a health condition or disability that may impede effective communication. The bill prohibits TxDMV from providing to DPS information that shows the type of health condition or disability a person has. The bill requires DPS to establish a system to include the received information in the Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunications System for the purpose of alerting a peace officer who makes a traffic stop that the operator of the stopped vehicle may have a health condition or disability that may impede effective communication. The bill prohibits DPS from making information received under the bill's provisions available in the system to a person who has access to the system under a contract unless the contract prohibits the person from disclosing that information to a person who is not subject to the contract. The bill establishes that a contract that allows a person to access the system and that is in effect before the bill's effective date is

governed by the law in effect on the date on which the contract was entered into, except that the contract continues only for the term of the contract and may not be renewed unless the renewed contract includes that prohibition.

S.B. 976 prohibits TxDMV from issuing to a person without the person's consent a license plate with a visible marking that indicates to the general public that the person voluntarily indicated on a vehicle registration application that the person has a health condition or disability that may impede effective communication. The bill establishes that information supplied to TxDMV relating to an applicant's health condition or disability is for the confidential use of TxDMV and DPS and prohibits disclosure of the information to any person, except as otherwise provided by the bill.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2019.