

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
86R4376 MM-D

S.B. 981
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Health & Human Services
3/8/2019
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 981 requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to collaborate with local governments to create a directory of local points of contact, communication methods, and lists of potential sites for distributing supplemental nutrition benefits to victims of disasters.

D-SNAP, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program administered in Texas by HHSC, provides food assistance to low-income households suffering losses caused by a natural disaster. HHSC operates the D-SNAP program on behalf of the federal government and implemented the program after Hurricane Harvey.

The USDA requires applications for D-SNAP benefits to be submitted in person, which presented a considerable challenge since many survivors were unable to travel to D-SNAP locations. In this regard, the most challenging aspect of administering D-SNAP in Texas was selecting sites to accept applications that met federal requirements while being sufficiently close to likely applicants. The federal government requires these sites to be able to safely secure D-SNAP electronic benefit cards, with adequate parking. HHSC coordinated with county judges and mayors to identify large, relatively undamaged buildings with suitable features for the expected number of applicants. USDA approval for each site took from 24 to 48 hours. Some people waited outdoors in the heat for seven to eight hours before entering a center. HHSC provided water to those in line, but the wait was excruciating for many. D-SNAP eligibility determinations went quickly, however, typically lasting about 10 minutes once an applicant reached the front of the line. HHSC mobilized thousands of eligibility staff from across the state to fly or drive into the area to assist.

S.B. 981 was filed in response to a recommendation in the Commission to Rebuild Texas Report. (see recommendation 4, page 94; see also pages 74–75). This is also a recommendation in the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services Interim Report (see page 14).

As proposed, S.B. 981 amends current law relating to the disaster supplemental nutrition assistance program.

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. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 33, Human Resources Code, by adding Section 33.0024, as follows:

Sec. 33.0024. DISASTER SNAP. (a) Defines "program."

(b) Requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to:

(1) in collaboration with local government officials, create a directory of local points of contact for the operation of the program, determine the best method for communication between HHSC and local government officials

regarding the program and evaluate, develop, and maintain a list of potential sites for in-person application for program benefits that meet federal requirements;

(2) enter into a memorandum of understanding with local government agencies regarding the location of sites for in-person application for program benefits; and

(3) provide information regarding the program and strategies for effective collaboration between local governments and HHSC to local government officials in coastal counties by hosting webinars, conducting conference calls, or holding in-person meetings.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2019.