

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 578
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Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. Poor health literacy can create significant barriers to accessing adequate affordable health care for individuals, and low health literacy is estimated to cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars every year. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous scholars and health professionals have identified poor health literacy as an exacerbating problem. Improving health literacy ultimately leads to better health outcomes, decreased health care costs, and an enhanced patient experience.

Texas lacks a body dedicated to understanding and addressing the specific challenges posed by low health literacy in the state. There have been calls for the formation of an advisory committee to develop a long-range plan for increasing health literacy in Texas. H.B. 578 seeks to address these issues by defining health literacy, designating health literacy as a major statewide health concern, and requiring the statewide health coordinating council to establish an advisory committee on health literacy.

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. 578 amends the Health and Safety Code to require the statewide health coordinating council to establish an advisory committee on health literacy composed of representatives of certain relevant interest groups. The bill requires the committee to develop a long-range plan for improving health literacy in Texas and to update the plan at least once every two years. The bill requires the committee, in developing the plan, to study the economic impact low health literacy has on state health programs and insurance coverage for Texas residents. The bill does the following:

- sets out certain matters the committee is required to identify and examine;
- requires the committee, not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year, to submit the developed or updated plan to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the legislature;
- provides for the election of a presiding officer;
- establishes that committee members serve without compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses;

- exempts the advisory committee from the application of certain Government Code provisions relating to state agency advisory committees; and
- subjects committee meetings to state open meetings law.

H.B. 578 requires the state health plan developed by the Department of State Health Services to include the prevalence of low health literacy among health care consumers as an identified major statewide health concern and to propose strategies for improving health literacy to attain greater cost-effectiveness and better patient outcomes in the provision of health care.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2021.