

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2973
By: Hull
Juvenile Justice & Family Issues
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Court-appointed volunteer advocate programs are an important part of the Texas child welfare system. Their presence in a child's life can be the deciding factor in court cases and whether the child has a negative or positive outcome in their cases. C.S.H.B. 2973 seeks to improve and strengthen these localized programs and provide accountability and transparency by providing for a grievance process for the individuals being served and tracking of active and inactive volunteer advocates.

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

C.S.H.B. 2973 amends the Family Code to include among the eligibility requirements for a public or private nonprofit entity that operates a court-appointed volunteer advocate program for a contract with the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to provide services under the program:

- that the entity adopt a grievance procedure to address complaints regarding negligence or misconduct related to a volunteer advocate's duties; and
- that the entity maintain accurate records regarding active volunteer advocates and inactive volunteer advocates under the program.

C.S.H.B. 2973 defines "active volunteer advocate" as an individual who has been trained by a volunteer advocate program in accordance with recognized standards for volunteer advocate programs and is currently serving as a volunteer advocate on at least one child's case and "inactive volunteer advocate" as a person who has received the same training and is not currently serving as a volunteer advocate.

C.S.H.B. 2973 specifies that a contract between HHSC and a statewide organization that provides training, technical assistance, and evaluation services for the benefit of local court-appointed volunteer advocate programs must include measurable goals and objectives relating to the number of both active and inactive volunteer advocates in the program.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2021.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 2973 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

While both the substitute and the original define "active volunteer advocate" and "inactive volunteer advocate," the substitute changes the training requirement for such an advocate from training by a volunteer advocate program that meets requirements relating to a contract with the HHSC to training by a volunteer advocate program in accordance with recognized standards for volunteer advocate programs.