

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 790
By: Zaffirini
County Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Travis County operates STAR Flight, a public emergency helicopter service that conducts air ambulance, technical rescue, firefighting, and law enforcement support missions in a number of Central Texas counties. As emergency services providers, air ambulances, including STAR Flight, often are out-of-network for their patients, which can lead to balance billing. While Travis County may prefer as a public entity simply to not balance bill for STAR Flight services, it has been reported that the county's interpretation of state law is that it must attempt to recoup any and all money owed to the county. Accordingly, the county uses third-party debt collection for unpaid bills, which is largely unsuccessful and actively undermines STAR Flight's reputation with the public. S.B. 790 seeks to address this issue by authorizing a county to elect to consider a health benefit plan payment towards a claim for air ambulance services provided by the county as payment in full for those services regardless of the amount the county charged for those services.

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. 790 amends the Local Government Code to authorize a county to elect to consider a health benefit plan payment towards a claim for air ambulance services provided by the county as payment in full for those services regardless of the amount the county charged for those services. The bill prohibits a county from practicing balance billing for a claim for which the county makes this election and defines "balance billing" as the practice of charging an enrollee in a health benefit plan to recover from the enrollee the balance of a health care provider's fee for a service received by the enrollee from the provider that is not fully reimbursed by the enrollee's health benefit plan.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2021.