

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2171
By: Guerra
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Texas A&M International University indicates that over three million Texans have limited and inadequate access to affordable, quality health care. According to the Texas Rural Health Association, federal authorities designate 75 percent of counties in Texas as health professional shortage areas or medically underserved areas. H.B. 2171 seeks to improve health care outcomes and expand health care systems in underserved rural areas by implementing legislative recommendations from the House Public Health Committee's Interim Report to the 88th Legislature. The bill provides for the establishment of the Texas Center for Rural Health Education at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, with a mission to develop a plan to improve rural health education and health care outcomes, conduct research regarding rural health education, and develop partnerships with certain schools and institutions to recruit, train, and retain health care professionals to serve in underserved rural areas, among other required actions.

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 rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the board of regents of The University of Texas System in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 2171 amends the Education Code to require the board of regents of The University of Texas System (UT) to establish the Texas Center for Rural Health Education at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), with the organization, control, and management of the center vested in the board of regents of the UT system. The bill sets out the following requirements for the center:

- perform an initial assessment of rural health education in Texas;
- develop appropriate performance metrics to measure improvement in rural health education and health care outcomes;
- conduct research regarding rural health education, including research to identify best practices in rural health education and underserved rural areas;
- develop recommendations regarding the allocation of funding for tuition and loan repayment programs available to rural health care professionals;
- develop partnerships between high schools, postsecondary institutions of higher education, and local medical systems to recruit, train, and retain health care professionals to serve in underserved rural areas;
- develop a plan to improve rural health education and health care outcomes; and

- develop and maintain a website that provides information regarding rural health education research and resources.

The bill requires the center, not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year, to submit to the legislature a report on rural health education and health care outcomes in Texas that includes a summary of the center's required activities and any recommendations for legislative or other action. The bill requires the center to submit the first biennial report not later than December 1, 2024.

H.B. 2171 requires UTRGV to encourage public or private entities to participate in or support the operation of the center and authorizes the center to enter into an agreement with any public or private entity for that purpose. Such an agreement may allow the center to provide information, services, or other assistance to an entity in exchange for the entity's participation or support.

H.B. 2171 authorizes the board of regents of the UT system to employ personnel as necessary for the center and to solicit, accept, and administer gifts and grants from any public or private source for the purposes of the center. The bill authorizes the board of regents of the UT system to adopt rules as necessary to implement the bill's provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.