

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2473
By: Bucy
Human Services
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Local leaders report that constituents are having trouble with the Texas Information and Referral Network, referred to as 2-1-1 Texas. Additionally, a 2023 United Ways of Texas report indicates that significant opportunities exist to improve the technological and communication capabilities of 2-1-1 Texas. Calling 2-1-1 connects Texans to the network for 24/7 assistance with necessities such as food, housing, child care, or other local and non-emergency services. The report states that 2-1-1 Texas has experienced record call volumes over the past three years with an increase between 30 to 40 percent over historical call volume statewide and, according to the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, an increase of 70 percent in San Antonio. However, funding for 2-1-1 Texas has remained stagnant for nearly 14 years. The report further indicates that 2-1-1 Texas is behind other states in terms of efficiency, innovation, and system integration, as other states have leveraged 2-1-1 into online databases and text-based services in the pursuit of better connecting citizens to necessary resources. H.B. 2473 seeks to institute a series of technological upgrades to the state's 2-1-1 network, including one-way and two-way texting, granular data collection provided in a searchable manner, a standardized screening tool for nonmedical drivers of health, enhanced navigation services, closed-loop referral capabilities, the exchange of resource data, and participation in a national information repository.

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. 2473 amends the Government Code to revise requirements applicable to the Texas Information and Referral Network in the following manner:

- specifies that the requirement to include technology capable of communicating with clients of state and local agencies using electronic text messaging includes one-way and two-way electronic text messaging; and
- specifies that the purpose of such messaging is to enhance client access to information and referral services, decrease client wait times, improve customer service, and disseminate information to clients in a timely manner.

The bill additionally requires the network to do the following:

- include in its publicly accessible Internet-based system aggregated, de-identified demographic information regarding the clients and client households served by the network, including certain information specified by the bill if volunteered by the clients;

- use a standardized screening tool to identify the nonmedical drivers of health for all clients;
- provide enhanced navigation services under a level of care three (LOC-3) as prescribed by the Department of State Health Services' Texas Resilience and Recovery Utilization Management Guidelines in order to better address complex client needs and collaborate with community partners;
- be capable of providing closed-loop referrals to support clients and track referral outcomes;
- exchange resource data with external partners, including vendors, through data sharing agreements;
- be part of a national repository of information and referral programs and services that provides the most updated information about programs and services available at the local, regional, state, and national levels; and
- be capable of providing backup information and referrals during a statewide disaster or system malfunction.

H.B. 2473 authorizes health care systems and managed care organizations to partner and enter into agreements with the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and area information centers to share data using the Texas Information and Referral Network to facilitate client care coordination and address nonmedical drivers of health, including housing, transportation, food, and financial assistance programs.

H.B. 2473 requires HHSC, not later than December 31 of each even-numbered year, to prepare and submit a report to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the house of representatives and make the report publicly available on HHSC's website and the Texas Information and Referral Network Internet site. The report must summarize the network's operations during the preceding two state fiscal years, identify existing needs and gaps in services in Texas communities that could be addressed through additional network improvements, and provide recommendations for improving the network.

H.B. 2473 requires an Internet site developed by the Texas Information and Referral Network to be user-friendly and regularly updated to ensure the site's interface supports the navigation needs of the site's users. The bill requires the material in the website to be organized in such a way that the public can search and navigate through the site with ease.

H.B. 2473 requires an area information center that contracts with HHSC to provide Texas Information and Referral Network operations to be accredited by a nationally recognized accreditation organization.

H.B. 2473 provides for the delayed implementation of any provision for which an applicable state agency determines a federal waiver or authorization is necessary for implementation until the waiver or authorization is requested and granted.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.