H.B. No. 617

AN ACT

relating to a pilot project to provide emergency telemedicine medical services and telehealth services in rural areas.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Chapter 771, Health and Safety Code, is amended by adding Subchapter F to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER F. NEXT GENERATION 9-1-1 TELEMEDICINE MEDICAL SERVICES AND TELEHEALTH SERVICES PILOT PROJECT

Sec. 771.151.  DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1)  "Center" means the area health education center at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center that meets the requirements of 42 U.S.C. Section 294a and has been awarded federal funding as an area health education center.

(2)  "Emergency medical services" means services used to respond to an individual's perceived need for immediate medical care and to prevent death or aggravation of physiological or psychological illness or injury.

(3)  "Emergency medical services provider" means a person who uses or maintains emergency medical services vehicles, medical equipment, and emergency medical services personnel to provide emergency medical services.

(4)  "Emergency prehospital care" means care provided to a sick or injured individual before or during transportation of the individual to a medical facility, and includes any necessary stabilization of the individual in connection with that transportation.

(5)  "Pilot project" means a pilot project established under Section 771.152.

(6)  "Regional trauma resource center" means a trauma facility the center selects to participate in the pilot project.

(7)  "Rural area" means:

(A)  a county with a population of 50,000 or less; or

(B)  a large, isolated, and sparsely populated area of a county with a population of more than 50,000.

(8)  "Telehealth service" and "telemedicine medical service" have the meanings assigned by Section 111.001, Occupations Code.

(9)  "Trauma facility" means a health care facility equipped and staffed to provide comprehensive treatment of seriously injured individuals as part of an emergency medical services and trauma care system.

Sec. 771.152.  ESTABLISHMENT OF PILOT PROJECT. (a) The commission, with the assistance of the center, shall establish a pilot project to provide emergency medical services instruction and emergency prehospital care instruction through a telemedicine medical service or telehealth service provided by regional trauma resource centers to:

(1)  health care providers in rural area trauma facilities; and

(2)  emergency medical services providers in rural areas.

(b)  The commission shall provide technical assistance to the center in implementing the pilot project.

(c)  The center, with the assistance of the commission, shall:

(1)  design criteria and protocols for each telemedicine medical service or telehealth service offered and the related instruction, and provide the oversight necessary to conduct the pilot project;

(2)  define criteria to determine when a telemedicine medical service or telehealth service that provides instruction for emergency medical services, emergency prehospital care, and trauma care should be transferred to an emergency medical resource center for intervention; and

(3)  collect the data necessary to evaluate the project.

(d)  The center may make available appropriate resources for individuals who do not speak English.

Sec. 771.153.  PERSONNEL. The center shall provide the telemedicine medical service or telehealth service and related instruction for the pilot project through health care providers in regional trauma resource centers, including physicians, pharmacists, emergency medical personnel, and other health professionals.

Sec. 771.154.  PARTICIPATION IN PILOT PROJECT. (a) The center shall determine the trauma facilities and emergency medical services providers interested in participating in the pilot project.

(b)  A trauma facility or emergency medical services provider participating in the pilot project must agree to successfully complete any required training and to provide all reports required by the center for the project.

Sec. 771.155.  SELECTION OF PILOT PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AND REGIONAL TRAUMA RESOURCE CENTERS. (a) The center, with the assistance of the commission, may select trauma facilities and emergency medical services providers to participate in the pilot project and select trauma facilities to serve as regional trauma resource centers.

(b)  The center may not select a trauma facility to participate in the pilot project or to serve as a regional trauma resource center unless the facility:

(1)  has a quality assurance program that measures each health care provider's compliance with the medical protocol;

(2)  uses emergency medical services and emergency prehospital care protocols approved by a physician medical director knowledgeable in emergency medical services and emergency prehospital care;

(3)  has experience in providing emergency medical services and emergency prehospital care that the center determines is sufficient; and

(4)  has resources sufficient to provide the additional telemedicine medical services or telehealth services and related instruction required for the project in addition to the health care services the facility already provides.

(c)  In selecting a trauma facility to serve as a regional trauma resource center, the center shall consider the facility personnel's ability to maintain records and produce reports to measure the effectiveness of the pilot project. The center shall share information regarding that ability with the commission.

Sec. 771.156.  FUNDING OF PILOT PROJECT. (a) Money collected under Section 771.072(f) may be appropriated to the commission to fund the pilot project.

(b)  The center may seek grants to fund the pilot project.

(c)  A political subdivision with a trauma facility that participates in the pilot project may pay part of the project costs.

(d)  If a sufficient number of political subdivisions in a region that may be served by the pilot project agree to pay the center an amount that together with other funding received under this section is sufficient to fund the project for the region, the center shall:

(1)  contract with the political subdivisions for each subdivision to pay an appropriate share of the cost; and

(2)  implement the project for the region when the amounts agreed to in the contracts and any other funding received under this section are sufficient to fund the project for the region.

Sec. 771.157.  REPORT TO LEGISLATURE. The center, in cooperation with the commission, shall report its findings to the governor and the presiding officer of each house of the legislature not later than December 31, 2028.

Sec. 771.158.  LIABILITY. The operations of the center and a regional trauma resource center are considered to be the provision of 9-1-1 services for purposes of Section 771.053. Employees of and volunteers at the regional trauma resource center have the same protection from liability as a member of the governing body of a public agency under Section 771.053.

Sec. 771.159.  PROJECT WORK GROUP. (a) The center may appoint a project work group to assist the center in developing, implementing, and evaluating the pilot project and preparing a report on the center's findings.

(b)  A member of the project work group is not entitled to compensation for serving on the project work group and may not be reimbursed for travel or other expenses incurred while conducting the business of the project work group.

(c)  The project work group is not subject to Chapter 2110, Government Code.

Sec. 771.160.  EXPIRATION. This subchapter expires September 1, 2029.

SECTION 2.  Section 771.072(g), Health and Safety Code, is amended to read as follows:

(g)  Notwithstanding any other law, revenue derived from the equalization surcharge imposed under this section may be appropriated to the commission only for the purposes described by Section 771.156 and Sections 773.122 through 773.124.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.

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    President of the Senate Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 617 was passed by the House on April 4, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 142, Nays 2, 1 present, not voting.

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Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 617 was passed by the Senate on May 22, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 30, Nays 1.

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Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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                  Governor