

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 253
By: Kitman
Agriculture & Livestock
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Texas is facing increasing threats to animal health from rapidly spreading diseases and invasive parasitic insects such as the New World screwworm, which endangers the state's livestock industry, wildlife populations, public health, and rural economies that depend on animal agriculture. While the state currently relies on multiagency collaboration across the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), the Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), and academic partners to track and respond to disease events, no permanent centralized institute exists to coordinate research, field responses, and treatments focused specifically on animal disease outbreaks and invasive parasites, which may limit the state's ability to prepare for and respond to these emergencies. H.B. 253 seeks to address this issue by creating the Institute for Animal Health Research and Response to work in partnership with the TAHC and TPWD to study the progression of animal diseases and parasitic insects and to develop strategies and treatments for such diseases and parasitic insect infestations.

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. 253 amends the Education Code to require the board of regents of The Texas A&M University System to establish and maintain the Institute for Animal Health Research and Response as a component of Texas A&M University under the management and direction of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The bill requires the institute, in collaboration with the Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), to do the following:

- study the progression of animal diseases and parasitic insects;
- analyze the genetic profiles of animals infected with diseases or parasitic insects;
- develop the following:
 - strategies to prevent animal diseases and parasitic insect infestations;
 - efforts to mitigate transmission of animal diseases and parasitic insect infestations; and
 - treatments for animal diseases and parasitic insect infestations; and
- evaluate the implementation of such strategies, mitigation efforts, and treatments developed by the institute.

The bill authorizes the institute to do the following:

- conduct such a required activity at a location operated by TPWD, the TAHC, or the institute, or in which an animal infected with an animal disease or parasitic insect infestation has been found;
- employ personnel;
- make plans and enter into contracts for the construction and use of necessary facilities;
- accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source for the purposes of the institute; and
- prioritize the study, analysis, and development of strategies, mitigation efforts, and treatments for animal diseases or parasitic insect infestations as the institute deems necessary.

Implementation of a provision of this bill by the board of regents of The Texas A&M University System is mandatory only if a specific appropriation is made for that purpose.

H.B. 253 expands the definition of "other agency of higher education" under the Higher Education Coordinating Act of 1965 to include the institute.

EFFECTIVE DATE

91st day after the last day of the legislative session.