**BILL ANALYSIS**

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| Senate Research Center | S.B. 1377 |
|  | By: Perry |
|  | Finance |
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|  | As Filed |

**AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

An ambulance desert is defined as an area where residents are more than 25 minutes away from an ambulance station, significantly increasing the risk of delayed emergency care. A national study titled Geographic Disparities in the Provision of Ambulance Services, released in May 2023, found that 94.9 percent of Texas counties contain an ambulance desert. Additionally, Texas ranks third highest in the number of people living in these underserved areas, highlighting a critical gap in emergency medical services (EMS).

Many rural counties in Texas struggle to maintain EMS operations due to high costs, workforce shortages, and limited funding for equipment and services. With aging ambulances, long response times, and vast distances between emergency calls and medical facilities, these challenges directly impact patient outcomes. Without sustainable EMS funding, rural communities face delays in receiving critical care.

A survey conducted by the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas, which included 81 responding counties, highlights the severity of EMS response delays:

55 percent of counties reported average round-trip ambulance response times exceeding one hour;

26 percent of counties had round trips exceeding three hours; and

63 percent of counties stated that their nearest trauma center is located 30 or more miles away from their ambulance stations.

To improve access to emergency medical care, S.B. 1377 establishes a grant program administered by the Comptroller of Public Accounts of the State of Texas. It will provide funding to qualified rural counties for the purchase of ground ambulances, ensuring that EMS providers have the resources needed to improve response times and save lives. By addressing critical infrastructure gaps, S.B. 1377 seeks to strengthen emergency medical services in rural Texas.

As proposed, S.B. 1377 amends current law relating to a grant program to provide financial assistance to qualified ambulance service providers in certain rural counties.

**RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Comptroller of Public Accounts of the State of Texas in SECTION 1 (Section 130.914, Local Government Code) of this bill.

**SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter Z, Chapter 130, Local Government Code, by adding Section 130.914, as follows:

Sec. 130.914. RURAL AMBULANCE SERVICE GRANT PROGRAM. (a) Defines "grant program," "qualified county," and "qualified rural ambulance service provider."

(b) Requires the Comptroller of Public Accounts of the State of Texas (comptroller) to establish and administer the rural ambulance service grant program (grant program) to support the state purpose of ensuring adequate ground ambulance services by providing financial assistance to qualified rural ambulance service providers in qualified counties.

(c) Authorizes the county, not later than the 30th day after the first day of a qualified county's fiscal year, to submit a grant application to the comptroller. Authorizes a county to submit only one application each fiscal year. Provides that if a county is awarded a grant under this program, the county is ineligible to apply for an additional grant.

(d) Authorizes the comptroller to award a grant to a qualified county using money appropriated to the comptroller to that purpose and only in accordance with a contract between the comptroller and the county that includes conditions providing the comptroller with sufficient control to ensure the public purpose of providing adequate ground ambulance services is accomplished. Requires the comptroller, in awarding grants, to consider the distance from a qualified county's county seat to the nearest Level I trauma facility and the county's ability to otherwise obtain the money necessary to provide adequate ground ambulance services.

(e) Authorizes the comptroller to award a grant under this section only in the following applicable amount: for a county with a population of less than 10,000, an amount not to exceed $500,000, or for a county with a population between 10,000 and 68,750, an amount not to exceed $350,000.

(f) Authorizes a qualified county awarded a grant under this section to use or authorize the use of the grant money only to purchase ambulances as provided by comptroller rule.

(g) Prohibits a qualified county awarded a grant under this section from reducing the budget of the qualified rural ambulance service provider for the county's next fiscal year following the fiscal year of the grant award.

(h) Authorizes the comptroller to disburse a grant award to a qualified county before the county places an order for an ambulance. Requires the county to purchase and take possession of an ambulance with money awarded under the grant program not later than the fifth anniversary of the date the county receives the money. Requires the comptroller to adopt rules necessary to implement this section, including rules to establish:

(1) a standardized application process, the form to apply for a grant, and the manner of submitting the form;

(2) deadlines for applying for a grant, disbursing grant money, and spending grant money;

(3) procedures for monitoring the disbursement of grant money to ensure compliance with this section and requiring the return of grant money awarded if a county fails to use the money for a purpose authorized by this section; and

(4) the type of ground ambulance vehicles that may be purchased with grant money.

SECTION 2. Authorizes a qualified county, as defined by Section 130.914(a)(2), Local Government Code, as added by this Act, to apply for a rural ambulance service grant on or after January 1, 2026.

SECTION 3. Requires the comptroller, not later than January 1, 2026, to establish and administer the rural ambulance service grant program and adopt the rules necessary to implement the program as required by Section 130.914, Local Government Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2025.