

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 842
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State Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, from 1980 to 2025 there were 190 confirmed weather disaster events in Texas, with losses exceeding approximately \$1 billion. Just last year, Hurricane Beryl caused the deaths of dozens of Texans, some of whom died from extreme heat after the storm had destroyed overhead power lines. Beryl left millions without electricity and caused an estimated \$1.2 billion in damages to CenterPoint Energy's electrical infrastructure. The bill author has informed the committee that underground power lines may be a viable way of addressing these issues and that, despite the high up-front cost of achieving this goal, those costs could be offset by savings due to fewer power outages, increased property values, and lower maintenance costs. H.B. 842 seeks to explore the viability of implementing this infrastructure in vulnerable parts of the state by directing the Public Utility Commission of Texas to conduct a comprehensive study on the implications of burying power lines in the Gulf Coast region.

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. 842 requires the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) to evaluate the following for the area in Texas located within 150 miles of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico:

- the potential cost of burying existing overhead power lines;
- the potential cost of maintaining and repairing underground power lines;
- the potential cost savings associated with reduced weather-related power outages; and
- the potential use of technologies developed or tested in the U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Overhaul with Proactive, High-Speed Undergrounding for Reliability, Resilience, and Security program in that area.

The bill requires the PUC to submit a report of the study results and any recommendations to the governor, lieutenant governor, and speaker of the house of representatives not later than September 1, 2026. The bill's provisions expire October 31, 2026.

H.B. 842 includes legislative findings regarding the prevalence of weather-related power outages experienced in the study area, the increased resistance of underground power lines to extreme weather conditions, and the possibility of reducing such outages by burying power lines.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2025.