

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 1397
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Economic Development
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Texas's foundational historical documents, including the "Victory or Death" letter by William B. Travis, the Texas Declaration of Independence, and the Texas Constitution, hold immense symbolic and educational value. Under current law, their custody and display are not specifically assigned to one body, limiting public access and coordinated preservation efforts. H.B. 1397 addresses this by designating the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) as the responsible entity for the care, custody, and secure display of these artifacts. The bill directs TSLAC to work in consultation with the Texas Historical Commission and the State Preservation Board to determine appropriate public display locations at the Capitol Complex and, when feasible and secure, at the Alamo complex. By providing a structured plan and timeline for these public displays, H.B. 1397 strengthens the preservation and public engagement with Texas's most significant historical documents, ensuring they are honored and accessible to Texans now and in the future.

H.B. 1397 amends current law relating to the care, custody, and display of the letter known as the victory or death letter, the Texas Constitution, and the Texas Declaration of Independence.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter L, Chapter 441, Government Code, by adding Section 441.207, as follows:

Sec. 441.207. CARE, CUSTODY, AND DISPLAY OF VICTORY OR DEATH LETTER, TEXAS CONSTITUTION, AND TEXAS DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. (a) Defines "victory or death letter."

(b) Provides that the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) is responsible for the care and custody of the victory or death letter, the Texas Constitution, and the Texas Declaration of Independence.

(c) Requires TSLAC to designate an appropriate place in the Alamo complex for the secure display of the victory or death letter and on the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) determination that the transfer to and display of the letter at the Alamo complex is safe and appropriate, transfer the letter to that location for display.

(d) Requires TSLAC, until TSLAC designates an appropriate place in the Alamo complex to display the victory or death letter and in collaboration with THC determines an appropriate time to securely transfer the letter to that place, to display the victory or death letter in the public location at the Capitol Complex at which the Texas Constitution and the Texas Declaration of Independence are displayed as required by Subsection (e).

(e) Requires TSLAC to collaborate with THC and the State Preservation Board (SPB) to determine an appropriate public location at the Capitol Complex for the secure display of the Texas Constitution and the Texas Declaration of Independence.

(e-1) Requires TSLAC, in consultation and collaboration with THC and SPB and not later than December 1, 2027, to develop a plan to display in the Capitol Complex the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Texas Constitution, publish the plan on TSLAC's Internet website, and provide a copy of the plan to the standing committees of the legislature with jurisdiction over the state's historical resources.

(e-2) Provides that Subsection (e-1) and this subsection expire September 1, 2031.

(f) Authorizes TSLAC, in consultation and collaboration with THC and SPB, to authorize for a limited period the display of the Texas Constitution, the Texas Declaration of Independence, or the victory or death letter at a historical event or historical site.

(g) Requires that costs attributable to the display of the victory or death letter, the Texas Constitution, and the Texas Declaration of Independence be paid by TSLAC, using money available to TSLAC for that purpose.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2025.