

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1620
By: Huffman
Homeland Security, Public Safety & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The bill sponsor has informed the committee that the state is currently experiencing a shortage of forensic science professionals. S.B. 1620 seeks to address this issue and expand workforce capacity in forensic science by creating the Texas Forensic Analyst Apprenticeship Pilot Program administered by the Office of Court Administration.

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 rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Forensic Science Commission in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 1620 amends the Government Code to require the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to establish the Texas Forensic Analyst Apprenticeship Pilot Program to increase the forensic science workforce capacity in Texas. The bill requires OCA to collaborate with the Texas Forensic Science Commission (FSC) as necessary to administer the pilot program. The bill requires OCA, for purposes of implementing the pilot program, to enter into contracts with the following entities:

- general academic teaching institutions or medical and dental units, as those terms are defined by the Higher Education Coordinating Act of 1965, that provide relevant training programs in forensic disciplines; and
- each publicly funded accredited crime laboratory that is awarded an apprentice position by the FSC under the bill's provisions.

S.B. 1620 requires the FSC to do the following:

- in consultation with OCA, adopt by rule eligibility requirements for the following:
 - individuals who may apply for an apprentice position under the pilot program; and
 - publicly funded accredited crime laboratories that may apply to sponsor an apprentice under the pilot program;
- in establishing those eligibility requirements, prioritize the long-term retention of forensic analysts in accredited crime laboratories in Texas;
- award apprentice positions to individuals and accredited crime laboratories that meet the eligibility requirements established under these provisions;
- enter into contracts with the laboratories selected to sponsor apprentices under the pilot program; and

- consult with the Texas Association of Crime Lab Directors to determine the current need for forensic analyst apprentices in each forensic discipline.

S.B. 1620 defines "accredited crime laboratory" as a crime laboratory, as that term is defined by Code of Criminal Procedure provisions relating to the forensic analysis and admissibility of evidence, that has been accredited by the FSC.

S.B. 1620 expires September 1, 2030.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2025.