

By: Hughes

S.B. No. 1653

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

1 AN ACT

2 relating to the provision of certain co-navigation services to  
3 individuals who are deaf-blind.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

5 SECTION 1. Section 81.001, Human Resources Code, is amended  
6 by adding Subdivision (1) to read as follows:

7 (1) "Commission" means the Health and Human Services  
8 Commission.

9 SECTION 2. Chapter 81, Human Resources Code, is amended by  
10 adding Section 81.014 to read as follows:

11 Sec. 81.014. CO-NAVIGATION SERVICES PROGRAM FOR  
12 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND. (a) In this section:

13 (1) "Communication mode" includes communication  
14 through:

15 (A) auditory amplification, such as through a  
16 personal hearing aid or assistive listening device;

17 (B) American Sign Language or Signed English by  
18 both tactile and visual means; and

19 (C) protactile language.

20 (2) "Co-navigation services" means services provided  
21 to an individual who is deaf-blind that assist the individual to  
22 physically access the individual's environment and to make informed  
23 decisions. The term includes providing visual and environmental  
24 information or sighted guide services and assisting with

1 communication accessibility by communicating in the preferred  
2 language and communication mode of the individual who is  
3 deaf-blind. The term does not include performing any of the  
4 following for the individual:

5 (A) providing personal care services to the  
6 individual;

7 (B) completing ordinary errands for the  
8 individual;

9 (C) making decisions for the individual;

10 (D) teaching or otherwise instructing the  
11 individual; or

12 (E) interpreting for the individual in a formal  
13 setting, including a medical, legal, or business setting.

14 (3) "Co-navigator" means a person who is specially  
15 trained to provide co-navigation services.

16 (4) "Program" means the deaf-blind co-navigation  
17 services program.

18 (5) "Protactile language" means a method of  
19 communication based on touch that is used by individuals who are  
20 deaf-blind.

21 (b) The commission shall operate a statewide co-navigation  
22 services program through which:

23 (1) co-navigation services are provided by  
24 co-navigators; and

25 (2) the commission reimburses the co-navigators for  
26 the provision of the services.

27 (c) The executive commissioner by rule shall establish

1 reimbursement rates to be paid to a co-navigator under the program.  
2 The reimbursement rates must use a tiered wage scale that is based  
3 on the co-navigator's:

4 (1) level of training in communication modes for  
5 individuals who are deaf-blind and in sighted guide-mobility  
6 techniques; and

7 (2) fluency and skill in communication modes and  
8 sighted guide-mobility for individuals who are deaf-blind.

9 (d) The commission shall ensure that quality co-navigation  
10 services are provided under the program by:

11 (1) monitoring the compliance of co-navigators with  
12 program rules;

13 (2) developing funding sources for the program that  
14 are in addition to state sources and will reduce reliance on the  
15 state sources for continuation of the program; and

16 (3) providing funding and technical assistance for  
17 training programs for:

18 (A) co-navigators under the program; and

19 (B) individuals who are deaf-blind to enable  
20 those individuals to effectively use the services offered under the  
21 program.

22 (e) The executive commissioner may establish an advisory  
23 committee to advise the commission in developing and operating the  
24 program, including operating the program in a manner that ensures  
25 the efficient use of state money. Subject to Section 2110.002,  
26 Government Code, the executive commissioner shall determine the  
27 number of members serving on the advisory committee, which must

1 include individuals who are deaf-blind and other stakeholders.

2 (f) The executive commissioner may adopt rules necessary  
3 to:

4 (1) operate the program in a manner that is efficient  
5 and maximizes the number of individuals served; and

6 (2) ensure that co-navigators receiving reimbursement  
7 under the program have adequate training to provide co-navigation  
8 services.

9 SECTION 3. Not later than September 1, 2026:

10 (1) the executive commissioner of the Health and Human  
11 Services Commission shall adopt rules necessary to implement  
12 Section 81.014, Human Resources Code, as added by this Act; and

13 (2) the commission shall begin operating the program  
14 required by that section.

15 SECTION 4. This Act takes effect September 1, 2025.