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HOUSE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

daily floor report

Wednesday, April 23, 2025
89th Legislature, Number 48
The House convenes at 10 a.m.
Part One

Two bills are on the Major State Calendar, two resolutions are on the Major State Calendar, and 35 bills are on the General State Calendar for second reading consideration. The list of bills included in Part One of the *Daily Floor Report* appears on the following page.



Gary VanDeaver
Chairman
89(R) - 48

HOUSE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

Daily Floor Report

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

89th Legislature, Number 48

Part 1

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SUBJECT: Creating the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas

COMMITTEE: Public Health — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — VanDeaver, Campos, Bucy, Cunningham, Frank, Johnson, J. Jones, Schofield, Simmons

2 nays — Olcott, Shofner

2 absent — Collier, Pierson

SENATE VOTE: On final passage (March 5) — 29 - 2

WITNESSES: None (*The House companion to CSSB 5, HB 5 by Craddick, was considered in a public hearing on March 10*)

DIGEST: CSSB 5 would establish the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT) to:

- create and expedite innovation in research on dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders to improve the health of state residents and enhance the state's research on these disorders, including the potential for a related medical or scientific breakthrough; and
- attract, create, or expand research capabilities of eligible higher education institutions and other entities by awarding grants related to these disorders.

DPRIT would be authorized to:

- award grants to further its purposes, including for research, associated costs, and prevention programs and strategies;
- collaborate with relevant state agencies, councils, and consortia to enhance health care and research for dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders;
- employ staff as necessary; and
- contract with another state agency to share administrative costs.

DPRIT would be required to:

- establish standards and oversight bodies to ensure money authorized under the bill was used properly;
- monitor grant contracts authorized by the bill;
- ensure all grant proposals comply with the bill and rules adopted under the bill before being submitted;
- establish procedures to document compliance by the DPRIT, including employees and committee members, with all laws and rules governing peer review and conflicts of interests.

The DPRIT oversight committee created under the bill would be required to hire a chief executive officer that had demonstrated ability to lead and develop academic, commercial, and governmental partnerships and coalitions. DPRIT would have to employ a chief compliance officer, and the chief executive officer could hire any other officers as necessary.

The bill would require DPRIT to submit an annual report on its activities and other specified financial, compliance, and grant-related information to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House of Representatives, and standing committee of each legislative house with primary jurisdiction over DPRIT matters. The report would have to be posted on DPRIT's website.

DPRIT would be required to annually commission a certified public accounting firm to perform an independent financial audit of its activities and provide the audit to the comptroller. The comptroller would have to review and evaluate the audit, annually issue a report of that review, and make recommendations on DPRIT's financial practices and performance. DPRIT's oversight committee would be required to review the audit, the comptroller's report and recommendations, and DPRIT's financial activities.

DPRIT would be required to maintain complete records of each grant application submitted, each grant recipient's financial and progress reports, DPRIT's review of those reports, and the identity of each principal investor and owner of each grant recipient. DPRIT would have

to keep each record for 15 years. DPRIT would have to have prepared periodic audits of any electronic grant management system used to maintain records and timely address any identified weaknesses.

DPRIT would be required to establish a compliance program under its chief compliance officer's direction to monitor compliance with the bill and rules adopted under the bill and for reporting incidents of noncompliance to the oversight committee. The bill would specify compliance-related duties, including attending and observing certain committee meetings, reporting on grant application recommendations, tracking and monitoring required reports by grant recipients, and establishing procedures for investigating allegations against applicable entities for fraud, waste, or abuse of state resources.

DPRIT would be subject to the Sunset Act and would sunset on September 1, 2035, unless continued by the Legislature.

Oversight committee. CSSB 5 would establish an oversight committee as DPRIT's governing body. The committee would be composed of three members each appointed by the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House of Representatives. Members would have to represent the state's geographic and cultural diversity. In making committee appointments, the governor, lieutenant governor, and speaker of the House would each have to appoint at least one person who was a physician or scientist with extensive experience working with dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, or related disorders. Appointments also would have to attempt to include persons affected by these disorders, or family members or caregivers of such persons. A person could not be an oversight committee member if the person or the person's spouse was employed by or participated in the management of an entity receiving money from DPRIT, owned or controlled interest in an entity receiving money, or used or received a substantial amount of goods, services, or money from DPRIT. A member of the Cancer Research Institute of Texas Oversight Committee also would be excluded from serving on the DPRIT oversight committee.

The bill would establish the grounds and procedures for removing a member from the committee. Members would serve staggered six-year

terms. The committee would be required to biennially elect a presiding officer and assistant presiding officer, and would be authorized to elect additional officers. Committee members would not be entitled to compensation but would be entitled to reimbursement for necessary expenses incurred in performing official duties.

The committee would have to hold a public meeting at least quarterly, with appropriate notice and a formal public comment period. The committee would be authorized to conduct a closed meeting to discuss issues related to securities or other revenue-sharing obligations or an ongoing compliance investigation.

The committee would be required to annually set grant program priorities and consider those priorities in awarding grants. The committee also would have to adopt a code of conduct related to certain conflicts of interest applicable to each oversight committee member, program integration committee member, and DPRIT employee.

CSSB 5 would provide for the initial appointment of oversight committee members to specified staggered terms by December 31, 2025, and the committee could not act until a majority of members had taken office.

Other committees. CSSB 5 would require the DPRIT oversight committee to create a peer review committee composed of experts in fields related to dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, or related disorders, and trained patient advocates who met certain qualifications. Peer review committee members could not serve on the governing board of an entity receiving a DPRIT grant. The oversight committee also would be authorized to create additional ad hoc advisory committees composed of experts.

DPRIT would be required to establish a program integration committee composed of the chief executive officer, three senior employees responsible for program policy and oversight, and the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission or the executive commissioner's designee.

The bill also would establish a higher education advisory committee composed of one member each appointed by the chancellor or president of The University of Texas System, the Texas A&M University System, the Texas Tech University System, the University of Houston System, the Texas State University System, the University of North Texas System, Baylor College of Medicine, and Rice University.

Dementia Prevention and Research Fund. CSSB 5 would establish the Dementia Prevention and Research Fund as a special fund in the treasury outside the general revenue fund, to be administered by DPRIT. The fund could be used only for purposes authorized under the Texas Constitution, including the award of grants for research or prevention of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders, grants for or purchase of research facilities, and the operation of DPRIT.
A grant recipient could use the money for research consistent with the bill's purposes and in accordance with a contract between the recipient and DPRIT. Authorized expenses would include honoraria, travel, conference expenses, supplies, operating expenses, contracted research and development, capital equipment, and facility construction or renovation.

A grant recipient awarded money for research could not spend more than 5 percent of the money on indirect costs. No more than 5 percent of the total amount of grant money awarded in a fiscal year could be used during that year for facility purchase, construction, remodel, or renovation. No more than 10 percent of total grant money awarded in a fiscal year could be used during that year for prevention projects and strategies to mitigate the incidence of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, or related disorders.

Conflicts of interest. CSSB 5 would require the oversight committee to adopt conflict-of-interest rules, based on standards applicable to members of scientific review committees of the National Institutes of Health, to govern oversight committee members, program integration committee members, peer review committee members, and DPRIT employees.

Committee members and DPRIT employees who had a conflict of interest regarding an application for review or other action would have to disclose

the conflict and recuse themselves from participation in reviewing the application according to procedures specified by the bill. They also could not access information regarding the matter to be decided. Members or employees would have a conflict of interest if they or a person related to them within the second degree of affinity or consanguinity had a professional or financial interest, as defined by the bill, in an entity awarded a grant or applying for a grant from the institute.

The bill also would specify procedures for:

- the oversight committee to grant a waiver of conflict-of-interest requirements under exceptional circumstances;
- DPRIT's general counsel to investigate unreported potential conflicts of interest; and
- DPRIT's chief executive officer or the oversight committee's presiding officer to make a final determination regarding an unreported conflict of interest or other impropriety or self-dealing.

Grant award procedure. CSSB 5 would require DPRIT to establish a peer review process to evaluate and recommend all grants awarded by the oversight committee under the bill. The oversight committee would be required to adopt rules for the grant award procedure. The rules would have to require the peer review committee to score grant applications and make recommendations to the program integration and oversight committees regarding awarding grants, including a prioritized list ranking grant applications and explanatory information. The rules also would have to require the program integration committee to submit to the oversight committee a list of applications approved by majority vote for recommendation that included documentation on considered factors, was based on the list submitted by the peer review committee, and prioritized proposals according to criteria specified by the bill.

A peer review committee member could not attempt to use the member's official position to influence a decision to approve or award a grant or contract to the member's employer. A program integration committee member could not discuss a recommendation with an oversight committee member unless the program integration committee had submitted its list of approved recommendations.

Each grant award recommendation would have to be approved by two-thirds of oversight committee members present and voting. Disapproval of a grant award recommendation would require an explanatory statement to be included in the meeting minutes. The oversight committee could not award more than $300 million in grants in a fiscal year, and could not award a grant to an applicant who had made a gift or grant to DPRIT, an oversight committee member, or a DPRIT employee on or after January 1, 2026.

The oversight committee would be authorized to approve grants for a multiyear project and would have to specify the total amount approved for such projects. The total amount would be considered to have been awarded in the fiscal year the peer review committee approved the project. DPRIT would be required to disburse only the money as needed to be spent in each fiscal year.

Before disbursing grant money under the bill, DPRIT would have to execute a written contract with the recipient, including terms specified in the bill for grant repayment under certain circumstances, intellectual property rights, matching funds, spending timelines, and deliverables.

Before DPRIT disbursed money, the recipient would be required to certify that the recipient had available an unexpended amount of money equal to half of the grant amount dedicated to the research specified in the grant proposal. CSSB 5 would require DPRIT to adopt rules regarding a grant recipient's obligations according to minimum standards for certifying matching money as specified in the bill.

The oversight committee would have to establish standards requiring all grant awards to be subject to an intellectual property agreement that allowed the state to collect royalties, income, and other benefits realized as a result of projects undertaken with money awarded under CSSB 5. The committee also would have to establish standards to ensure that grant recipients purchased goods and services from in-state suppliers as reasonably possible, and from historically underutilized businesses as defined by state law.

As a condition of awarding a grant, the oversight committee would have to require that the recipient submit to regular inspection reviews of the grant project by DPRIT employees to ensure contract compliance and ongoing progress. The chief executive officer would be required to report at least annually to the oversight committee on the progress and continued merit of projects awarded grants by DPRIT.

Public information. Under CSSB 5, a grant applicant's name and address, the amount requested in a grant proposal, the type of research to be addressed by a proposal, and any other information DPRIT designated with a grant applicant's consent would be public information and could be disclosed under the Public Information Act.

To protect the actual or potential value of information submitted to DPRIT by a grant applicant or recipient, the following information would be confidential and not subject to disclosure under the Public Information Act or any other law:

- all other information contained in a grant application, peer review evaluation, award contract, or progress report relating to a product, device, or process, the application or use thereof, and all technological and scientific information developed by the applicant or recipient; and
- the plans, specifications, blueprints, and designs, including related proprietary information, of a scientific research and development facility.

The following information also would be confidential and not subject to disclosure under the Public Information Act, unless the information related to an individual who consented to disclosure:

- information that revealed the identity of an individual who reported fraud, waste, or abuse of state resources to the DPRIT compliance program office, sought guidance from the office, or participated in an investigation under the program;
- information that revealed the identity of an individual who was alleged to have, or might have planned, initiated, or participated in activities specified in a report submitted to the office if, after

completing an investigation, the office determined the report to be unsubstantiated or without merit; and

- other information collected or produced in a compliance program investigation if releasing the information would interfere with an ongoing investigation.

Information made confidential or excepted from public disclosure could be made available to a law enforcement agency or prosecutor, a governmental agency responsible for investigating a matter specified in a compliance report, or a committee member or DPRIT employee responsible for a compliance program investigation or an investigation review.

DPRIT would be required to post on its website records pertaining to any gift, grant, or other consideration provided to DPRIT, an employee, or an oversight committee member, in the employee's or member's official capacity. The information posted would have to include each donor's name and the amount and date of the donation.

Effective date. CSSB 5 would take effect December 1, 2025, but only if the proposed constitutional amendment CSSJR 3 took effect. If that amendment was not approved by voters, the bill would have no effect.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

By creating the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, CSSB 5 would help make Texas the leader in combating dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and other degenerative neurological disorders. The bill would make a major investment in research focused on the prevention and treatment of such diseases, improving the health and quality of life of millions of Texans and benefiting the state's economy. The impact of dementia and related diseases is growing due to a rapidly aging population and increased life expectancy, and the need for increased investment in research, prevention, and treatment is urgent. Dementia is a leading cause of death in the U.S., and Texas ranks high among other states in Alzheimer's cases and deaths. Additionally, lack of neurological medical care is especially acute in some regions of the state, which limits access to critical care.

CSSB 5 would accelerate innovation in dementia research by providing grants through DPRIT, which would be modeled in certain respects after the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), the state's institute for funding cancer research. CPRIT has successfully attracted excellent cancer researchers and doctors to Texas and provided a significant economic return on the state's investment. DPRIT also would help attract top research talent to the state and create high-quality jobs, as well as provide royalty payments to the state from funded projects. By advancing efforts to mitigate the causes and effects of dementia, DPRIT could help relieve caregiving costs in the state, which can burden families for many years. DPRIT also would augment current research efforts by facilitating collaboration among medical and scientific experts.

Texas' business-friendly regulatory environment provides advantages that ideally position the state to take on the challenge of combating dementia and become a major center of biomedical research. While some have questioned the place of government in funding such research, Texas' current budget surplus presents a unique opportunity to improve the lives of millions in Texas and beyond. Additionally, DPRIT could facilitate types of research, such as projects focused on prevention, that might not be pursued by private entities alone, since they may not be especially profitable. CSSB 5 also provides strong protections against conflicts of interest to ensure the integrity of the state's investment.

CRITICS SAY:

While combatting dementia is a worthwhile goal, CSSB 5 would create an open-ended, long term financial risk for taxpayers outside of the proper scope of government, and there are other appropriate priorities for public funds. Private industry, nonprofits, and universities are capable of addressing the problem without government involvement in research. CSSB 5 also would create a new state bureaucracy without sufficient accountability measures.

CSSB 5 would model DPRIT on CPRIT, which itself has had problems with a lack of accountability in the use of public money. DPRIT could be more problematic, as dementia research is broader and more ambiguous in scope than cancer research, and because DPRIT would involve more bureaucratic layers and political appointees, it could increase inefficiency and the potential for favoritism.

OTHER CRITICS SAY:

CSSB 5 should provide more guardrails and limits on the types of research funded through DPRIT, including by prioritizing research on the causes of dementia while taking account of lifestyle and the effects of drugs taken by patients. The bill should protect against commercialized and invasive device research that could harm vulnerable elderly Texans.

The bill would allow for conflict of interest requirements to be waived in certain circumstances, and it is unclear how many waivers would be granted, which could raise concerns about transparency. The bill should do more to provide a buffer between pharmaceutical companies operating for profit and state business.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have an impact of $0 to general revenue related funds through the biennium. DPRIT would be funded initially with a transfer of $3 billion from the general revenue fund as provided by CSSJR 3.

SUBJECT: Proposing a constitutional amendment to establish DPRIT and a fund

COMMITTEE: Public Health — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — VanDeaver, Campos, Bucy, Cunningham, Frank, Johnson, J. Jones, Schofield, Simmons

2 nays — Olcott, Shofner

2 absent — Collier, Pierson

SENATE VOTE: On final passage (March 5) — 29 - 2

WITNESSES: None. (*The House companion to CSSJR 3, HJR 3 by Craddick, was considered in a public hearing on March 10*)

DIGEST: CSSJR 3 would require the Legislature to establish the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT) to award grants to institutions of learning, advanced medical research facilities, public or private persons, and collaboratives in the state to provide money for:

- research into the causes of, prevention of, and treatment and rehabilitation for dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders;
- research into mitigating the symptoms of those disorders;
- facilities, equipment, and other costs related to such research; and
- prevention programs and strategies to mitigate the health impacts of those disorders.

DPRIT also would be required to support institutions of learning and advanced medical research facilities and collaboratives in the state in all stages of:

- discovering the causes of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders;
- developing measures for mitigating such disorders;

- developing programs to address advanced treatment access for those disorders; and
- establishing standards and oversight bodies to ensure the proper use of authorized funding, including facilities development.

The members of the governing body and any other decision-making body of DPRIT could serve six-year terms.

The Dementia Prevention and Research Fund would be established as a special fund in the state treasury outside the general revenue fund to be administered by DPRIT. The comptroller would be required to credit fund interest to general revenue. On January 1, 2026, the comptroller would be required to transfer $3 billion from general revenue to the fund. The transfer would not be considered an appropriation of state tax revenue for the purposes of the constitutional limit on the growth rate of appropriations based on the estimated growth rate of the state's economy.

DPRIT could use money in the fund only for DPRIT operations and funding grants for research and facilities related to dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders. The legislature could appropriate no more than $300 million from the fund to DPRIT for a fiscal year, not including any unspent money appropriated to DPRIT carried forward from the preceding fiscal year. Before DPRIT could award a grant, the recipient would have to have available an unexpended amount of money equal to half of the amount dedicated to the research specified in the grant proposal.

The ballot proposal would be presented to voters at an election on November 4, 2025, and would read: "The constitutional amendment providing for the establishment of the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, establishing the Dementia Prevention and Research Fund to provide money for research on and prevention and treatment of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and related disorders in this state, and transferring to that fund $3 billion from state general revenue."

SUPPORTERS SAY:

By authorizing the creation of the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, CSSJR 3 would help make Texas a leader in combating

dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and other degenerative neurological disorders. The bill would allow for a major investment in research focused on the prevention and treatment of such diseases, improving the health and quality of life of millions of Texans and benefiting the state's economy. The impact of dementia and related diseases is growing due to a rapidly aging population and increased life expectancy, and the need for increased investment in research, prevention, and treatment is urgent. Dementia is a leading cause of death in the U.S., while Texas ranks high among other states in Alzheimer's cases and deaths. Lack of neurological medical care is especially acute in some regions of the state, which impacts the ability of individuals to receive critical care.

CSSJR 3 would accelerate innovation in dementia research by providing grants through DPRIT, which would be modeled in certain respects after the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), the state's institute for funding cancer research. CPRIT has successfully attracted excellent cancer researchers and doctors to Texas and provided a significant economic return on the state's investment. DPRIT also would help to attract top research talent to the state and create high-quality jobs. By advancing efforts to mitigate the causes and effects of dementia, DPRIT could help relieve caregiving costs in the state, which can burden families for many years. DPRIT also would augment current research efforts by facilitating collaboration among medical and scientific experts.

Texas' business-friendly regulatory environment provides advantages that ideally position the state to take on the challenge of combating dementia and become a major center of biomedical research. While some have questioned the place of government in funding such research, Texas' current budget surplus presents a unique opportunity to improve the lives of millions in Texas and beyond. Additionally, DPRIT could facilitate types of research, such as projects focused on prevention, that might not be pursued by private entities alone, since they may not be especially profitable.

CRITICS SAY:

While combatting dementia is a worthwhile goal, CSSB 5 would create an open-ended, long term financial risk for taxpayers outside the proper scope of government, and there are other appropriate priorities for public funds. Private industry, nonprofits, and universities are capable of

addressing the problem without government involvement in research. CSSB 5 also would create a new state bureaucracy without sufficient accountability measures.

CSSB 5 would model DPRIT on CPRIT, which itself has had problems with a lack of accountability in the use of public money. DPRIT could be more problematic than CPRIT because dementia research is broader and more ambiguous in scope than cancer research, and because DPRIT would involve more bureaucratic layers and political appointees, which could increase inefficiency and potential for favoritism.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of $3,000,191,689 to general revenue related funds through the biennium, including $191,689 for publication of the resolution.

SUBJECT: Establishing provisions for increasing licensing reciprocity agreements

COMMITTEE: Licensing & Administrative Procedures — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Phelan, Gerdes, Geren, Harless, Hernandez, Longoria, McQueeney, Patterson, M. Perez, Romero, Walle

0 nays

2 absent — Thompson, Harris

WITNESSES: For — Rod Bordelon, Coalition for Regulatory Efficiency and Reform; Jeff Burdett, NFIB; Grace Atkins, Texas 2036; Glenn Hamer, Texas Association of Business; Randall Chelette, Texas On-Site Wastewater Association; Noah Trudeau (*Registered, but did not testify*: Charles Casio, AARP Texas; Scott Stewart, American Council of Engineering Companies of Texas; Nick James, Cicero Action; Rebekah Chenelle, Dallas Regional Chamber; Shera Eichlet, Goldwater Institute; Kaitlyn Murphy, Greater Houston Partnership; Katie Ferrier, Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce; CJ Tredway, Independent Electrical Contractors of Texas; Jacob Smith, Plumbers Local Union 68, Southwest Pipe Trades Association; Justin Keener, Texans for Free Enterprise, U.S. Hispanic Contractors Association; Lee Parsley, Texans for Lawsuit Reform; Leticia Van de Putte, Texas Academy of Physician Assistants; J.D. Hale, Texas Association of Builders; Lori Henning, Texas Association of Goodwills; Richard Lord, Texas Building & Construction Trades; Kelsey Bernstein, Texas Council of Community Centers; Desiree Castro, Texas Food & Fuel Association)

Against — None

On — Courtney Arbour, TDLR (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rebecca Morigan, TCEQ; Heather Muehr, TDLR)

DIGEST: CSHB 11 would require the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) to maximize licensing reciprocity agreements, with

respect to licenses issued by the department, to the extent allowed by law. TDLR also would have to identify state laws that prevented the department from entering into a reciprocity agreement with a licensing authority in another state.

The bill would require the Texas Commission of Licensing and Regulation (TCLR) to establish procedures for TDLR to determine whether the licensing requirements of another state were substantially equivalent to the requirements of the state, taking into consideration:

- the level of required training and testing to obtain a license, including methods used to evaluate work experience to fulfill training or testing requirements;
- the scope of practice for which the license was issued; and
- the procedures used in the other state to resolve complaints and to determine whether a license holder was in good standing.

Additionally, TCLR would have to establish procedures for TDLR to enter into and implement reciprocity agreements with licensing authorities in other states that had licensing requirements substantially equivalent to Texas' requirements.

The bill would require TDLR to submit a written report to the governor and the Legislative Budget Board no later than December 1 of each odd-numbered year, which would:

- summarize TDLR 's efforts regarding licensing reciprocity agreements, including a description of the extent to which this state's licensing requirements exceeded the requirements of other states;
- describe TDLR's efforts to enter into reciprocity agreements with licensing authorities in other states, including a list of each reciprocity agreement entered into and any unsuccessful effort to enter into a reciprocity agreement with a licensing authority of another state; and
- recommend legislative action to increase the number of license reciprocity agreements, including any reduction of licensing

requirements that would make more reciprocity agreements possible.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 11 would improve workforce mobility and reduce economic barriers by reducing the current licensure burdens for professionals licensed in other states. Business owners and other professionals who move to Texas have to pay fees and obtain extra training to be licensed and work in their professions, even if these individuals already hold a substantially similar license from another state. This contributes to workforce shortages and places unnecessary burdens on licensing agencies. Increasing reciprocity agreements in Texas would help facilitate the integration of newly arrived professionals into the Texas workforce by streamlining their transition while also maintaining high industry standards. The bill also would task TDLR with maximizing reciprocity agreements with other states, allowing businesses to more effectively fill critical positions and expanding the state's talent pool. The bill would ultimately enhance Texas' workforce efficiency and economic competitiveness.

CRITICS SAY:

CSHB 11 could lower the quality of professional standards in highly specialized industries with unique licenses. Many Texas-specific industries have extensive licensing and education requirements, and a reciprocity agreement could lower the requirements necessary to maintain high-quality practices. The bill would not address procedures for professions in which there was an absence of an equivalent license, creating uncertainty about how to guarantee statewide standards.

SUBJECT: Authorizing a tax exemption for homes of adults with certain disabilities

COMMITTEE: Ways & Means — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 13 ayes — Meyer, Martinez Fischer, Bernal, Button, Capriglione, Gervin-Hawkins, Hickland, Muñoz, Noble, V. Perez, Troxclair, Turner, Vasut

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Russell Hayter)

Against — None

DIGEST: HJR 72 would amend the Texas Constitution to allow the Legislature to exempt from property taxation a portion of the market value of the real property a person owned that was the primary residence of an adult who had an intellectual or developmental disability and was related to the property owner or trustee of the property within the third degree of consanguinity.

The portion of the real property's market value authorized for exemption would be equal to the exemption applied to an adult's residence homestead.

The Legislature could define "developmental disability" and "intellectual disability" to implement the section.

A ballot proposal would be presented to voters at an election on November 4, 2025, and would read: "The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for an exemption from ad valorem taxation of a portion of the market value of a property that is the primary residence of an adult who has an intellectual or developmental disability and who must be related to the owner or trustee of the property within a certain degree by consanguinity."

SUPPORTERS SAY: HJR 72 and its enabling legislation, HB 972, would reduce the financial burden on family members who provided support, care, and living space to relatives with disabilities by expanding the homestead exemption to apply to the homes of these individuals. In an effort to care for their adult

relatives with disabilities, some people purchase homes for their loved ones to reside. An adult with an intellectual or developmental disability who would otherwise be entitled to a homestead exemption often cannot practically use it because having the home in his or her name would cause them to lose essential federal and state benefits. These homes should qualify for the residence homestead exemption since they would otherwise be in the person's name.

The bill would not impose a significant financial burden on the state or other taxpayers since only a small number of homes would be affected.

CRITICS SAY:

HJR 72 would narrow the tax base and shift the tax burden onto other property owners by removing property value from the tax rolls. The Legislature should focus on providing broad-based tax relief rather than carving out exemptions for particular populations.

NOTES:

HB 972, the enabling legislation for HJR 72, is also on the daily House calendar for second reading consideration today.

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the constitutional amendment would have no cost to the state other than the cost of publication, which would be $191,689.

SUBJECT: Creating an oilfield theft prevention unit within DPS

COMMITTEE: Energy Resources — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — Darby, E. Morales, Craddick, Dean, Dyson, Gates, Gerdes, Guerra, Reynolds, Rosenthal

0 nays

1 absent — J. Garcia

WITNESSES: For — Bill Vanderland, Permian Basin Oilfield Crime Committee; Michael D. Lozano, Permian Basin Petroleum Association; Ed Longanecker, Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association (TIPRO); Todd Staples, Texas Oil and Gas Association (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jerrod Jones, Apache Corporation; Chris Hosek, BP; Greg Mathews and Julie Williams, Chevron; Julie Range, Commission Shift Action; Kari Gibson, ConocoPhillips; Royce Poinsett, Coterra; Isaac Griesbaum, Deep Blue Midland Basin; Teddy Carter, Devon Energy; Samantha Omey, ExxonMobil; Jimmy Carlile, Fasken Oil and Ranch; Larry Young, Game Warden Peace Officers Association; Anthony Kivela, Houston Police Retired Officers Association; Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club; James Allison, Milestone Environmental Services; Jack Fleet, NARO Texas; Doug White, NGL Energy Partners; Julie Moore, Occidental Petroleum (Oxy); Travis McCormick, Panhandle Producers and Royalty Owners Association; Karr Ingham and Caleb Troxclair, Texas Alliance of Energy Producers; Gabriela Perdichizzi, Texas Association of Business; Ryan Paylor, Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association (TIPRO); Thure Cannon, Texas Pipeline Association; John Sierega, TMPA; Jason Modglin, Western Midstream; Liza Binkley; Anita Knight; Glenda Pittman)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Charles Maley, South Texans' Property Rights Association; Sarah Berel-Harrop)

On — Mark Stewart, Railroad Commission of Texas; Shawn Hallett and Jeremy Orr, Texas DPS

DIGEST:

CSHB 48 would require the director of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to create an organized oilfield theft prevention unit to be operated by DPS. The unit would have the discretion to investigate and arrest individuals who have unlawfully appropriated a petroleum product or oil and gas equipment. The unit would be required to coordinate with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, attorneys representing the state, the Railroad Commission of Texas, and any person who is a victim of unlawful petroleum product or oil and gas equipment appropriation.

The director would be required to establish a command structure within DPS to oversee the unit's operations. Subject to approval by the Public Safety Commission, the director would have to adopt rules as needed for the unit's administration and oversight, including rules to address procurement of facilities and equipment and required personnel training and working conditions.

The unit would have statewide jurisdiction but would primarily operate within the department's designated region that is adjacent to the international border and contains the city of El Paso. The bill would require the unit's headquarters to be located within that region. Subject to approval by the Public Safety Commission, DPS could establish additional regional offices in any department region.

In cooperation with DPS, the unit would be required to:

- develop and deploy to local law enforcement agencies specialized training, resources, and policing strategies tailored to investigating and preventing relevant offenses;
- conduct public outreach and awareness initiatives to educate industry professionals and communities regarding relevant offenses; and
- maintain a centralized database for tracking relevant offenses and related criminal enterprises.

No later than January 1 of each odd-numbered year, DPS would be required to prepare and submit a written report to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House of Representatives, and each standing committee of the Legislature with primary jurisdiction over natural resources or criminal justice matters. The report would have to summarize the unit's activities, evaluate its effectiveness, and recommend legislative or administrative actions to enhance effectiveness.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 48 would strengthen protections for Texas' vital energy industry by enhancing law enforcement coordination and capacity. The bill would reduce economic losses and disrupt organized criminal operations involved in oilfield theft, a growing issue that costs the oil and gas industry millions of dollars each year and threatens the state's energy economy. Sophisticated theft rings increasingly target petroleum products and equipment, posing significant challenges for under-resourced and undertrained local law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute these crimes effectively. CSHB 48 would address this fragmented approach by requiring the organized oilfield theft prevention unit to coordinate with local, state, and federal authorities as well as industry stakeholders. By establishing this unit, CSHB 48 would secure critical infrastructure, support economic stability, and improve public safety.

While some have suggested that preventing theft should fall solely on private companies, oilfield theft impacts all Texans by reducing oil production and depriving the state of substantial tax revenue. Although private companies are already investing heavily in security measures, the scale and sophistication of these crimes demand a coordinated public response. The bill would not replace private efforts, but enhance public safety, disrupt organized criminal enterprises, and safeguard critical infrastructure. By maintaining data and issuing public reports, the unit would ensure transparency and demonstrate measurable benefits to the public. The unit's creation would provide a strategic approach to addressing complex, organized theft that exceeds the capacity of any single private entity and poses significant threats to public welfare.

CRITICS SAY:

CSHB 48 should not allocate public resources to subsidize private industry. Establishing an organized oilfield theft prevention unit would effectively serve as a publicly funded security force for private oil and gas companies, placing the financial burden on taxpayers. Companies that are directly affected by theft should be responsible for investing in their own security measures rather than relying on state-funded law enforcement.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of $7,695,359 to general revenue related funds through the biennium.

SUBJECT: Requiring a personal financial literacy course for high school students

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 14 ayes — Buckley, Bernal, Allen, Ashby, Bryant, Cunningham, Frank, Hinojosa, Hunter, Kerwin, Leach, Leo Wilson, Schoolcraft, Talarico

0 nays

1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For – Michael Shawn Brigham, Next Gen Personal Finance; Yanely Espinal, NGPF Mission 2030 Fund; J'Vonnie Williamson, Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT); Vincent Branch (*Registered, but did not testify*: Tricia Cave, ATPE; John Litzler, Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission; Michael Grimes, Consumer Service Alliance of Texas; Garry Jones, Democrats for Education Reform TX; Glen Austin, Greater Houston Partnership; Jen Biundo, Healthy Futures of Texas; Wendy Foster, Independent Bankers Association of Texas; Shannon Meroney, National Association of Benefits & Insurance Professionals (NABIP) Texas Chapter; Caitlin Flanders, National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors; Michelle Wittenburg, National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors; Ayaan Moledina, Students Engaged in Advancing Texas; Megan Mauro, Texas Association of Business; Kwame Walker, Texas Association of Life and Health Insurers; Mike Meroney, Texas Association of Manufacturers (TAM); Kelly Rasti, Texas Association of School Boards; Celeste Embrey, Texas Bankers Association; Sarah Crockett, Texas CASA; J McCartt, Texas Consumer Credit Coalition; Larry Gonzales, Texas Consumer Finance Association; Stephen Raines, Texas Credit Union Association; Paula Hilliard, Texas Education 911; Grace Bonilla, Texas Impact; Meredyth Fowler, Texas Mortgage Bankers Association; Lauren Rose, Texas Network of Youth Services; Jennifer Easley, Texas PTA; Kenneth Besserman, Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants; Christianna Brown, Elaina Brown, James Brown, Charlene Reagan, Fran Rhodes, David Rogers, True Texas Project; Ashley Harris, United Ways of Texas; Paytyn Woltersdorf, Wells Fargo;

and 5 individuals)

Against – (*Registered, but did not testify*: Allen Liu and Demetria L. McCain, NAACP Legal Defense Fund; Meg Bakich; Alice Linahan)

On – (*Registered, but did not testify*: Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Eric Marin, Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Chrissy Hejny)

BACKGROUND:

Under current law, the foundation curriculum for high school graduation requires students to complete three credits in social studies, including at least one-half credit in economics or personal financial literacy and economics.

DIGEST:

CSHB 27 would amend the curriculum requirements for the foundation high school program. In order to graduate, the bill would require that students successfully complete at least one-half credit in personal financial literacy and one credit in economics, world geography, or world history. The bill would remove the option to take a one-half credit in economics or personal financial literacy. This provision would apply only to students entering ninth grade during or after the 2025-26 school year.

The State Board of Education (SBOE) would be required to allow a student to obtain the one-half credit in personal financial literacy by successfully completing an advanced placement course designated by SBOE.

The bill would repeal Education Code sec. 28.025(b-22), regarding the allocation of instructional time in a personal financial literacy and economics course.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2025-26 school year and would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 27 would help prepare Texas high school students to succeed as adults by requiring them to take a half-credit personal financial literacy

course. Too many students graduate from high school without learning necessary financial literacy skills. This can lead to young adults making life-altering mistakes that can harm their economic potential for years to come. Students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to this issue. The personal financial literacy course required by the bill already has an SBOE-approved Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards, and would ensure that students leave high school with the practical, real-world skills to make informed decisions about savings, credit, investing, and budgeting.

CRITICS SAY:

CSHB 27 could undermine local schooling decisions by establishing a state curriculum definition of personal financial literacy that would not necessarily suit the needs of every school district or student. There is no consensus on what personal financial literacy should entail, with different regions of the state having different needs.

SUBJECT: Requiring plans for transmission and distribution pole management

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 14 ayes — King, Hernandez, Anchía, Darby, Y. Davis, Geren, Guillen, Hull, McQueeney, Metcalf, Raymond, Smithee, Thompson, Turner

0 nays

1 absent — Phelan

WITNESSES: For - Mark Bell, Association of Electric Companies of Texas; Sean Knowles, Osmose Utilities Services; Craig Cowden, James Henderson, Joe Leathers, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association; Julia Harvey, Texas Electric Cooperatives; Jack Walker, Texas Trial Lawyers Association; Stephanie Houle, Xcel Energy; Jason Abraham; Mikal Watts (*Registered, but did not testify*: Isaac Albarado, Kelly Sadler, American Electric Power Texas; Jeff Bonham, CenterPoint Energy, Inc.; Scott Hutchinson, Entergy Texas; Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club; Mindy Carr, Oncor; Walt Baum, Powering Texans; Kamil Cook, Public Citizen Texas; Michael Ruggieri, Southwestern Elec. Power Co. (SWEPCO); Jeremy Mazur, Texas 2036; Katie Coleman, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Gabriela Perdichizzi, Texas Association of Business; Josh Winegarner, Texas Cattle Feeders Association; Charlie Leal, Texas Farm Bureau; Rob Hughes, Texas Forestry Association; Jennifer Owen, Texas Land & Mineral Owners Association; Ben Utley, Texas-New Mexico Power (TNMP); Mance Zachary, Vistra Corporation; Damon Withrow, Xcel Energy)

Against - None

On - Taylor Kilroy, Texas Public Power Association (*Registered, but did not testify*: Connie Corona, Public Utility Commission of Texas)

DIGEST: CSHB 144 would require each electric cooperative, electric utility, and municipally owned utility that distributed electricity to the public to submit to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) a plan for the

management and inspection of transmission and distribution poles in the entity's system. Each plan would have to include:

- a statement of scope and objectives;
- the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of individuals responsible for plan oversight and execution;
- a description of the entity's processes for the management, repair, and inspection of transmission and distribution poles, the training and certifying of personnel, and the documentation of and response to a landowner's report or complaint regarding pole condition or repair;
- for each pole to be inspected, an inspection deadline, an inspection record submission process, and a timeline for any required remedial action for a pole; and
- a proposed budget for plan implementation.

CSHB 144 would require PUC to approve, modify, or reject a plan no later than 180 days after the plan was submitted. At least once every three years, an entity to which the bill applied would be required to submit an update to PUC detailing compliance with the plan's objectives, the costs of implementation, and its inspection results and repair schedule. An electric utility could submit the update in the annual report on utility maintenance activities currently required by certain provisions of the Utilities Code.

At least monthly, an entity to which CSHB 144 applied would be required to submit an update to PUC of the information required in the plan regarding inspection deadlines, submission of records, and remedial action timelines. The update would have to include, for each pole inspected, an indication of whether the pole passed inspection and was determined to be safe, reliable, and able to withstand extreme weather conditions, including high winds.

A plan required under the bill would have to be submitted to PUC no later than January 1, 2026.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 144 would help prevent wildfires in Texas by providing additional regulation and oversight of the inspection and maintenance of utility poles. Major fires in the Texas Panhandle have been caused by aging utility infrastructure, including downed power lines. By requiring utilities to file detailed plans for transmission and distribution pole maintenance and repair with PUC, CSHB 144 would enhance planning transparency, promote proactive infrastructure management, and increase reliability and resiliency in the state's transmission and distribution systems. The plans required by CSHB 144 would encourage utilities to use best practices in pole management, such as deadlines for inspections and timelines for repairs, which ultimately would benefit utility customers and local communities.

CRITICS SAY:

While enhancing transparency in pole maintenance and planning is a worthwhile goal, CSHB 144 could expand PUC's regulatory authority too far into areas of utility operation currently governed at the local level. The bill's monthly reporting requirements also could be burdensome for some smaller utilities.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of $4,229,356 to general revenue related funds through the biennium.

SUBJECT: Requiring perinatal bereavement care in certain hospitals

COMMITTEE: Public Health — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 12 ayes — VanDeaver, Campos, Bucy, Cunningham, Frank, Johnson, J. Jones, Olcott, Pierson, Schofield, Shofner, Simmons

0 nays

1 absent — Collier

WITNESSES: For - John Litzler, Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission; Catherine Quintana, Parkland Health; Jessica Phillips, TETAF; Maxcine Tomlinson, Texas New Mexico Hospice & Palliatve Care Organization; Jennifer Allmon, The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops; Terri Major Kincade; Jacquelyn Smith; Katie Talman (*Registered, but did not testify*: Katherine Strandberg, Every Body Texas; Michael Bullock, Miles' Mission; Jennifer Bullock Moore, Miles' Mission; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Tessa Galloso, Texans Care for Children; Amy O'Donnell, Joe Pojman Ph.D., Texas Alliance for Life; David Reynolds, Texas Chapter American College of Physicians; Meredith Cooke, Texas Children's Hospital; Dinah Welsh, Texas EMS, Trauma & Acute Care Foundation; Benjamin Williams, Texas Hospital Association; Robert Watson, Texas Impact; Matt Dowling, Texas Medical Association; Jack Frazee, Texas Nurses Association; Clayton Travis, Texas Pediatric Society; Rachel Wolleben, Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition; Sarah Lindley Bailey; Sarah Berel-harrop; Eve Margolis; Thomas Parkinson; Emily Witt)

Against - None

On - John Seago, Texas Right to Life (*Registered, but did not testify*: Manda Hall, Department of State Health Services; James Blanton, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST:

CSHB 37 would require hospitals with a maternal level of care designation to provide certain perinatal bereavement services to families following an intrauterine fetal demise, neonatal death, or stillbirth. Services would include perinatal bereavement care counseling options and access to any available perinatal bereavement devices during the medically recommended length of stay.

The bill would define perinatal bereavement care as the provision of supportive care for a prenatal diagnosis of a life-limiting fetal condition. Perinatal bereavement device would mean a device with technology capable of delaying for bereavement purposes the deterioration of human tissue for up to 72 hours following an intrauterine fetal demise, neonatal death, or stillbirth.

The bill would direct the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to create a bereavement care initiative to improve access to and quality of perinatal bereavement care in Texas. Under the initiative, DSHS could provide certain resources, including perinatal bereavement devices and training for hospital personnel who provided maternal care on interacting with parents and family members in a considerate and respectful manner following an intrauterine fetal demise, neonatal death, or stillbirth. DSHS would have to prioritize hospitals that lacked access to a perinatal bereavement device, treated a greater number of high-risk maternal patients, and delivered a greater number of babies. DSHS could accept external funding to support the program.

CSHB 37 also would require the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission, in collaboration with the Perinatal Advisory Council, to develop and implement a program to recognize hospitals that provided bereavement care training and adopt criteria for awarding recognition.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 37 would help hospitals support grieving families and help lessen the trauma for families experiencing the loss of a child by requiring perinatal bereavement care in certain hospitals and requiring DSHS to provide accompanying resources. The bill would particularly benefit rural

hospitals that often lack the resources to invest in these services. Allowing DSHS to provide training for certain hospital personnel under the perinatal bereavement care initiative also would help ensure that medical staff were prepared to communicate with families respectfully and sensitively during their time of loss.

In addition, the bill would require and fund the provision of perinatal bereavement devices, which prolong the changes that take place after death, allowing families additional time to say goodbye. This additional time can be critical to the grieving process, however, the availability of these devices currently varies by hospital.

CRITICS SAY:

No concerns identified.

SUBJECT: Prohibiting the use of personal communication devices at school

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 12 ayes — Buckley, Bernal, Allen, Ashby, Bryant, Cunningham, Hinojosa, Hunter, Kerwin, Leach, Schoolcraft, Talarico

2 nays — Frank, Leo Wilson

1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For – Maurine Molak, David's Legacy Foundation; Dawn Wible, Talk More Tech Less; Stephanie Holdren, Texas PTA; Greyson Gee, Texas Public Policy Foundation; and 12 individuals (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mandi Kimball, Children at Risk; Michelle Wittenburg, David's Legacy Foundation; Richard Tagle, E3 Alliance; Jarod Love, ExcelinEd in Action; Andrea Sparks, Not On Our Watch Texas; Gabe Grantham, Texas 2036; Colby Nichols, Texas Association of Community Schools; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Michelle Evans; Zenobia Joseph; Kelle Kieschnick; Kristel Sexton)

Against – Mary Lowe, Families Engaged; Lynn Davenport; Alice Linahan; Hollie Plemons (*Registered, but did not testify*: Debra Liva, In Child's Best Interest; Sarah Berel-Harrop; Mia Collins; Chrissy Hejny; Latronda Williams; Leslie Winters)

On – Tricia Cave, ATPE; Paula Hilliard, Texas Education 911; Sukhadeva Mitta; Steve Swanson (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin and John Scott, TEA; Kelly Rasti, Texas Association of School Boards; Dr. Kathy Martinez-Prather, Texas School Safety Center at Texas State University; Yulissa Chavez, The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Leslee Matthews)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 37.082 authorizes a school district to prohibit a student from possessing a paging device while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored activity on or off school property. The

section was first enacted by the 74th Legislature in 1995, and amended by the 80th Legislature in 2007.

DIGEST:

CSHB 1481 would require a school district's board of trustees or an open-enrollment charter school's governing body to adopt, implement, and ensure the district or school complied with a written policy prohibiting a student from using a personal communication device while on school property during the school day. The bill would define "personal communication device" as a telephone, cell phone such as a smartphone or flip phone, tablet, smartwatch, radio device, paging device, or any other electronic device capable of telecommunications or digital communication. The term would not include an electronic device provided to a student by a school district or charter school.

A policy prohibiting student use of personal communication devices at school could comply with the bill's requirements by:

- prohibiting a student from bringing such a device on school property; or
- designating a storage method for the device while the student is on school property during the school day.

The policy would be required to establish disciplinary measures for violation of the prohibition and could provide for confiscation of the device. The policy could authorize the disposal of a confiscated device in any reasonable manner, as long as the district or school gave the student's parent 90 days' prior written notice of the intent to dispose of the device.

The bill would require a policy to authorize the use of a personal communication device:

- necessary to implement an individualized education program, a plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, or a similar program or plan for students with disabilities;
- by a student with a documented need based on a directive from a qualified physician; or

- necessary to comply with a health or safety requirement imposed by law or as part of the district's or school's safety protocol.

An adult high school program operated by a charter school would not be subject to the bill.

CSHB 1481 would require a district or charter school to adopt a policy as soon as practicable, but within 90 days after the effective date of the bill. The bill also would require the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop and publish model policy language on its website.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 1481 would help ensure that the school environment is conducive to education by prohibiting the use of personal communication devices by students during the school day. Research has shown that smartphone use is leading to shorter attention spans and disengagement from learning. Modern phones are specifically designed to be addictive. It is imperative to limit student access to these kinds of devices to better facilitate quality instruction time and ensure that students are free of distractions when they are trying to learn. The bill would help to improve academic performance among Texas students, as many schools that have banned personal phone usage have experienced improved student performance on high-stakes exams, for example.

CSHB 1481 could help make schools safer for students by preventing cyberbullying, which often occurs during school hours via social media and texting. Smartphone use is also contributing to the youth mental health crisis and hindering children's social-emotional development. By limiting personal phone use at school, the bill would help reduce instances of bullying and promote positive mental health among students.

CSHB 1481 would not impose a one-size-fits-all approach for all Texas schools but would provide flexibility for districts to establish and implement a policy to allow for the lowest or no-cost option. The bill would promote local control by allowing districts and schools to choose

how best to implement the communication device ban. Schools also could decide when phones could be used during non-instructional times or during emergencies. Additionally, exceptions in the bill for communication devices that students use to aid with their health or ability to participate in class would ensure that students with special needs were not harmed by a policy.

While some have raised concerns about students' access to phones in an emergency, personal phone use during an emergency is not necessarily helpful. In the event of an emergency, having many children become preoccupied with their phones can distract them from getting to safety, which can make the situation more dangerous. Additionally, classrooms already have to have access to an electronic communication device in the event of an emergency as part of the district's or charter school's multihazard emergency operations plan.

CRITICS SAY:

CSHB 1481 would impose impractical and potentially expensive requirements on schools that would do more harm than good. Adequate storage for hundreds of students' phones could cost a school thousands of dollars that could be better spent on other student needs, and could be difficult to implement. The bill would limit local control and unnecessarily expand the authority of TEA by not allowing schools to choose for themselves how to handle student phone use during the school day.

While it is important to reduce distractions in classrooms, the bill would not sufficiently address the problem because students would still have access to their school-issued, one-to-one devices. These devices often have access to the same websites and apps as personal phones or tablets and can be just as much of a distraction. If schools allow students to use Chromebooks, then they should allow them to use their personal devices for educational purposes.

By prohibiting the use of personal communication devices during school hours, the bill would prevent the use of phones during emergency situations when it is crucial that parents and students be able to contact one another or the police. Additionally, students have used their phones to expose instances of severe faculty and student misbehavior. Without

access to their devices, students would have a harder time bringing attention to these issues.

SUBJECT: Requiring age verification for online artificial sexual material

COMMITTEE: Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 11 ayes — Leach, Johnson, Dutton, Dyson, Flores, J. González, Hayes, LaHood, Landgraf, Moody, Schofield

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Adrian Shelley, Public Citizen (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Michelle Wittenburg, David's Legacy Foundation; Elisa M. Tamayo, El Paso County; James Kershaw, Harris County Deputies' Organization FOP #39; Ray Hunt, Houston Police Officers' Union; John Wilkerson, Texas Municipal Police Association (TMPA); Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — David Dixon, Department of Public Safety; Renzo Soto, TechNet

DIGEST: HB 581 would require a commercial entity that operated a website or application with a publicly accessible tool for creating artificial sexual material harmful to minors to use reasonable age verification methods to verify that an individual attempting to access the tool was at least 18 years old. The commercial entity would be prohibited from retaining any identifying information about the individual.

The bill would require a commercial entity that operated a website or application with a publicly accessible tool for creating artificial sexual material harmful to minors to ensure that an individual used as a source for the material was at least 18 years old and had consented to the use of the individual's face and body as a source for the material.

The bill would define "artificial sexual material harmful to minors" to mean computer-generated sexual material harmful to minors that was produced, adapted, or modified using artificial intelligence in which a person is recognizable by the person's face, likeness, or other distinguishing characteristic.

HB 581 would extend to the bill certain provisions on age verification methods and civil penalties under current law that apply to the online publication of sexual material harmful to minors.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

HB 581 would protect minors and hold companies accountable by requiring age verification for both the users and the subjects of AI-generated sexual material. With advances in artificial intelligence (AI), it has become considerably easier to generate realistic fake images and videos, or "deepfakes," that portray a real individual in a sexually explicit manner. These deepfake videos can present a serious problem, as has been seen in schools when students generate and spread around deepfake explicit content of their peers, causing the victims to be bullied and feel degraded and dehumanized.

Currently, providers of websites or applications that allow the public to generate deepfake content do not have to verify that the users are at least 18 years old, nor do they have to verify that the subjects of the deepfakes are at least 18 years old and consent to their likeness being used for generating sexual material. Texas is lagging in the regulation of explicit AI material, and HB 581 would update the state's laws to better protect against the exploitation of minors and non-consenting adults and keep harmful AI tools out of the hands of young people.

While some have suggested that companies could be overburdened by age verification requirements, the protection of children from the harms of AI-generated sexual material should be paramount, and inconveniencing these companies would be acceptable if that goal were achieved.

CRITICS SAY:

HB 581 should more narrowly define which commercial entities would be subject to age verification and civil penalties. The bill's language could unintentionally include AI companies that do not generate sexual content, subjecting them to unnecessary regulation.

SUBJECT: Allowing a handgun license designation on a driver's license

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security, Public Safety & Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 10 ayes — Hefner, Ray Lopez, Canales, Cortez, Hickland, Holt, Isaac, Louderback, McLaughlin, Pierson

0 nays

1 absent — Dorazio

WITNESSES: For - Gary Zimmerman (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jennifer Szimanski, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT); M Paige Williams, Dallas Criminal District Attorney John Creuzot; Ray Hunt, Houston Police Officers' Union; Brian Hawthorne, Sheriffs Association of Texas; Bryan Flatt, TMPA; Wendy Kalthoff; Ayaan Moledina)

Against - (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chris McNutt, Texas Gun Rights)

On - (*Registered, but did not testify*: Emily Taylor, Gun Owners of America; Natalie Robertson, Texas Department of Public Safety; Lisa Daughtry, TXDPS)

DIGEST: HB 1696 would require the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to adopt rules allowing an applicant for an original, duplicate, modified, or renewed handgun license to elect to include a handgun license designation on the person's driver's license or commercial driver's license.

The handgun license designation would have to include the person's handgun license number and a statement of the period for which the license to carry a handgun was effective. DPS would be required to establish procedures to ensure that a person who elected to include the handgun license designation on the person's driver's license or commercial driver's license:

- met the requirements for issuance of the original, duplicate, modified, or renewed license to carry a handgun; and
- maintained the designation only while licensed to carry a handgun.

The bill also would amend an existing requirement to display a handgun license upon request. If a license holder were carrying a handgun on or about their person when a magistrate or peace officer demanded the person to display identification, the license holder could display a driver's license with the handgun designation instead of providing both the handgun license and a second form of identification.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

DPS would be required to adopt rules by December 1, 2025. The bill would require DPS to make the handgun license designation available only to an applicant for an original, duplicate, modified, or renewed license to carry a handgun who submitted an application on or after January 1, 2026.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

By requiring DPS to create an optional handgun designation for driver's licenses, HB 1696 would remove the need for a person to produce multiple identification cards when required to show identification. The current dual document system is redundant for citizens and an unnecessary administrative burden for law enforcement. Also, having a driver's license with a handgun license designation would be helpful when a law enforcement officer checking a person's driver's license in the system is unable to find the person's license to carry.

Since the bill would simply provide the option for a handgun license designation on a driver's license and would not require the designation, the bill would avoid regulatory overreach and would not require a person to disclose any information they wanted to remain private.

CRITICS SAY:

HB 1696 would make unnecessary changes to the law, as a person's license to carry a handgun is already linked to the person's driver's

license, and law enforcement officers can see if a person is licensed to carry a handgun when checking their driver's license.

The bill could also raise privacy concerns. Driver’s licenses are sometimes required as identification in public places, such as when making purchases. Having a handgun license designation visible on a driver’s license could reveal information that the person would not otherwise be obligated to reveal. In addition, the bill could lead to confusion if the person had a handgun license designation on their driver’s license after their license to carry was suspended.

SUBJECT: Revising child welfare procedures on removal and termination

COMMITTEE: Human Services — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — Hull, Manuel, A. Davis, Dorazio, C. Morales, Noble, Richardson, Schatzline, Slawson, Swanson

1 nay — Rose

WITNESSES: For - Brandon Logan, Family Freedom Project; Judy Powell, Parent Guidance Center; Kate Murphy, Texans Care for Children; Julia Hatcher, Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys; Andrew Brown, Texas Public Policy Foundation; Brad Scalise; Shelly Troberman (*Registered, but did not testify*: Marian Little, Mary M Elizabeth, Austin Justice Coalition; Sarah Berel-Harrop; Thomas Parkinson; Mary Sarver)

Against - (*Registered, but did not testify*: M Paige Williams, Dallas Criminal District Attorney John Creuzot; Christopher Gatewood, Smith County Criminal District Attorneys Office)

On - (*Registered, but did not testify*: Audrey O'Neill, DFPS)

DIGEST: CSHB 2216 would amend provisions of the Family Code governing the removal of children from the home and the placement of children following removal. The bill would raise the evidentiary standard for termination of the parent-child relationship from "clear and convincing evidence" to "beyond a reasonable doubt" and make conforming changes throughout the Family Code.

Active efforts. The bill also would revise references to “reasonable efforts” by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to instead be “active efforts,” defining "active efforts" as affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended primarily to maintain or reunite a child with the child’s family.

In cases where DFPS was involved in a suit affecting the parent-child relationship, the bill would require the department’s active efforts to include assisting parents through the steps of a service plan and with accessing or developing the resources necessary to satisfy the plan. DFPS

would have to tailor the active efforts to the facts and circumstances of each case, including by:

- conducting a comprehensive assessment of the circumstances of the child's family, with a focus on safe reunification as the most desirable goal;
- identifying appropriate services and helping the parents to overcome barriers;
- conducting or causing to be conducted a diligent search for the child's extended family members, and contacting and consulting with extended family to provide the child and parents with family structure and support;
- taking steps to keep siblings together whenever possible;
- supporting regular visits with parents in the most natural setting possible, as well as trial home visits;
- identifying community resources and actively assisting the child's parents or family in using and accessing those resources;
- monitoring progress and participation in services;
- considering alternative ways to address the needs of the child's parents and family if the optimum services did not exist or were not available; and
- providing post-reunification services and monitoring.

Assistance regarding the service plan would have to be narrowly tailored to address issues identified in the court's order granting DFPS temporary managing conservatorship of the child or ordering the department to provide family preservation services.

The active efforts under the bill would have to be evaluated to ensure the efforts were consistent with the circumstances of the removal of the child from the home and provided for the child's safety.

Court orders, petitions, and motions for termination. The bill would add requirements for court orders, petitions, and motions for the termination of the parent-child relationship to include evidence of a causal relationship between particular home conditions and the likelihood that the continuation of the parent-child relationship would result in serious emotional or physical injury to the child. The bill would specify that evidence of the existence of certain factors, such as community poverty, crowded housing, or a parent's age, substance use, or social behavior, did not alone constitute evidence beyond a reasonable doubt.

Conduct would be considered likely to result in serious emotional or physical injury to the child if the conduct was likely to result in a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury to the child or an observable and material impairment to the growth, development, or functioning of the child.

The bill would remove as a condition under which the court was prohibited from ordering termination of the parent-child relationship the requirement that the court find and describe with specificity that reasonable efforts to return the child to the parent had been waived due to aggravated circumstances.

Disclosure of certain evidence. The bill would amend procedures for providing records to parents and their attorneys. The bill would revise provisions to specify that in a suit affecting the parent-child relationship filed by DFPS, the department would be required to provide certain records electronically to the parent party to the suit, the parent's attorney, and the child's attorney ad litem at least seven days before the full adversary hearing, removing the requirement for the parent's attorney to request the records. The bill would add to the list of required records:

- a copy of any relevant medical, psychological, psychiatric, or educational records in DFPS's possession, including exculpatory records, regardless of whether DFPS would use the records in court; and
- a copy of any records relating to consultations with physician networks and systems regarding certain medical conditions, including exculpatory records, regardless of whether DFPS would use the records in court.

Hearings after emergency possession of a child without a court order. For a child taken into DFPS possession without a court order, the bill would specify that the court would have to order the return of a child unless the court was satisfied that clear and convincing evidence, rather than any evidence, of certain circumstances existed.

The bill would require that a certain determination by the court regarding the child's welfare in these circumstances be based on evidence of a causal relationship between the conditions in the home and the likelihood that the continuation of the child in the home would result in serious emotional or physical injury to the child.

The bill would specify that evidence of the existence of certain factors, such as community poverty, crowded housing, or a parent's age, substance use, or social behavior, did not alone constitute clear and convincing evidence for these purposes. In addition, for the purposes of the court's determination, conduct would be considered likely to result in serious emotional or physical injury to the child if the conduct was likely to result in a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury to the child or an observable and material impairment to the growth, development or functioning of the child.

Placement with identified relatives and designated individuals. The bill would require, rather than authorize, DFPS to place children with relatives or designated caregivers identified on the proposed child placement resources form if DFPS determined the placement to be in the child's best interest. The bill also would add former foster parents to the preferred order for child placement decisions and specify that DFPS could deviate from the placement order if good cause was shown.

In determining whether good cause was shown to deviate from the preferred placement order, DFPS would be prohibited from considering as part of the best interest determination socioeconomic status or ordinary bonding between a child and a previous caregiver related to time spent in a non-preferred placement.

In a suit to take possession of a child filed without prior notice and a hearing, or a suit filed after taking possession of a child in an emergency, in which DFPS was appointed as the temporary managing conservator of a child, a person who qualified as a placement preference could file a motion to intervene in the suit if DFPS did not place the child with that person. The court would be required to grant the person's motion to intervene if the court found that the person qualified for a placement preference and that DFPS placed the child with a person of lower preference without good cause. The court would have to notify in writing a person with a placement preference of this right to intervene.

Full adversary hearings. For certain suits related to taking possession of a child, the bill would remove the provision that an indigent parent not represented by an attorney appear in opposition to the suit in order for the court to be required to inform the parent of the right to a court appointed attorney. The bill also would remove the requirement that a parent claiming indigence request the appointment of an attorney for a full

adversary hearing in order for the court to require the parent to file an affidavit of indigence.

Courts would be required, rather than authorized, to postpone hearings for up to 30, rather than seven, days from the date of an attorney's appointment to allow attorney preparation. If a parent who was not indigent appeared in opposition to a suit, the court would be required to, rather than authorized to, for good cause shown, postpone the hearing for up to 30, rather than seven, days from the parents appearance to allow the parent time to hire an attorney or to provide the attorney time to respond to the petition. If a court postponed or granted a continuance for a full adversary hearing, DFPS would be required to immediately modify any existing visitation plan to increase the visitation time for the parent and a child who had been removed. Virtual visitation could satisfy this requirement.

At the conclusion of a full adversary hearing, the court would be required to order the return of the child to the parent or other person from whom the child was removed unless the court found clear and convincing, rather than sufficient, evidence of certain conditions.

Aggravated circumstances. The bill would remove a court's authorization to waive the requirements to develop a service plan and to make active efforts to return the child to a parent.

The bill would remove from conduct constituting subjecting a child to aggravated circumstances conduct constituting an offense under provisions of the Penal Code on injury to a child, elderly individual, or disabled individual, and on abandoning or endangering a child, elderly individual, or disabled individual.

The bill would revise the conditions under which the court would be required to conduct a permanency hearing within 30 days. Rather than on finding that reasonable efforts to make it possible for the child to safely return to the child's home were not required, a permanency hearing would be required on finding that a parent had subjected a child to aggravated circumstances. On finding that a parent had subjected a child to aggravated circumstances, DFPS would be required to create a limited service plan. The plan would satisfy the requirement that DFPS make active efforts to return the child to the parent and would have to comply with any court order rendered in the case pertaining to bond or

supervision. The plan could contain only tasks that protected the safety of the child and due process rights.

Teleconferencing and videoconferencing. The bill would revise language to specify that DFPS, in cooperation with district and county courts, would have to expand the use of teleconferencing and videoconferencing with certain individuals in court proceedings, regardless of funding.

Placement of children in the conservatorship of DFPS. For the purposes of provisions on the placement of children in the conservatorship of DFPS, the bill would define a "child" to mean a person:

- younger than age 22 for whom DFPS had been appointed managing conservator before the child's 18th birthday; or
- was the responsibility of an agency with which DFPS had entered into an agreement to provide care and supervision of the child.

In making the initial or subsequent placement decision for a child, DFPS would be required to give preference to persons in the following order:

- a person related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption;
- a person with whom the child had a long-standing relationship;
- a foster parent with whom the child previously successfully resided while in the temporary managing conservatorship of the department;
- a foster home; and
- a general residential operation.

Effective date. The bill would take effect January 1, 2027, and would apply only to petitions, motions, suits, or placements made on or after its effective date.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 2216 would ensure that Texas families involved with DFPS received the highest quality of services and that children were not unnecessarily separated from their parents by applying the casework standards established by the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) to Texas families. By raising the evidentiary thresholds for removing a child from the home and for terminating parental rights, and by requiring and defining active, rather than reasonable, efforts to be made by DFPS, the bill would help to prevent unnecessary removals, which can be traumatic for both children and parents. Raising the evidentiary threshold to

"beyond a reasonable doubt" in these child welfare cases would ensure that termination decisions were made with the highest level of judicial scrutiny.

In addition, the bill would reinforce provisions requiring the placement of children with relatives and ensure that family members had a right to intervene, which would help prevent DFPS from deviating from placement prioritization of a relative based solely on economic status or other circumstances. The bill would provide additional safeguards for families and improve access to supportive services. The bill also would allow for greater participation in cases by requiring courts and DFPS to expand the use of teleconferencing and videoconferencing, regardless of funding.

CRITICS SAY:

CSHB 2216 would be unnecessary, as existing law promotes family reunification and includes safeguards to support parents in the child welfare system. Applying a "beyond a reasonable doubt" evidentiary standard, which is typically reserved for criminal cases, would be an inappropriate threshold for termination of parental rights in civil child welfare cases.

SUBJECT: Amending affidavit requirements for child-care facility tax exemptions

COMMITTEE: Ways & Means — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Meyer, Martinez Fischer, Bernal, Button, Capriglione, Gervin-Hawkins, Hickland, Muñoz, Noble, V. Perez, Turner

2 nays — Troxclair, Vasut

WITNESSES: For — Kathlyn McHenry, Early Care and Education Consortium; Brian Gutman, Learning Care Group (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; T. J. Patterson, City of Fort Worth; Matthew Bentley, KinderCare Learning Companies; David Feigen, Texans Care for Children; Seth Winick, The Learning Experience, The Primrose Schools of Texas)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Cindi Castilla, Texas Eagle Forum)

On — Kurt Hutson (*Registered, but did not testify*: Brent South, Texas association of appraisal districts)

BACKGROUND: Tax Code sec. 11.36(b) establishes that, subject to meeting certain qualification criteria, if the governing body of a county or municipality adopts an exemption for child-care facilities, a person is entitled to an exemption of all or part of the appraised value of:

> (1) the real property the person owns and operates as a qualifying child-care facility; or
> (2) the portion of the real property that the person owns and leases to a person who uses the property to operate a qualifying child-care facility.

Sec. 11.36(f) establishes that a person who claims an exemption under sec. 11.36(b)(2) must include with the application for the exemption an affidavit certifying to the chief appraiser for the relevant appraisal district that:

(1) the person has provided to the child-care facility a disclosure document stating the amount by which the taxes on the property are reduced as a result of the exemption and the method the person will implement to ensure that the rent charged for the lease of the property fully reflects that reduction;
(2) the rent charged reflects the reduction in property taxes resulting from the exemption through a monthly or annual credit against the rent; and
(3) the person does not charge rent for the lease of the property in an amount that exceeds certain rent amounts, subject to certain conditions.

DIGEST:

CSHB 1035 would establish the definition of "net lease" to mean a lease under which a lessee pays, in addition to the base rental amount, the associated property taxes. The definition would also include a double net lease and a triple net lease.

CSHB 1035 would amend Tax Code sec. 11.36(f)(1) to allow the affidavit required to be submitted with the application by a person claiming a child-care facility tax exemption under sec. 11.36(b)(2) to either certify that the disclosure document had been provided or that the property was subject to a net lease and the child-care facility to which the property was leased was responsible for paying the property taxes.

The bill also would amend sec. 11.36(f)(2) to provide that the affidavit must certify that the rent charged reflected the reduction in the amount resulting from the exemption, either through a monthly or annual credit against the rent or, if applicable, by the operation of the property's net lease.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

CSHB 1035 would guarantee that eligible tax savings are properly passed down to child-care facilities by explicitly accounting for net leases under the law, ensuring that financial benefits reach the facilities directly and

assist the working families who depend on affordable child care every day. Current requirements for affidavits related to child-care facility tax exemptions do not account for net leases where a tenant child-care facility is directly responsible for paying property taxes and may receive tax bills directly. By addressing this issue and accounting for these types of leases in the requirements for claiming a property tax exemption, CSHB 1035 would help to reduce financial strain on both child-care providers and working parents alike. The bill would ultimately help make child care more accessible and affordable, which in turn would help to address workforce challenges that often occur when parents struggle to secure reliable child care.

Texas voters demonstrated strong support for reducing property taxes for child-care facilities with the passage of Proposition 2 in 2023, and this bill would improve the ability of local governments to provide for this property tax exemption. The Legislative Budget Board finds that no significant fiscal impact to the state is anticipated for the bill, while the bill would have a meaningful financial impact on child-care providers, families, and the overall economy.

CRITICS SAY:

While child-care providers offer a critical service for Texans, many child-care providers already receive government subsidies and may not warrant a tax exemption that could shift the tax burden onto other taxpayers. This could lead to higher sales taxes or increased property taxes that could ultimately fall on working families and small businesses.

SUBJECT: Adding groundwater conservation district permit consideration criteria

COMMITTEE: Natural Resources — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — Harris, Martinez, Ashby, Barry, C. Bell, Buckley, Fairly, Gámez, J. Garcia, Romero, Villalobos, Zwiener

0 nays

1 absent — M. González

WITNESSES: For — Vanessa Puig-Williams, EDF; Gregory Ellis, Lost Pines GCD and other clients of the firm; Andrew Wier, Simsboro Aquifer Water Defense Fund; Adam Foster, Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts; Ted Boriack, Water Protection Association of Gonzales County; Nancy McKee (*Registered, but did not testify*: Shauna Sledge, Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District; David Blackburn, Bell County; Ricky Garrett, Bell County Water Control & Improvement District #1; Jody Williams, Clearwater UWCD; Ross Giesinger, Environmental Defense Action Fund; Teresa Davenport, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance; Cyrus Reed, Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club; Tom Entsminger, National Wildlife Federation; Brian Sledge, Prairielands Groundwater Conservation District; Upper Trinity Groundwater Conservation District; Aliyah Formont, Texas Public Policy Foundation; Doug Shaw, Upper Trinity Groundwater Conservation District; Buddy Garcia)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dirk Aaron, Clearwater UWCD)

DIGEST: HB 1633 would amend the considerations a groundwater conservation district was required to review before granting or denying a well permit or a permit amendment to include whether the proposed use of water unreasonably affected wells that were registered with the district and exempt from the requirement to obtain a well permit.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

HB 1633 would add clarity to the well permitting process and help protect rural landowners' access to groundwater by requiring that groundwater conservation districts consider the impact to registered permit-exempt wells in their permitting decisions.

Rural landowners rely heavily on registered exempt wells for drinking water, and these wells have seen significant drawdowns in water access due to the approval of major water projects. These regional water exports have forced small-scale farmers, ranchers, and landowners to dig their wells increasingly deeper to access groundwater, creating a significant financial burden that landowners have had to pay for.

Under current law, groundwater conservation districts must weigh the impact to existing permit holders when granting or denying a new permit, but are not required to consider permit-exempt wells. The bill would make the permitting process more equitable by ensuring that registered exempt wells were given the same consideration as permitted commercial wells.

In addition, the bill would encourage landowners to register their wells, since it only adds protections for registered wells.

CRITICS SAY:

No concerns identified.

SUBJECT: Requiring human trafficking prevention training for certain first responders

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — VanDeaver, Campos, Bucy, Cunningham, Frank, Johnson, J. Jones, Olcott, Pierson, Schofield, Shofner, Simmons

0 nays

1 absent — Collier

WITNESSES: For - Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Amber McCray, Street Grace (*Registered, but did not testify*: Heather Vasek, Acadian Ambulance Service; Rick Ramirez, City of Austin; Joshua Sanders, City of Houston; Katelyn Caldwell, Harris County Commissioners Court; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Sydney Baker, Not on Our Watch Texas; Joel Romo, Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance; Kelsey Bernstein, Texas Council of Community Centers; Craig Holzheauser, Texas EMS Alliance; Dewey Marshall, Texas Network of Youth Services; Jennifer Allmon, The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops; Sarah Berel-harrop; Sarah Cohen; Thomas Parkinson; Marci Purcell; Leticia Van de Putte)

Against - None

On - (*Registered, but did not testify*: Joy Borjes, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST: HB 742 would require first responders, including fire protection personnel and emergency medical services personnel, within the time prescribed by Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) rule, to successfully complete a training course approved by the HHSC executive commissioner on identifying, assisting, and reporting victims of human trafficking.

Under the bill, a first responder would mean a public safety employee whose duties include responding rapidly to an emergency, but would not include:

- volunteer emergency services personnel;
- an emergency medical services volunteer; or
- a peace officer or reserve law enforcement officer who was performing law enforcement duties.

The HHSC executive commissioner would be required to approve training courses on human trafficking prevention, including at least one course available without charge, and post a list of the approved training courses on HHSC's website. The executive commissioner also would be required to post and update the list of approved training courses as necessary and consider for approval training courses conducted by health care facilities. As soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill, the executive commissioner would be required to adopt necessary rules and approve and post the list of training courses.

Signage. Hospitals' emergency departments and freestanding emergency medical care facilities would be required to display a sign, at least 11 by 17 inches in size, written in at least a 16-point font and in the form prescribed by the attorney general, that included:

- the statement "All health care practitioners and first responders are required to receive human trafficking prevention training.";
- the statement "A hospital or freestanding emergency medical care facility employee may not be disciplined, retaliated against, or otherwise discriminated against for reporting in good faith a suspected act of human trafficking.";
- information on recognizing and reporting human trafficking and a list of human trafficking indicators;
- a phone number the attorney general designated for reporting suspected acts of human trafficking; and
- contact information for reporting suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety.

The sign would have to be posted in a location easily visible to all hospital or freestanding emergency medical care facility employees and posted separately in English, Spanish, and any other primary language spoken by at least 10 percent of the facility's employees. As soon as practicable after

the effective date of the bill, the attorney general would be required to design the sign. Existing requirements for hospitals to post human-trafficking-related signs would be removed.

General provisions. A hospital or freestanding emergency medical care facility could not discipline, retaliate against, or otherwise discriminate against a hospital employee who in good faith reported suspected human trafficking to the hospital, a law enforcement agency, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, the attorney general, or any other appropriate authority.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

By requiring effective human trafficking prevention training for certain first responders, HB 742 would help increase the number of identified trafficking victims who received assistance. Texas has long recognized the need for health professionals to be educated on human trafficking prevention, but certain first responders do not receive relevant training. This poses a problem, as first responders may be the only emergency personnel to encounter a victim of human trafficking following an emergency or act of violence, as victims often decline transit to a healthcare facility due to fear of their trafficker. A majority of human trafficking victims encounter first responders at some point while being trafficked, making human trafficking prevention training for first responders a key step in addressing the issue in Texas.

CRITICS SAY:

No concerns identified.

SUBJECT: Requiring human trafficking prevention training for medical assistants

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — VanDeaver, Campos, Bucy, Cunningham, Frank, Johnson, J. Jones, Olcott, Pierson, Schofield, Shofner, Simmons

0 nays

1 absent — Collier

WITNESSES: For - Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Amber McCray, Street Grace; Kristilyn Moses, Texas Society of Medical Assistants (*Registered, but did not testify*: T. J. Patterson, City of Fort Worth; Joshua Sanders, City of Houston; Katelyn Caldwell, Harris County Commissioners Court; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Sydney Baker, Not on Our Watch Texas; Kelsey Bernstein, Texas Council of Community Centers; Dewey Marshall, Texas Network of Youth Services; Jennifer Allmon, The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops; Sarah Berel-harrop; Thomas Parkinson; Marci Purcell; Leticia Van de Putte)

Against - None

On - (*Registered, but did not testify*: Joy Borjes, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST: HB 754 would require a medical assistant, within the time prescribed by Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) rule, to successfully complete a training course approved by the HHSC executive commissioner on identifying, assisting, and reporting victims of human trafficking. A medical assistant would be defined as an individual who, under the supervision of a physician, assisted with patient care management, executed administrative duties, and performed certain clinical procedures specified by the bill.

The HHSC executive commissioner would be required to approve training courses on human trafficking prevention, including at least one course available without charge, and post a list of the approved training courses

on HHSC's website. The executive commissioner also would have to consider for approval training courses conducted by health care facilities and update the list of approved training courses as necessary. As soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill, the executive commissioner would be required to adopt the necessary rules to implement this training and approve and post the approved list of training courses on the HHSC website.

Signage. HB 754 would require hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, public health clinics, birthing centers, outpatient clinics, and community health centers to display signs of a certain size and font and in the form prescribed by the attorney general that included:

- the statement "All health care practitioners and medical assistants are required to receive human trafficking prevention training.";
- the statement "An employee may not be disciplined, retaliated against, or otherwise discriminated against for reporting in good faith a suspected act of human trafficking.";
- information on recognizing and reporting human trafficking and a list of human trafficking indicators;
- a phone number the attorney general designated for reporting suspected acts of human trafficking; and
- contact information for reporting suspicious activity to the Department of Public Safety.

The sign would have to be posted in a location easily visible to all facility employees and separately in English, Spanish, and any other primary language spoken by at least 10 percent of the facility's employees. As soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill, the attorney general would be required to design the sign.

General provisions. A facility could not discipline, retaliate against, or otherwise discriminate against a facility employee who in good faith reported suspected human trafficking to the facility, a law enforcement agency, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, the attorney general, or any other appropriate authority.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2025.

SUPPORTERS SAY:

By requiring effective human trafficking prevention training for medical assistants, HB 754 would help increase the number of identified trafficking victims who received critical assistance. A majority of human trafficking victims access healthcare at some point while being trafficked, often receiving treatment for injuries or illnesses related to their victimization. Medical assistants have the unique opportunity of establishing rapport with their patients through one-on-one conversations while documenting their patients' vitals and medical history. As medical assistants are the most likely medical professionals to observe the behavioral dynamics of a patient and any potential signs of abuse, providing them with human trafficking prevention training would be a key step in identifying victims and addressing the issue in Texas.

CRITICS SAY:

No concerns identified.