

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2879
By: Raney
Public Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Concerns have been raised regarding the number of children, especially those in poverty, who do not have access to books or have parents that read to them. Such insufficient exposure to language may result in children beginning school at a disadvantage in terms of literacy skills. C.S.H.B. 2879 seeks to address this issue by requiring The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston to establish a competitive grant program to promote early literacy, using a model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2879 amends the Education Code to require The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, subject to the bill's appropriations contingency, to establish a competitive grant program to promote early literacy through which the health science center will award grants for the implementation of literacy programs, or the expansion of existing programs, and for the operation of those programs for a period of not less than two years. The bill requires the health science center to award the grants in a manner that ensures that the literacy programs collectively operate in multiple communities that are geographically distributed throughout Texas. The bill requires a literacy program funded through a grant to do the following:

- consult and use as a guide the literacy program model developed by the Reach Out and Read National Center;
- require that health care practitioners who participate in the literacy program maintain waiting rooms that encourage children to read; provide services designed to increase the school readiness of children receiving program services; and, in conjunction with performing well-child examinations, provide books to children and encourage parents to read to their children to develop preliteracy skills; and
- partner with local adult literacy providers to encourage parent literacy in appropriate circumstances.

C.S.H.B. 2879 authorizes a public or private entity to apply for a grant and provides for the form of such an application. The bill requires the health science center, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center, to publish guidelines for the funded literacy programs and authorizes the guidelines to follow the Reach Out and Read national program model standards

and guidelines.

C.S.H.B. 2879 restricts a grant recipient's use of grant money to covering costs related to implementing or expanding and operating a literacy program. The bill authorizes the health science center to use competitive grant program money for the following purposes:

- administering the competitive grant program; and
- purchasing or contracting to purchase discounted books for use by grant recipients.

C.S.H.B. 2879 requires the health science center, with the assistance of the Reach Out and Read National Center, to prepare and submit a biennial report, not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year, to the senate committee on education and the house public education committee regarding the grants awarded during the preceding two state fiscal years. The bill sets out requirements relating to the report and requires the health science center to submit the initial report not later than December 1, 2022. The bill requires the health science center to actively seek and apply for any available federal money and authorizes the health science center to use state appropriations and to accept gifts, donations, grants of money, and in-kind contributions from the federal government, local governments, private corporations, or other persons to assist in financing the competitive grant program, provided the center implements the program in accordance with the bill's appropriation contingency. The bill makes the requirement for the health science center to implement a provision of the bill contingent on a legislative appropriation specifically for that purpose and otherwise authorizes, but expressly does not require, the center to implement such a provision using other money available to the center for that purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2019.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 2879 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute includes provisions making the health science center's required implementation of the bill's provisions contingent on a legislative appropriation for that purpose.