

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1121
By: Lucio
Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Concerns have been raised regarding the lack of existing public laboratory capabilities in the areas of Texas bordering Mexico to test for communicable diseases that pose a potentially serious public health threat. Public health officials have noted the importance of the time frame in which relevant testing can be completed, since delays due to limited local capabilities may result in greater risk of public exposure. These difficulties are compounded by the economically distressed circumstances and migration patterns of the border region and by the seasonal schedule of operations for certain state facilities elsewhere in Texas. S.B. 1121 seeks to address these concerns by requiring DSHS to conduct an assessment of existing laboratory capabilities in the region, establish interlocal agreements to improve access to resources, and provide for year-round testing where appropriate.

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

S.B. 1121 amends the Health and Safety Code to require the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), not later than September 1, 2020, to prepare and submit a written or electronic report to the legislature on public laboratories in Texas counties that are adjacent to an international border. The bill requires the report to include information on the existing testing capabilities of the public laboratories, focusing on clinical, environmental, and zoonotic testing capabilities and recommendations to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of the public laboratories through administrative action and legislation. The bill requires DSHS to collaborate with municipal or county health departments and public and private testing laboratories to collect information and develop recommendations for the report. These provisions expire September 1, 2021.

S.B. 1121 requires DSHS, using available resources and as determined appropriate by DSHS, to enter into agreements with public institutions of higher education and public and private testing laboratories in Texas to increase the availability of public health laboratory services for municipal and county health departments in counties adjacent to an international border. The bill requires the agreements to establish specified protocols. The bill requires DSHS, using available resources and as determined appropriate by DSHS, to support access to year-round laboratory testing for vector-borne infectious diseases to record and address local outbreaks of such diseases in the counties of Texas that are most at risk for those year-round outbreaks,

including, Maverick, Val Verde, Webb, Zapata, Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties. The bill authorizes DSHS to make the access directly available or through a local agreement as provided by the bill and sets out the types of testing the supported year-round laboratory testing may include, as appropriate.

S.B. 1121 makes the requirements for DSHS to implement a provision of the bill contingent on a legislative appropriation specifically for that purpose and otherwise authorizes, but expressly does not require, DSHS to implement such a provision using other appropriations available for that purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2019.