

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary teams for child abuse and neglect services

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Hilderbran, Naishtat, Chavez, Christian, Davila, Krusee, Maxey, McReynolds, Wohlgemuth
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Josephine Hall
Against — None
On — Howard Baldwin, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services; David Shelton, Texas Fathers Alliance

BACKGROUND : Under current law, local and state law enforcement are required to refer all reports received alleging child abuse or neglect to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS). DPRS must immediately notify local law enforcement of reports of suspected child abuse or neglect or death of a child from abuse or neglect and must make prompt and thorough investigation of child abuse reports.

DPRS is also responsible for implementing service delivery standards for programs, providing training and technical assistance to regional and local service providers, developing and implementing systems for monitoring service delivery, promoting innovative local service delivery and cooperating and coordinating with other governmental agencies in service delivery. Department employees or volunteers who perform a departmental duty or responsibility are immune from civil or criminal liability for act or omissions if they acted in good faith and within the scope of their authority.

DIGEST: HB 2250 would require DPRS, to the extent possible, to establish multidisciplinary teams for providing and coordinating services to and exchanging information on abused or neglected children. A multidisciplinary team would have to include professionals in each discipline necessary to provide comprehensive medical and psychological services to children and their families. Members of multidisciplinary teams

would have civil and criminal immunity when working within the scope of their authority.

The bill would require DPRS to conduct community education programs designed to enlist public participation in preventing, identifying, and treating cases of child abuse and neglect. The department also would be required to make training concerning child abuse or neglect available to professionals required by law to report, investigate, or litigate those cases, and to provide joint training on investigating child abuse reports to DPRS staff and law enforcement personnel.

DPRS would seek assistance from appropriate state or local law enforcement agencies when investigating child abuse reports to get assistance from state or local law enforcement.

HB 2250 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership in each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2250 would enhance knowledge of child abuse and neglect issues within both Texas communities and professional fields, and enhance the way the state responds to these situations. Currently, law enforcement and child protection agencies in Texas are not required to share information regarding certain types of child abuse and neglect. This bill would provide for exchange of information, joint training and joint investigations of child abuse and neglect between law enforcement and DPRS, and would offer added protection to abused children.

By creating a new multidisciplinary team approach to conducting investigations of child abuse and neglect, the bill would generate a more effective use of law enforcement and child protective skills. Since child abuse cases are very complicated involving many issues, it makes sense to involve a seasoned group of professionals from different disciplines, including law, medicine, mental health, social work and law enforcement. Many other states have enacted laws establishing multidisciplinary teams with great success in recent years. The multidisciplinary team approach promotes cooperation among juvenile services, law enforcement, juvenile courts, social services, schools as well as public awareness and prevention programs while cutting down on duplication of services and efforts.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

While the concept of joint training and investigation is a good one, law enforcement personnel could provide more effective training for caseworkers investigating child abuse reports. At least one police department in Texas is successfully training these investigators with much success, saving DPRS money in the process.