

SUBJECT: Creating the Coastal Bend Health Education Center

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Rangel, Cuellar, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, Wohlgemuth
0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 4 — 30-0

WITNESSES: For — Joseph R. Krier, Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
Against — None
On — Jay Noren, Texas A&M University System Health Science Center

BACKGROUND: The Coastal Bend region of Texas is located in the southeast part of the state bordering the Gulf of Mexico. About 700,000 people live in the 17 counties that make up this region. By 2010, the region is expected to grow to about 825,000, an increase of one-sixth.

DIGEST: SB 590, as amended, would instruct the Texas A&M University System board of regents to establish the Texas A&M University System Coastal Bend Health Education Center by January 1, 2000. The board could execute agreements with any other educational entity or institution in the region, including a health service provider, to help establish or take part in the operation of the center.

The center would have to develop and provide community-based instructional sites for educating health-care professionals. It could include any public or private medical, dental, nursing, or other health-care or educational institution to take part in programs within the center's service area, as determined by the regents.

The center could provide undergraduate clinical education, graduate education, or other levels of health-care education work in connection with component institutions of the Texas A&M system, as determined by the

regents. The center could conduct public outreach programs and research programs related to educational areas or to public-health issues arising within its service area.

The regents would have to assign responsibility for management of the center to the Texas A&M University System Health Science Center. Operating costs of the center would have to be paid from operating funds of the health science center or any participating institution and from any other available public or private funds. The regents could solicit, accept, and administer gifts and grants for the center. The center would be under continuing supervision of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The bill would obligate the regents to establish the center only if the Legislature appropriated funds specifically for that purpose. The coordinating board would have to prepare an initial impact statement and deliver it to the regents and to the chairs of the higher education committees of each house of the Legislature by August 31, 2000.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

The purpose of SB 590 is to create the Coastal Bend Health Education Center to train health professionals, improve access to health care, reduce disease, and promote public health. The center would bring much-needed relief for the scarcity of health education training programs in the region. Students who received their medical education in the Coastal Bend would be more likely to remain in the region to provide medical services and research.

SB 590 would support the kind of partnerships between colleges and universities that communities need to solve their problems locally. Students would study their chosen professions on A&M campuses in Corpus Christi and Kingsville, at Coastal Bend College, or at Del Mar College. In addition, leased space in hospitals, clinics, and community agencies could be used for educating students. The center would produce health professionals familiar with the special health needs of communities in the region.

The center would focus on public health problems such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, cancer, obstetrics, tobacco- and alcohol-related illnesses, mental illness, and geriatrics. It could help in environmental areas

such as water quality, industrial and agricultural chemicals, and waste disposal. Finally, the center could help the Texas Agricultural Extension Service with rural outreach health-education programs.

Providing for the center to engage in partnerships has reduced the fiscal note dramatically. SB 590 is projected to cost the state only \$1.5 million for fiscal 2000-01. The project would not require construction and renovation funds, but would use existing and leased space. This \$1.5 million investment would produce a great return to the state in terms of public health, public education, and eventually in savings of high-cost medical expenses. Also, the investment would produce a better-educated citizenry that would keep high-paying jobs in Texas and the Coastal Bend region.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 590 is projected to cost the state \$1.5 million during fiscal 2000-01 and nearly \$18 million in the following biennium. The institutions involved in the center already exist and provide similar programs. They could by agreement form the partnerships needed to carry out the intent of the new center without creating another state-funded entity.

While the Coastal Bend counties are underserved by health professionals, Corpus Christi, the largest city in the region, is overserved. This bill would benefit primarily Corpus Christi, the site of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and Del Mar College. Although some geographic maldistributions exist, Texas as a whole produces an adequate number of physicians, according to several reports on the subject.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would require the coordinating board to prepare an initial impact statement.

An item in the Article 11 wish list of the House-passed version of HB 1 by Junell, the general appropriations bill for fiscal 2000-01, would provide about \$22.4 million for the Texas A&M University System Coastal Bend Health Education Center each year of the biennium, contingent on enactment of SB 590.