

- SUBJECT:** Creating a committee to review the adoption process for foster children
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Herrero, Darby, Hernandez, Hughes, Legler, Naishtat, Walle
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Elkins
- WITNESSES:** For — Heidi Cox, The Gladney Center; Eric Freeby; Pam Monsivaiz; Kathleen Nickels; Bob Price; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jane Burstain, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Nancy Holman, Texas Alliance of Child & Family Services; Noelita Lugo, Texans Care for Children; Diana Martinez, TexProtects)
- Against — None
- On — Liz Kromrei, Department of Family and Protective Services
- DIGEST:** HB 2225 would create an adoption review committee to evaluate the process for finding permanent placements for foster children. The committee would have nine members. Six would be appointed by the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and would include:
- an employee of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS);
  - a representative from a licensed child-placement agency that provides adoption services;
  - an adoption advocate;
  - a foster care advocate;
  - a representative from the Council on Adoptable Children of Texas; and
  - an attorney with expertise in handling adoptions.

The remaining three members would be required to have expertise in or a demonstrated commitment to adoption issues, and one each would be

appointed by the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House.

HB 2225 would require DFPS, in conjunction with the adoption review committee, to conduct an extensive review of the foster care system to: identify obstacles that impede DFPS' ability to find permanent placements for foster children, including adoption, and to develop ways to improve the foster care system by:

- reducing the time a child is in the conservatorship of the state before being permanently placed;
- reducing the number of children in the conservatorship of the state who are placed outside of their home county; and
- enhancing the procedures for adopting foster children.

The bill would require the results to be submitted by DFPS in a written report to the governor and various legislative leaders no later than December 1, 2010. The report would have to include a summary of findings and recommendations of actions and any legislative recommendations that would improve the foster care system.

The adoption review committee would be abolished and the requirements of this bill would expire on September 1, 2011.

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, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 2225 would bring together the best and brightest in the adoption field with one goal — to review the foster care system and determine changes that could be made so that foster children could move into loving, permanent homes in the fastest, most efficient manner possible.

HB 2225 would be the first step toward a comprehensive state policy to promote the permanent placement of foster children, which is critical to their future success. Recent studies show that 40 percent of children who “age out” of the foster care system, or turn 18 without ever having received a permanent placement, never graduate from high school, and 56 percent of these children are unemployed and live in poverty within four years. Additionally, of all incarcerated youths and young adults in Texas, 88 percent are part of the foster care system or aged out of foster care.

These children need permanent placement or adoption in order to increase their chance of success.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from the bill as filed by changing the name of the committee from the “foster care review committee” to the “adoption review committee.” The committee substitute added that the review committee would consist of nine members, with six appointed by the HHSC executive commissioner and three appointed by legislative leaders, rather than six members with two each appointed by the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House. The introduced bill would have prohibited a member of the Legislature from serving on the committee, while the committee substitute would not. The committee substitute also added reducing the number of children who are placed outside their home county to the purposes for which the review of the foster care system would be conducted.