

- SUBJECT:** 2-1-1 disaster registration for community and in-home support agencies
- COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Corte, Vaught, Edwards, Farias, Pickett, C. Turner
0 nays
3 absent — Chavez, Maldonado, Ortiz
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registering, but did not testify:* Darrin Hall, City of Houston, Office of Mayor)

Against — None

On — Anita Bradberry, Texas Association for Home Care (*Registered, but did not testify:* Beth Wick, Texas Information & Referral Network)
- BACKGROUND:** The Texas Information and Referral Network, a division of the Health and Human Services Commission, maintains 2-1-1, a telephone help line that provides information about programs such as:
- food, free shelter, and rent assistance;
 - utility bill assistance;
 - counseling;
 - child care and after-school programs;
 - senior services; and
 - disaster relief.
- DIGEST:** HB 2558 would amend the Health and Safety Code to require all home and community-support services agencies to assist their clients in registering for disaster evacuation assistance via 2-1-1. The agencies also would be required to counsel their clients about disaster preparedness.
- 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 2258 would help save lives and prevent unnecessary hardship or injury by enabling emergency responders to know the location and specific needs of all homebound, elderly, and persons with special needs. Using this information, shelters would be able to gather supplies in appropriate numbers and plan timely evacuation strategies. An accurate database is essential for developing an accurate and comprehensive plan to distribute supplies and to serve this unique population.

Information provided to 2-1-1 by home and community-support agencies would help ensure that emergency plans are developed to meet the needs of all Texas citizens. These agencies bring their clients en masse to evacuation hubs, and some clients state that they are not educated about 2-1-1. The agencies are in an advantageous position to assist their clients because they provide direct care.

The Select Committee on Hurricane Ike Devastation recommended establishing a database of persons with special needs, the elderly, the disabled, those with medical problems, and all homebound persons. The committee recommended that each shelter location have in place a plan to reach those who are unable to travel to points of distribution. Florida maintains a successful special needs registry to aide in disaster situations citizens with serious medical conditions, the physically disabled, elderly, and those with severe psychological illness.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 2558 would duplicate current practice within home and community-support agencies. Most individuals already have a support system in place and might resist registering for additional assistance.