

SUBJECT: Requiring HHSC and related entities to broadcast, archive open meetings

COMMITTEE: Government Transparency and Operation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Elkins, Capriglione, Gonzales, Shaheen, Tinderholt, Uresti

0 nays

1 absent — Lucio

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Casey Haney, Blakemore Public Affairs; Paul Townsend, Children's Hospital Association of Texas; Kelley Shannon, Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas; Leah Gonzalez, Healthy Futures of Texas; Dixie Davis, League of Women Voters of Texas; Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries; Eric Kunish, National Alliance for Mental Illness-Austin; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Adriana Kohler, Texans Care for Children; Tom Banning, Texas Academy of Family Physicians; Sarah Mills, Texas Association for Home Care and Hospice; Michael Schneider, Texas Association of Broadcasters; Mary Allen, Texas Association of Community Health Centers; Gwen Daverth, Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy; Nora Belcher, Texas e-Health Alliance; Troy Alexander, Texas Medical Association; Erin Cusack, Texas Nurse Practitioners; Andrew Cates, Texas Nurses Association; Clayton Travis, Texas Pediatric Society; Donnis Baggett, Texas Press Association; Jason Sabo, The Immunization Partnership; James Thurston, United Ways of Texas; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Bryan Black, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST: HB 630 would require the Health and Human Services Commission

(HHSC) and each health and human services agency to broadcast over the internet live video and audio of each open meeting of the agency and to archive a reasonable-quality video and audio recording of the broadcast. The agencies would have to provide access to the archived video and audio on their websites within seven days after a meeting and to maintain it on the website for at least two years after the date it was first made available.

HHSC and each associated agency would be required to post on its website a notice of the date, time, place, and subject of each open meeting at least 72 hours before the scheduled start time.

These broadcast, archiving, and notice requirements would apply to meetings of advisory bodies that advise the executive commissioner or a health and human services agency. The archived video and audio would have to be made available through the website of the agency to which the advisory body provided advice.

HHSC would be required to consider contracting through competitive bidding with a private individual or entity to broadcast and archive an open meeting. The bill would allow an agency to use a room made available to it on request in any state building for an internet broadcast of an open meeting.

HHSC, each health and human services agency, and any advisory body would be exempt from the broadcast, archiving, and notice requirements if a catastrophe or a technical breakdown prevented the agency from complying. After the catastrophe or technical breakdown, the agency would have to make all reasonable efforts to make the required video and audio of the open meeting available in a timely manner.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017, and would apply only to an open meeting held on or after September 1, 2023.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

HB 630 would improve transparency and increase public engagement by

making the open meetings of health and human services agencies available online. Although the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) currently is working to broadcast and archive video and audio of most meetings on its website, concerns have been raised about inadequate online access to open meetings for all health and human services agencies. This bill would continue efforts that are already underway and ensure the online availability of video and audio for all open meetings of HHSC and related agencies and advisory bodies.

HHSC and its related entities consist of officials responsible for making decisions that affect many Texans, including vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Given public interest in these issues, it is important to improve transparency for HHSC priorities and to facilitate public participation in the decision-making of these agencies.

Many stakeholders, including members of the public and health care professionals, find it difficult to take off work or travel to Austin to provide timely input at meetings. This bill would reduce barriers to participation and allow citizens statewide to access internet broadcasts or archived videos at their convenience.

HB 630 contains measures that would minimize implementation costs. HHSC and its associated agencies would have six years to fully implement the integration of webcasting technology in new facilities. To reduce the cost of compliance, HHSC could contract for these services with private entities through competitive bidding. The commission already has begun efforts to broadcast some of its meetings, including contracting with a private entity and installing the necessary technology in all hearing rooms. The bill also would allow HHSC to request the use of video/audio-capable rooms in any state building for meetings.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.