

SUBJECT: Proposing a constitutional amendment for mental health research bonds

COMMITTEE: Public Health — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — S. Thompson, Wray, Allison, Coleman, Lucio, Ortega, Price, Sheffield, Zedler

1 nay — Frank

1 absent — Guerra

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mandi Kimball, Children at Risk; Eric Woomer, Federation of Texas Psychiatry; Donna Warndof, Harris County Commissioners Court; Jason Sabo, Mental Health America of Greater Houston; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness Texas; Eric Kunish, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Austin; Lauren Spreen, Texas Academy of Family Physicians; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Tom Kowalski, Texas Healthcare and Bioscience Institute; Sara Gonzalez, Texas Hospital Association; Uchenna Umeh, Texas Medical Association, Texas Pediatric Society, Federation of Texas Psychiatry)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Adam Cahn, Cahnman's Musings; Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; Mark Ramsey, Republican Party of Texas SREC SD7; Anna Alkire; Kirsten Linebaugh; Ruth York)

On — Sheila Hemphill, Texas Right To Know (*Registered, but did not testify*: Sonja Gaines, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST: CSHJR 5 would amend the Texas Constitution to allow the Legislature to authorize the Texas Public Finance Authority (TPFA) to sell general obligation bonds of the State of Texas and enter into related credit agreements to fund mental and behavioral health research and programs. The purpose of the programs would be to:

- research behavioral health issues, including causes, public health trends and strategies, and new treatments;
- research substance use and addiction issues, including the genetic determinants of addiction, identification of and mitigation of risk factors, addiction recovery, pain management strategies, and prescription practices;
- research behavioral and mental health issues affecting children, including unidentified and untreated mental illness, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and suicide prevention; and
- address the shortage of mental health professionals in Texas, including programs to increase access to mental health professionals and the use of telemedicine and to provide financial assistance to mental health professionals trained in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness in children and adolescents.

Issuance of bonds. The TPFA could issue or sell up to \$3 billion in general obligation bonds under the provisions of the joint resolution but could not issue more than \$500 million in bonds in a year. Proceeds from the sale of bonds would be deposited in separate funds or accounts in the state treasury to be used by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) in providing grants to institutions of higher education and government entities. These proceeds also could be used to pay for the costs of issuing bonds and any related administrative expenses.

While any of the bonds or interest on the bonds was unpaid, from the first money entering the state treasury each fiscal year not otherwise appropriated by the Texas Constitution, an amount sufficient to pay the principal of and interest on bonds that matured or became due during the fiscal year and to make payments under related credit agreements during the fiscal year would be appropriated, less the amount in the sinking fund at the close of the previous fiscal year.

After approval by the attorney general, registration by the comptroller of public accounts, and delivery to the purchasers, the bonds issued under the provisions of CSHJR 5 would be incontestable and would be general

obligations of the state.

The ballot proposal would be presented to voters at an election on November 5, 2019, and would read: "The constitutional amendment providing for the issuance of up to \$3 billion in general obligation bonds by the Texas Public Finance Authority to fund research, treatment, and access to services in this state for behavioral health, mental health, and substance use and addiction issues."

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHJR 5 would provide the funding to conduct necessary research on mental and behavioral health and substance abuse disorder in Texas and to address the lack of mental health professionals in the state. The resolution would ensure that the state could fund this research in accordance with the requirements of the Texas Constitution.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHJR 5 could create a financial risk to the state with an expansion of obligations on long-term debt service. A "pay-as-you-go" method for financing CSHJR 5 would be preferable to expanding the state's debt.

NOTES:

HB 10 by S. Thompson, the enabling legislation for CSHJR 5, is set for second reading consideration today on the Major State Calendar.

The Legislative Budget Board notes that the impact on state debt of CSHJR 5 could not be determined at this time. The cost to the state of publishing the resolution would be \$177,289.