

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 2596
By: King (Zaffirini)
Health & Human Services
5-12-97
Engrossed

DIGEST

The Texas Information and Referral Task Force convened in April of 1990 under the direction of the Texas Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, the Texas Health and Human Services Council, and the Texas Interagency Council for Early Childhood Intervention. This task force was charged with the responsibility of developing a plan for a statewide information and referral system for health and human services. The resulting report published in 1991 made recommendations which laid the foundation for the Texas Information and Referral Network (network).

The network, a public-private partnership, has resulted in increased coordination of information and referral services through the designation of community information centers in 140 Texas counties, representing 92 percent of the state's population. The network is currently working on statewide information and referral standards to ensure effectiveness and accountability. Implicit in the network's approach is the principle that existing community-based structures, both state and local, are to be utilized to build consolidated information and referral data management infrastructures. This approach reduces unnecessary duplication and competition, which provides for a broad-based ownership of the network and efficient organization of resources.

The current system remains fragmented in areas which makes it difficult to determine which services are available and who qualifies for them. There are many excellent and extensively used systems which address multiple programs and services, but they are not always well coordinated with specialized information and referral services in the same community or with state-level information and referral services.

This bill would designate the Texas Information and Referral Network of the Health and Human Services Commission as the program responsible for the development, coordination, and implementation of a statewide information and referral network that integrates existing community-based structures with state and local agencies.

PURPOSE

As proposed, H.B. 2596 designates the Texas Information and Referral Network of the Health and Human Services Commission as the program responsible for the development, coordination, and implementation of a statewide information and referral network that integrates existing community-based structures with state and local agencies.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 531B, Government Code, by adding Sections 531.0312, 531.0313, and 531.0314, as follows:

Sec. 531.0312. TEXAS INFORMATION AND REFERRAL NETWORK. Provides that the Texas Information and Referral Network (network) at the Health and Human Services Commission (commission) is the program responsible for the development, coordination, and implementation of a statewide information and referral network that integrates existing

community-based structures with state and local agencies. Requires a health and human services agency to provide the network with information about the health and human services provided by the agency for inclusion in the statewide information and referral network. Requires the agency to update the information at least quarterly.

Sec. 531.0313. ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES REFERRAL INFORMATION. Authorizes the network to develop an Internet site to provide information to the public regarding the health and human services provided by public or private entities throughout the state. Requires the material in the network site to be geographically indexed and designed to inform an individual about the health and human services provided in the area where the individual lives. Requires the material to be further indexed by type of service provided within each geographic area. Authorizes the Internet site to contain links to the Internet sites of any local provider of health and human services and to contain certain information. Defines "Internet."

Sec. 531.0314. INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SYSTEM TASK FORCE. Requires the commission to establish a task force to implement the statewide information and referral system for health and human services and to make recommendations to the commission and other agencies providing health and human services. Requires the task force to coordinate the development of state and local information and referral network databases. Requires the task force to consist of representatives from the state's health and human services agencies and certain organizations.

SECTION 2. Requires the task force under Section 531.0314, Government Code, as added by this Act, to evaluate the use of the Internet and other methods of providing access to information and referral services; conduct an inventory of all existing information and referral systems including toll-free telephone numbers and state agencies performing information and referral activities; and recommend a strategy for eliminating duplicative toll-free telephone numbers. Requires the task force to report its findings and recommendations to the Health and Human Services Commission not later than March 1, 1998, and requires the commission and other affected agencies to seek to implement those recommendations, with the assistance of the task force, not later than July 1, 1998. Requires the task force to make a follow-up report to the 75th Legislature not later than December 1, 1998. Requires the report to include recommendations for statutory changes.

SECTION 3. Emergency clause.
Effective date: upon passage.