

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1403
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Health & Human Services
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As Filed

DIGEST

As of 1994, there were over 51,000 legally blind Texans over the age of 40, and each year more than 4,000 Texans become legally blind. Almost half these cases could be prevented with proper intervention. Many conditions which could be controlled with medication or surgery go untreated because of lack of insurance or other means to pay for the treatment. The Texas Commission for the Blind can only serve these individuals after they become blind. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 70 percent of legally blind people are either underemployed or unemployed, with the vast majority dependent upon public assistance. This legislation establishes a blindness education, screening, and treatment program in order to prevent many Texans from losing their sight and their ability to remain independent.

PURPOSE

As proposed, S.B. 1403 establishes and funds a blindness education, screening, and treatment program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is granted to the Texas Commission for the Blind in SECTION 1 (Section 91.027(e), Human Resources Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 91.027, Human Resources Code, as follows:

Sec. 91.027. New heading: **BLINDNESS EDUCATION, SCREENING, AND TREATMENT PROGRAM.** Requires the Texas Commission for the Blind (commission) to develop a Blindness Education, Screening, and Treatment Program to provide blindness prevention education, screening, and treatment to prevent blindness for residents who are not covered under an adequate health benefit plan. Requires the program, screening procedures, and treatment procedures to include certain services. Requires the commission, by rule, to prescribe eligibility requirements for the program. Sets forth the terms by which the blindness, education, screening, and treatment account is an account in the state treasury. Requires the commission to implement the Blindness Education, Screening, and Treatment Program not later than January 1, 1998. Provides that this subsection expires February 1, 1998. Deletes the provision requiring the commission to take measures it considers advisable to prevent blindness and conserve eyesight.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 521.421, Transportation Code, by adding Subsection (f), to require the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to collect an additional fee of \$1 for the issuance or renewal of a license to fund the program. Requires DPS to forward money collected to the comptroller for deposit to the blindness, screening, and treatment account.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 1997.

SECTION 4. Emergency clause.