

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1237
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Jurisprudence
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Currently, there is no express statutory authorization for adult criminal cases to be referred for a fee to mediation or victim-offender conferencing in Texas. Such programs seek to resolve the perpetrator's acts against a victim without formal judicial intervention by directly redressing a victim's losses and the victim's need to be made whole.

In other jurisdictions that have begun using victim offender conferencing, research shows that 89 percent of agreements were successfully completed, 79 percent of victims were satisfied, and 72 percent of such programs reduced recidivism by an average of seven percent. These rates far exceed the rates of restitution paid and victim satisfaction obtained following formal justice system processes. The diversion of cases to criminal alternative dispute resolution (ADR) has also been shown to reduce costs to taxpayers by reducing the number of cases that must be resolved through traditional court proceedings.

S.B. 1237 amends the Civil Practice and Remedies Code to provide an avenue for ADR for criminal cases in participating counties by providing a procedure for prosecutorial referral, with the approval of the victim and the defendant's voluntary waiver of his or her right to trial and appeal, and the collection of a participant fee from the defendant.

As proposed, S.B. 1237 amends current law relating to referral of disputes for alternative dispute resolution, including victim-directed referrals; authorizing a fee.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 152.003, Civil Practice and Remedies Code, as follows:

Sec. 152.003. REFERRAL OF CASES. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text. Authorizes a judge of a district court, county court, statutory county court, probate court, or justice of the peace court in a county in which an alternative dispute resolution system has been established to, on motion of a party or on the judge's or justice's own motion, refer a civil or, on the request of an attorney representing the state, a criminal case to the system regardless of whether the defendant in the criminal case has been formally charged, rather than refer a case to the system.

(b) Requires an attorney representing the state to obtain the consent of the victim to the referral before requesting a referral of a criminal case under this section.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 152.006, Civil Practice and Remedies Code, as follows:

Sec. 152.006. FEE FOR ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTERS. Authorizes an entity described by Section 152.002(a) (relating to authorizing the commissioners court of a county by order to establish an alternate dispute resolution system) or (b)(1) (relating to authorizing the commissioners court to contract with a

private nonprofit corporation, a political subdivision, a public corporation, or a combination of these entities to administer the alternative dispute resolution system) that provides services for the resolution of disputes to collect a reasonable fee set by the commissioners court. Deletes existing text authorizing an entity described by Section 152.002(b)(1) that provides services for the resolution of disputes in a county that borders the Gulf of Mexico with a population of 250,000 or more but less than 300,000 to collect a reasonable fee in any amount set by the commissioners court from a person who receives the services. Deletes existing text prohibiting this section from being construed to affect the collection of a fee by any other entity described by Section 152.002(b)(1).

SECTION 3. Amends Chapter 152, Civil Practice and Remedies Code, by adding Section 152.007, as follows:

Sec. 152.007. PARTICIPANT FEE FOR CRIMINAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION. (a) Authorizes an entity that provides services for the resolution of criminal disputes under this chapter to collect a reasonable fee set by the commissioners court from a person who receives the services, not to exceed \$350, except that a fee may not be collected from an alleged victim of the crime.

(b) Authorizes the court to order a participant to reimburse the county in which the referral was made an amount that the court finds the participant is able to pay if the referring court determines that a participant in services described by Subsection (a) has the financial resources to enable the participant to offset in part or in whole the costs of legal services provided to the participant under Article 26.04 (Procedures for Appointing Counsel), Code of Criminal Procedure, in connection with the criminal dispute resolution, including any expenses and costs.

SECTION 4. Amends Section 154.021, Civil Practice and Remedies Code, by adding Subsection (d), to prohibit a court from referring a criminal case for alternative dispute resolution except as provided by Section 152.003 of this code or Article 26.13(g) (relating to authorizing the court to assist the victim and the defendant in participating in a victim-offender mediation program before accepting a plea of guilty or of nolo contendere and on request of the victim), Code of Criminal Procedure.

SECTION 5. (a) Provides that the changes in law made by this Act with respect to criminal cases apply only to a criminal case in which the defendant is arrested for or charged with an offense that occurs on or after the effective date of this Act. Provides that a criminal case in which the defendant is arrested for or charged with an offense that occurs before the effective date of this Act is governed by the law in effect when the offense was committed, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose. Provides that for purposes of this section, an offense was committed before the effective date of this Act if any element of the offense was committed before that date.

(b) Provides that the changes in law made by this Act with respect to civil cases apply only to a civil case referred to a county alternative dispute resolution system on or after the effective date of this Act. Provides that a civil case referred before the effective date of this Act is governed by the law applicable to the case immediately before the effective date of this Act, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 6. Effective date: September 1, 2013.