

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1928
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations-S/C Border Security
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Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) offers refugee resettlement services to help refugee families attain economic independence and cultural adjustment after their arrival in the United States. Refugees are individuals who live outside their country of origin and cannot return to their home due to fear of persecution based on race, religion, ethnic group, or membership in a social or political group.

The resettlement of refugees in the local communities is coordinated by local voluntary resettlement agencies (VOLAGs). These entities work with national VOLAGs, the United States Department of State, and HHSC to determine the best place for these refugees to be resettled. A well-organized, systematic plan of engagement between local VOLAGs and stakeholders (i.e., school districts, local hospital districts, law enforcement, major employers, etc.) is vital to the assurance of available resources within communities in which these refugees are placed.

S.B. 1928 gives rulemaking authority to HHSC in order to allow public participation and local input into the rules developed around the placement of refugees. (Original Author's/Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

S.B. 1928 amends current law relating to ensuring local governmental and community input in any federal refugee resettlement program established in this state.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission in SECTION 1 (Section 531.0411, Government Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter B, Chapter 531, Government Code, by adding Section 531.0411, as follows:

Sec. 531.0411. RULES REGARDING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT. (a) Defines "local resettlement agency" and "national voluntary agency" in this section.

(b) Requires the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (executive commissioner) to adopt rules to ensure that local governmental and community input is included in any refugee placement report required under a federal refugee resettlement program and that governmental entities and officials are provided with related information. Requires the executive commissioner, in adopting rules under this section, to, to the extent permitted under federal law, ensure that:

(1) meetings are convened, at least quarterly, in the communities proposed for refugee placement at which representatives of local resettlement agencies have an opportunity to consult with and obtain feedback from local governmental entities and officials, including municipal and county officials, local school district officials, and representatives of local law enforcement agencies, and from other community stakeholders, including major providers under the local health care system and major employers of refugees, regarding proposed refugee placement;

(2) a local resettlement agency:

(A) considers all feedback obtained in meetings conducted under Subdivision (1) before preparing a proposed annual report on the placement of refugees for purposes of 8 U.S.C. Section 1522(b)(7)(E);

(B) informs the state and local governmental entities and officials and community stakeholders described under Subdivision (1) of the proposed annual report; and

(C) develops a final annual report for the national voluntary agencies and the Health and Human Services Commission that includes a summary regarding how stakeholder input contributed to the report; and

(3) the Health and Human Services Commission:

(A) obtains from local resettlement agencies the preliminary number of refugees the local resettlement agencies recommended to the national voluntary agencies for placement in communities throughout this state and provides that information to local governmental entities and officials in those communities; and

(B) obtains from the United States Department of State or other appropriate federal agency the number of refugees apportioned to this state and provides that information and information regarding the number of refugees intended to be placed in each community in this state to local governmental entities and officials in those communities.

SECTION 2. Requires the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to adopt the rules as required under Section 531.0411, Government Code, as added by this Act, not later than May 1, 2016.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2015.