

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1963
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 1963 establishes a transformative healthcare delivery initiative for Rio Grande Valley veterans. No doubt a critical need in the Valley, the region is home to over 48,000 veterans, thousands of whom are going without much-needed health and mental services. Veterans needing critical inpatient care must travel hundreds of miles to the closest United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) inpatient facility dedicated to serving veterans. The Valley also lacks a full service VA hospital and years of requests to VA to establish such a hospital have gone unanswered.

The goal is to create a system of care anchored in the newly established University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine, but spread throughout the communities in the Valley, that shares costs and resources for the benefit of all veterans. A top priority is to eliminate access to care problems in the Valley by providing an increased level of inpatient and outpatient care and by reducing the wait time for care.

A partnership and coordination among The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley medical school, federal Veterans Affairs partners, academia, and the private sector will enhance access to medical services for all Valley veterans.

S.B. 1963 authorizes The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine to enter into one or more contracts with VA to provide medical and mental health treatments to residents of the county or service area who are otherwise eligible for the VA's health care assistance. The School of Medicine is encouraged to contribute money, property, and other resources to establish, maintain, and operate a veteran's hospital or provide medical and mental care to area veterans.

As proposed, S.B. 1963 amends current law relating to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's authority to contract with federal agencies to provide healthcare to veterans.

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 Subchapter N, Chapter 74, Education Code, by adding Section 74.761, as follows:

Sec. 74.761. TREATMENT OF CERTAIN PATIENTS. (a) Authorizes The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine (medical school) to enter into one or more contracts with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide medical and mental health treatment to residents of the county or service area who are otherwise eligible for the VA's health care assistance.

(b) Provides that the medical school is encouraged to contribute money, property, and other resources to establish, maintain, and operate a veteran's hospital or provide medical and mental health care to area veterans in accordance with

Section 73 (Veterans Hospitals), Article XVI (General Provisions), Texas Constitution.

(c) Authorizes the medical school, in complying with this section, to prioritize medical and mental health services that eliminate access to care issues and reduce wait times by providing an increased level of inpatient and outpatient care for veterans who would be forced to travel more than 200 miles for healthcare or who cannot access specialty or primary care in the service area.

(d) Requires the medical school to spread any available medical and mental health care for veterans throughout the service region to the extent possible.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2015.