

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1780
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Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute (TEPHI), led by the UTHealth School of Public Health in partnership with state and local public health agencies, healthcare organizations, and university partners throughout the state, will plan and develop a public health reserve force that will better prepare Texas and Texans for the next pandemic. This force, based on the national guard model, would give the state the flexibility to respond quickly to an epidemic or pandemic outbreak and support experts at the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), and city and county public health authorities. This reserve force would include needed public health workforce ranging from epidemiologists to contact tracers and case investigators, but not on a full time basis. This budget-friendly workforce would train regularly, but have other jobs during non-emergency times. In addition to training a public health reserve, TEPHI proposes to:

- provide timely, accurate and actionable data analysis to decision makers and the public, manage the safe, secure monitoring of data through an updated infrastructure, including the epidemic modeling and forecast hub to develop modeling strategies and the data visualization hub to create a dashboard for routine monitoring of emerging and existing epidemics;

- assist with rapid assessment of potential outbreaks;

- advise on supply chain evaluation, and business and food chain preparedness;

- create a network of approved testing laboratories and establish best practices for vetting supplies and build a statewide stockpile of critical laboratory supplies for future pandemics;

- help with preparedness for small and rural healthcare systems and provide a commitment to serve vulnerable and underserved populations;

- build on partnerships with DSHS, TDEM, and other key stakeholders to complement TDEM's coordination and disaster management capabilities by partnering in the domain of pandemic preparedness and response;

- research the lingering impacts of Long COVID for treatments and novel ideas to prevent chronic conditions from such viruses; and

- create a dedicated communications department that provides timely, science-based information and messaging about the pandemic for the interested public, state and local governments, and health care practitioners.

As proposed, S.B. 1780 amends current law relating to the establishment of the Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute.

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 Chapter 75 Education Code, by adding Subchapter D, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER D. TEXAS EPIDEMIC PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE.

Sec. 75.301. DEFINITIONS. Defines "public health reserve network" and "institute."

Sec. 75.301. ESTABLISHMENT. Provides that Subchapter D establishes the Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute (institute) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

Sec. 75.302. ROLE AND SCOPE. (a) Requires that the institute establish and maintain a public health reserve network to protect public health and to support pandemic and epidemic disaster preparedness and response components of the state emergency management plan required by Section 418.042 (State Emergency Management Plan).

(b) Requires the Department of State Health Services to provide the institute with access to relevant and timely data to perform its duties.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 418.042, Government Code, as follows:

- (16) makes a conforming change;
- (17) provisions for protecting public health; and
- (18) makes no changes.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2021.