

- SUBJECT:** Continuing a pilot project on child-protective caseworker shortages
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Uresti, Naishtat, Wohlgemuth, Christian, Miller, Olivo, Reyna
0 nays
2 absent — McCall, Villarreal
- WITNESSES:** For — Susan Crenshaw, Tarrant County Child Protective Services; Madeline McClure, Prevent Child Abuse Texas and Dallas County Child Welfare Board; *(Registered, but did not testify:)* Craig Pardue, Dallas County
Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** The 77th Legislature in 2001 enacted SB 962 by Moncrief, establishing a pilot project to address child protective caseworker shortages in an 11-county North Texas region that includes Dallas and Tarrant counties. Under the pilot project, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS) may remove the cap on the number of authorized caseworker positions in the region and may triple the number of trainee positions. The act allowed DPRS to terminate the program if the number of caseworkers met or exceeded the number of authorized positions.
- DIGEST:** HB 2433 would direct DPRS to renew the pilot project to assist Region 11 continue to accomplish the goals of the original project, subject to available funding. DPRS would have to remove the cap on the number of authorized caseworker positions in the region, increase the number of training positions by 140 percent, maintain the number of training staff, and provide funds needed to renew the project.

DPRS would have to report to the Legislature by December 31, 2004, regarding the effect of the pilot project on the retention of caseworkers. The report would have to include an assessment of the continuing need for the project and a recommendation on whether to continue it. The Legislature would have to take the report into account in considering additional

legislation to address the need of certain regions of the state for child protective services caseworkers.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003, and would expire September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2433 would authorize DPRS to continue a successful project to reduce turnover and improve retention of child protective caseworkers in a region of Texas that handles about one-fourth of all child-abuse cases in the state. When the project was established two years ago, turnover rates for caseworkers were very high, and DPRS was having difficulty attracting and retaining new staff. Hiring caps prevented training academies from enrolling enough caseworker trainees to fill vacancies. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that trainees counted toward the cap even though they were not yet working as caseworkers.

The project has provided additional staff and resources that have helped reduce turnover in the region. This ultimately benefits Texas children by providing greater stability and consistency among caseworker staff.

These results justify continuing the pilot project. DPRS did not request funds to continue the project in its appropriations request for fiscal 2004-05 because of the need to maintain other programs in the face of an overall funding reduction. The project originally received funds from the Crime Victims Compensation (CVC) Fund, which are expected to cover the state's ongoing share of the program cost.

HB 2433 would require DPRS to submit an assessment of the project, which should be completed and reviewed before the project is expanded to other regions of the state.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The pilot project has contributed to lower turnover rates in the North Texas region, but ongoing funding to address high turnover rates among DPRS caseworkers should come from funds intended for that purpose. The program should not be funded indefinitely by the CVC Fund, which is designated specifically for crime victims. Continued funding of the pilot project would limit the amount of revenue available for crime victims.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The pilot program already has proven that it significantly reduces turnover, saving the state money that previously was spent to train new workers. DPRS should receive funding to expand the program to include other parts of the state that are experiencing high caseworker turnover.

NOTES:

The bill's fiscal note projects a general revenue cost of about \$1.5 million for fiscal 2004-05, plus about \$700,000 in federal funds, and an addition of three training academy staff workers and 24 caseworker trainees.

The companion bill, SB 1065 by Shapiro, passed the Senate by voice vote on April 10 and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House Human Services Committee on April 28, making it eligible for consideration in lieu of HB 2433.