

SUBJECT: Emergency communication district use of state travel program

COMMITTEE: Government Reform — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Uresti, Otto, Frost, Gonzales, Hunter, Veasey  
0 nays  
1 absent — Y. Davis

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 26 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: *(On House companion bill, HB 3047 by Veasey:)*  
For — Rod Paine, National Travel Systems; *(Registered, but did not testify: Shayne Woodard, Texas 9-1-1 Alliance)*  
  
Against — None  
  
On — *(Registered, but did not testify: Richard Muscat, Bexar Metro 9-1-1 Network District)*

BACKGROUND: The State Travel Management Program (STMP) at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission (TBPC) was created by the 70th Legislature in 1987 to provide centralized management and coordination of state agency travel.

Local Government Code, secs. 271.081-271.083 and Government Code, secs. 2155.202 and 2175.001(1) provide the legal authority for certain non-state entities to participate in the TBPC Cooperative Purchasing Program. These entities include local governments, MHMR community centers, and assistance organizations. Co-op participants may use the STMP to make travel arrangements.

In Texas, 9-1-1 emergency telecommunication services are provided three different ways: by home-rule cities; by emergency communication districts; and, in those areas of the state not covered by a home-rule city or an emergency communication district, by the Commission on State Emergency Communications (CSEC). More than 52 percent of the state's

population is served by the 24 existing communications districts covering about 30 counties. These districts are run by independent governing boards, cover primarily metropolitan areas, and are not subject to appropriation for funding.

**DIGEST:** SB 1663 would allow a board member or employee of an emergency communication district to use the TBPC contract for travel services for the purpose of obtaining reduced airline fares and travel agent fees. The traveler could use this service only for official district travel business.

Any costs to TBPC would be recouped by fees charged to the participating districts, and fees would be deposited into an airline fares account in the general revenue fund. TBPC could adopt rules and amend contracts to administer this proposal.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** SB 1663 would give emergency communication districts the same opportunity that state agencies and counties have to save taxpayer money when paying for airline tickets and other travel expenses. The program could prove especially useful for saving money on high, last-minute fares when employees were called away on emergency business. Citizens want tax money spent on essential public services, not on overhead and administrative expenses for travel.

The bill also would provide more savings on travel expenses for the state and counties because the pool of likely users would increase by adding communication districts. The TBPC would be in a better position to negotiate with airlines and other travel service providers for more favorable rates, providing better discounts than individual entities could obtain alone. Joining a state pool would be better than forming a pool with other communication districts because a participant with a larger group, such as the state, probably would receive lower travel rates.

**OPPONENTS SAY:** Although saving tax money is important, SB 1663 would blur the line between these districts and state government. Emergency communication districts could instead leverage their buying power for airline tickets and travel services by forming their own negotiating pools rather than using a state agency.

NOTES:

The companion bill, HB 3047 by Veasey, passed the House on May 12 and was scheduled for public hearing on May 19 by the Senate Government Organization Committee.