

- SUBJECT:** Monitoring, training, and workgroup study to assist disabled youth
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, S. King, J. Davis, Eissler, Herrero, Naishtat, Parker, Pierson
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Hughes
- WITNESSES:** For — James R. Meadours, Texas Advocates; Wayde Shipman, The ARC of Texas, The ARC of the Gulf Coast; Stacey Sparks, Imagine Enterprises; Amy Elizabeth Litzinger; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dennis Borel, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Jean Langendorf, United Cerebral Palsy of Texas; Sarah Mills, Advocacy, Inc.; Linda G. Litzinger; Denise Sonleitner)
- Against — None
- On — Colleen Horton, Texas Center for Disability Studies; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Angela Lello, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities; Terry W. Smith, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services)
- BACKGROUND:** The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) employs vocational rehabilitation transition specialists and transition counselors, whose duties involve assisting transition by youths with disabilities to post-schooling activities, services for adults, or community living.
- DIGEST:** HB 1230 would require monitoring of health and human services (HHS) programs and services for transitioning youth with disabilities and training for employees who assisted these youth. The bill also would require the formation of a workgroup addressing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- The executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) would monitor programs and services offered through HHS agencies designed to assist youth with disabilities to

transition from school-oriented living to post-schooling activities, services for adults, or community living. In monitoring the programs and services, the commissioner would collect information regarding the outcomes of the transition process as necessary to assess the programs and services and whether they resulted in positive outcomes.

In collaboration with other HHS agencies, DARS would require employee participation in a specialized training program for employees whose duties involved assisting transitioning youth with disabilities. The training program would include information regarding supports and services available from HHS agencies and the community for adults and transitioning youth with disabilities.

By November 1, 2007, the HHSC executive commissioner would have to establish a workgroup to create and implement a plan to:

- ensure that an individual with a disability could seek individualized, competitive employment in the community;
- improve collaboration between agencies and service providers to maximize existing supported employment resources; and
- increase the quality and quantity of available supported employment opportunities in Texas.

The commissioner would appoint workgroup members and have to include representatives from HHS agencies, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Education Agency. The workgroup also would include people who were experts in, or who represented the interests of, individuals with disabilities, including advocates, family members, health care providers, and supported employment providers.

HB 1230 would set a timeline for implementing the plan, including adoption of rules necessary to implement the workgroup recommendations by October 1, 2008. By January 1, 2009, the commissioner would have to present a report to the 81st Legislature describing the actions taken to implement the workgroup recommendations and any actions HHS agencies intended to take during the next biennium.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1230 would provide invaluable tools to help disabled youth attain positive outcomes as they transition to adulthood. Too many youth are leaving the public school system with limited services to help them gain meaningful supported employment, leaving limited options for community integration.

The bill's program monitoring requirements would allow HHS agencies to collect data on these youths as they enter adult services and programs. Data demonstrating where these youths were and how well different employment support initiatives were working would help counselors assist these youths in achieving better outcomes.

DARS transition specialists typically focus on employment and rehabilitative supports and have limited knowledge of other community-based supports and services. The training requirement of this bill would enhance the ability of DARS employees to assist and refer disabled youth for the services and supports needed to remain in the community. This also would help the agency meet federal training requirements.

Youth and families often are frustrated and confused when trying to obtain employment supports because often they receive conflicting information from agencies and service providers. With the input of advocates, experts, families, and service providers, the implementation of workgroup recommendations would enhance opportunities to create more effective service systems that offered increased opportunities for employment and supported employment for Texans with disabilities.

HB 1230 would provide the appropriate amount of direction for the expectations of the training and monitoring programs. The bill would set the objectives of these programs and allow agency expertise to dictate how best to meet these objectives within agency resources. Given the complexity of the goals of this bill in achieving better outcomes, further specificity could limit program efficacy by interfering with the ability of agencies to exercise their expertise.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Although the objectives of HB 1230 are worthy, the bill should be clearer in the expectations for the training and monitoring programs. It would not establish the minimum number of hours necessary for the training program, and if not enough hours were spent addressing the required topics, the bill would not meet the objective of arming employees with information truly beneficial to the populations they serve. In addition, the

bill is vague in requesting monitoring of outcomes that are difficult to define, such as quality of life and community integration. The bill should provide more direction on the information to be collected, the types of outcomes to be measured, the purpose for which this information would be used, and the form in which this information would be made accessible.