

- SUBJECT:** Demonstration project to reduce social isolation among the elderly
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Herrero, Darby, Hernandez, Hughes, Legler, Naishtat, Walle
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Elkins
- WITNESSES:** For — Oscar Garcia, Katy Kappel, Texas Silver-Haired Legislature; (*Registered, but did not testify:* George Linial, Texas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging; Charles Oerter, Texas Association of Child Placing Agencies; Jason Sabo, United Ways of Texas; Mary Teeters, Meals on Wheels and More; David Thomason, Texas Senior Advocacy Coalition)
- Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Human Resources Code, ch. 161 establishes the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) and outlines the duties and functions of the department.
- A recent survey of older Texans found that about one in five Texans over 60 reported suffering from loneliness and isolation, and almost one in three Texans age 75 and over reported loneliness as a problem.
- Research shows that homebound, older adults are more vulnerable to depression, which corresponds with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data showing that the elderly have the highest rate of suicide in the nation. The same research found that when provided social support and activity, older adults were no longer more likely to suffer from depression than other seniors. Because of this data, many states and nations have begun volunteer outreach programs for the elderly.
- In Tarrant County, the Neighbor Helping Neighbor program recently was established by the United Way's Area Agency on Aging to help socially isolated seniors 60 years of age and older. Volunteers and professionals

are involved in providing a variety of services to seniors who do not have access to resources, are living alone without assistance from friends or family, or who are experiencing feelings of loneliness as a result of being isolated from their community. Services range from home visits and phone calls from volunteers, to transportation, food bank pickups, household chores, meals, minor home repairs, or information and referrals.

DIGEST:

CSHB 2632 would create a social isolation demonstration project. Subject to the availability of funds specifically appropriated for this purpose, DADS would establish not more than three demonstration projects to identify and assist socially isolated elderly individuals.

A demonstration project would include a variety of volunteer opportunities to assist socially isolated elderly individuals, including:

- visits by telephone and in person;
- meals;
- food bank pickup;
- household chores;
- shopping assistance;
- transportation;
- minor home repair;
- installation of wheel chair ramps;
- installation or management of safety equipment;
- yard maintenance; and
- information and referrals to services.

In establishing demonstration projects under the bill, DADS would consider the design of the Neighbor Helping Neighbor program developed in Tarrant County.

If a state agency determined that a waiver or other federal authorization was required before implementing any provision of the bill, the agency would request the waiver or authorization and could delay implementing that provision until the waiver or authorization was granted.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009.