

- SUBJECT:** Continuing the Employment-First Task Force; modifying operations
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Raymond, Frank, Klick, Miller, Minjarez, Rose, Swanson, Wu
1 nay — Keough
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 19 — 22-9 (Bettencourt, Birdwell, Burton, Creighton, Hall, Hancock, Huffines, Nelson, V. Taylor)
- WITNESSES:** No public hearing
- BACKGROUND:** **Employment-First Task Force.** In 2013, the 83rd Legislature enacted SB 1226 by Zaffirini, creating an interagency task force overseen by the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to promote the competitive employment of individuals with disabilities and the expectation that individuals with disabilities can meet the same employment standards as any other working-age adult.
- In 2015, the 84th Legislature passed SB 200 by Nelson, the HHSC Sunset bill. The bill abolished the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and transferred its functions to the Texas Workforce Commission and HHSC, effective September 1, 2016. The bill also eliminated the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) and required its functions to be transferred to HHSC by September 1, 2017, along with certain duties of the Department of State Health Services (DSHS).
- Concerns have been raised about the need to restructure the Employment-First Task Force to reflect the consolidation of HHSC, and to continue to address underemployment of individuals with disabilities.
- Composition.** Government Code, sec. 531.02448(b) requires the HHSC executive commissioner to appoint the members of the task force, including at least:

- an individual with a disability;
- a family member of an individual with a disability;
- one representative each from HHSC, DARS, DSHS, DADS, the Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Education Agency;
- an advocate for individuals with disabilities;
- a representative of an employment service provider; and
- an employer in an industry that might employ individuals with disabilities, or a representative of such an employer.

Recommendations. Sec. 531.02448(f) requires the Employment-First Task Force to develop recommendations for policy, procedure, and rule changes necessary to fully implement an employment-first policy.

Expiration. The task force is set to expire September 1, 2017, if not continued in statute.

DIGEST:

SB 455 would extend the life of the Employment-First Task Force and alter its composition, duties, and required recommendations.

Composition. SB 455 would alter the composition of the task force by requiring the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) executive commissioner to appoint:

- three representatives from HHSC, including one representative of the commission's behavioral health services functions and one representative of the commission's aging and disability services functions; and
- two representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), including one representative of TWC's assistive and rehabilitative service functions.

The bill would remove the requirement that the commissioner must appoint a representative from:

- the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services;
- the Department of State Health Services; and
- the Department of Aging and Disability Services.

The bill would require the task force to meet at least quarterly and at the discretion of the presiding officer.

Recommendations. The bill would require the task force to include in its required recommendations for policy and rule changes necessary to fully implement an employment-first policy information to guide and assist state agencies in carrying out these changes.

Expiration. The bill would continue the task force until September 1, 2021, at which time the task force would be abolished.

The bill would take effect August 31, 2017.