

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
76R7248 JJT-D

S.B. 1441
By: Barrientos
Human Services
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As Filed

DIGEST

Currently, the specialized telecommunications device assistance program only provides devices to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and not to individuals with other disabilities that make it difficult or impossible to use standard telecommunications devices. This bill would allow the Texas Public Utilities Commission and the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide assistive telecommunications devices for individuals with serious disabilities.

PURPOSE

As proposed, S.B. 1441 sets forth guidelines for the expansion of the specialized telecommunications devices assistance program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is granted to the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in SECTION 1 (Section 56.152, Utilities Code) and the Public Utilities Commission of Texas and the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in SECTION 1 (Section 56.151, Utilities Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Sections 56.151 and 56.152, Utilities Code, to require the Public Utilities Commission of Texas (PUC) and the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (commission for the deaf) to, by rule, establish a program to financially assist individuals with disabilities that impair the individual's ability to effectively access the telephone network, rather than certain individuals who are deaf or have an impairment of hearing or speech. Requires the commission for the deaf to, by rule, prescribe eligibility standards for individuals, including deaf individuals and those who have an impairment of hearing or speech. Makes a conforming change.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 56.153(a), Utilities Code, to require the commission for the deaf to distribute certain vouchers to eligible applicants for devices described by Section 56.151.

SECTION 3. Amends Chapter 56E, Utilities Code, by adding Section 56.156, as follows:

Sec. 56.156. SPECIALIZED TELECOMMUNICATIONS ISSUES ADVISORY COMMITTEE. Requires PUC and the commission for the deaf to appoint an advisory committee to advise PUC on issues regarding telephone network access for individuals with disabilities. Sets forth requirements for the membership composition of the committee.

SECTION 4. Provides that the text of Sections 56.151, 56.152, and 56.153(a), Utilities Code, gives effect to changes made by Chapter 149, Acts of the 75th Legislature, Regular Session, 1997. Provides that this Act prevails over another Act of the 76th Legislature, Regular Session, 1999, relating to nonsubstantive additions to and corrections in enacted codes.

SECTION 5. Effective date: September 1, 1999.

SECTION 6. Emergency clause.