

SUBJECT: TDCJ study of health care expenses for non-violent elderly inmates

COMMITTEE: Corrections — favorable without amendment

VOTE: 4 ayes — Madden, McReynolds, Dunnam, Jones

0 nays

3 absent — Hochberg, Haggerty, Oliveira

WITNESSES: For — Carlos Higgins, Texas Silver-Haired Legislature

Against — None

On — Allen Hightower, Correctional Managed Health Care; Allen D. Sapp, Correctional Managed Health Care Committee; Dee Wilson, Texas Department of Criminal Justice - TCOOMMI

DIGEST: HB 429 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to conduct a study of the number of inmates 55 years old or older who receive health care services and have never been convicted of or received deferred adjudication for a serious or violent offense listed in Code of Criminal Procedure art. 42.12, sec. 3g.

TDCJ would have to determine the number of inmates described by the bill and the amount of savings in health care costs that would result if these inmates were released from prison on parole.

The bill would take effect January 1, 2007, and the study would have to be submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 429 would direct TDCJ to study the issue of health care of elderly inmates because changes in state policy in this area could lead to significant cost savings without compromising public safety. The first step in exploring the state's options would be the study required by HB 429.

It is appropriate to study the elderly prison population because it comprises about 6 percent of the inmate population and is growing at an

annual rate of 10 percent. Elderly prisoners access care about three times as often as younger inmates and have higher rates of chronic disease that require more hospital and specialty care. In addition, it costs about three times as much to house an elderly inmate as a younger one.

HB 429 would require that the study look at the issues surrounding releasing non-violent elderly offenders to parole because incarcerated offenders are not eligible for Medicaid, Medicare, or other federally funded programs. This means that the state must pay 100 percent of the costs of caring for chronically ill and incapacitated elderly inmates. Once these offenders are released on parole, they become eligible for Medicaid and other federal programs, which helps defray the state's costs. The bill would appropriately limit the study to non-violent offenders.

HB 429 would require TDCJ to report by December 2008 on the study's findings so that the 81st Legislature would be able to consider possible changes to state law.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.