

SUBJECT: Allowing certain counties to pay to transport senior citizens and others

COMMITTEE: County Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Coleman, Farias, Burrows, Romero, Schubert, Spitzer, Wu
2 nays — Stickland, Tinderholt

WITNESSES: For — Craig Pardue, Dallas County; (*Registered, but did not testify:*
Charles Reed, Dallas County Commissioners Court; Rick Thompson,
Texas Association of Counties; Josh Gravens, Texas Citizens United for
Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE); Donald Lee, Texas Conference of
Urban Counties; Bradford Shields, Travis County Commissioners Court)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Under Local Government Code, sec. 615.022, the Harris County
Commissioners Court may use county general funds to pay for
transportation of senior citizens for civic, community, educational, and
recreational activities within and outside the county.

DIGEST: HB 1929 would expand the authorization to use county general funds for
the transportation of senior citizens for civic, community, educational, and
recreational activities to include Dallas County, in addition to Harris
County.

The bill also would allow the expenses paid out of the county general
funds by the commissioners courts of Dallas and Harris counties to cover
transportation to these activities for residents and visitors, more generally,
if a majority of the costs paid were for the transportation of senior
citizens.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2015.

SUPPORTERS
SAY: HB 1929 would allow Dallas County to fund costs associated with senior
citizen transportation to sponsored health fairs and county wellness

centers, which could improve senior citizens' health and save money in the long run. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, almost 10 percent of Dallas County's population is over the age of 65.

The senior citizen population is particularly vulnerable to certain illnesses and conditions. Some health issues can be prevented or minimized by early medical intervention, including vaccinations, health screenings, and eye checkups. Sponsored health fairs and county wellness centers can offer these services, but the senior citizen population must have transportation access to reach these destinations. This bill would allow Dallas County to pay to transport its elderly residents to obtain these types of services.

Transportation-related expenses, such as gas or van rentals, are small compared to the significant cost of emergency care services, which a senior citizen might need if a condition goes undetected or untreated. Keeping the elderly population out of the emergency rooms of county hospitals by providing them with transportation to obtain preventive care would be cost-effective and would be better for senior citizens.

HB 1929 would not be mandatory and would support local control. Dallas County needs statutory authority to provide this type of service to their senior citizens. HB 1929 would give local authority so that Dallas County could decide if this type of service should be offered.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

By expanding authorization to use county general funds for the transportation of senior citizens and others and expanding authorization to Dallas County, HB 1929 could create an added cost that might become a burden to the county and its residents.