



## HB 3859 WOULD ESTABLISH PREREQUISITES FOR TIERS EXPANSION AND REQUIRE STAFFING ANALYSIS

The House Human Services Committee will hear HB 3859 on Thursday, April 9. HB 3859 would ensure adequate staffing of the health and human services eligibility system and prevent premature expansion of TIERS, the computer system that the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has been piloting since 2003.

- **The House Human Services Committee will hear HB 3859 on Thursday, April 9, at 10:30 a.m. or upon adjournment of the House, in E. 2.036.**
- **HB 3859 would require a staffing analysis by HHSC to determine how many staff are needed to operate TIERS and meet federal performance standards. It would also establish benchmarks to prevent the expansion of TIERS before it is ready.**
- **Texas' eligibility and enrollment system is in crisis and cannot handle current demand, much less growing needs with rising unemployment. Expanding TIERS prematurely, or without enough staff to handle the conversion, could cause further delays in application processing.**

### Background on TIERS

TIERS was originally intended to improve client access to services by replacing outdated computer systems with a single automated system to determine eligibility for all of HHSC's programs. The Department of Human Services (DHS) launched a pilot of the new computer system in five offices in Travis and Hays counties in July 2003, with a phased-in statewide expansion planned for the fall of 2003. After problems arose during the pilot, DHS put the rollout on hold.

In 2004, HHSC initiated plans to modernize and privatize the eligibility and enrollment system through the use of call centers and began preparing TIERS to support the new system. Though the eligibility and enrollment contract with Accenture was cancelled in 2007, putting the call center expansion on hold, HHSC has continued to roll out TIERS. The number of cases in TIERS has more than tripled since 2007, largely due to the addition of Women's Health Program cases. HHSC is also pursuing a limited geographic rollout of TIERS to Regions 7 (Central Texas), 10 (Upper Rio Grande Valley), and 1 (High Plains). The federal government approved this geographic rollout, but limited the number of Food Stamp cases that could be converted to 22 percent of the total caseload. (For more information, see CPPP's *Policy Page #335* at [www.cphp.org/files/3/LOC%20hearing%20335.pdf](http://www.cphp.org/files/3/LOC%20hearing%20335.pdf))

HHSC continues to add cases to TIERS despite clear signs that TIERS is presently incapable of meeting federal performance standards, which require that 95 percent of all applications be processed within a certain number of days. As of September 2008, only 78.5 percent of TIERS applications were processed on time, compared to 92.7 percent of applications in SAVERR (the "old" system). Several factors are causing delays in TIERS-processed applications:

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- It takes more time to process an application in TIERS than in SAVERR, and
  - Staffing shortages are causing delays in both systems.

In addition to the delays in application processing, a report by the State Auditor identified numerous other concerns with TIERS, including a lack of processing power to support a statewide rollout, design flaws, and the use of too many “workarounds” to ensure that client data is correct. (See [www.sao.state.tx.us/reports/main/09-005.pdf](http://www.sao.state.tx.us/reports/main/09-005.pdf)).

The only way to meet federal timeliness standards in TIERS is to focus on a solution that reduces the average time it takes for a worker to process an application in TIERS, and/or significantly increase eligibility staff. HHSC has requested more staff from the Legislature for fiscal years 2010-11 to meet the increase in need resulting from rising unemployment. Whether the Legislature will grant HHSC’s request won’t be known until the budget is passed in May. (See *Policy Page #373* at [www.cppp.org/files/3/373\\_Fix%20it\\_policy%20page.pdf](http://www.cppp.org/files/3/373_Fix%20it_policy%20page.pdf) for more information.) Even if the Legislature provides more funding for staff, it will take time for HHSC to hire and train enough workers to restore timeliness in application processing. Adding significant numbers of new

cases to TIERS before HHSC has stabilized the eligibility workforce is likely to cause further delays and errors in application processing.

### **HB 3859**

HB 3859 would enhance the performance of the eligibility system by setting staffing standards and other benchmarks to guide the expansion of TIERS. The bill would require HHSC to conduct a thorough staffing analysis to determine how many staff are needed to ensure that TIERS is rolled out without causing delays or reductions in services to clients. It would also prevent expansion of TIERS until the system:

- Is “fully functional;”
- Is capable of delivering benefits timely and accurately as required under federal law; and
- Has the hardware capacity necessary to process the additional cases being converted to the system.

To strengthen the bill, CPPP recommends that it be amended to add a definition of “fully functional” and identify the party responsible for making this determination.

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