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76th Legislative Session: TIES Developments

Legislators to Make Key Decisions About the Creation of HHS Integrated Eligibility System

The proposed Texas Integrated Enrollment and Services (TIES) project would create “one-stop” access for Texas families needing health and human services from programs with different eligibility standards or agency oversight. This Policy Page describes funding proposals made by the House and Senate that will have to be decided by the budget conference committee later this session, and summarizes TIES-related legislation.

HHSC Request for TIES

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is coordinating the development and funding proposals for the Texas Integrated Enrollment and Services (TIES) project. As of April 1999, TIES would partly or fully include more than 40 programs administered by the Texas Department of Health (TDH), Department of Human Services (DHS), and Workforce Commission (TWC). A critical first step for TIES is to replace the decades-old SAVERR (System for Application Verification Eligibility Referrals and Reporting) computer system being used by DHS for Medicaid, Food Stamps, and TANF.

Testifying before House and Senate budget committees, HHSC officials explained their \$131 million request for TIES for the 2000-01 biennium, as well as two method of finance options that would have paid for TIES over seven years using revenue bonds or state General Revenue.

House and Senate Funding Recommendations

House Appropriations action: CSHB 1, the proposed state spending package approved by the House Appropriations Committee (HAC) on March 31, contains only \$1.4 million in biennial funding for the HHSC strategy that pays for TIES (the same level in HB 1/SB 2 as filed). This amount—a \$2.5 million cut from the 1998-99 biennium—would only be enough to continue paying for TIES development staff.

At the hearings preceding HAC’s final vote on CSHB 1, House budget officials expressed concern about the

location and effects of staffing cuts that could result from full TIES implementation (up to 2,400 employees statewide), as well as the proposed location of TIES call centers in Texas’ largest cities. CSHB 1 has a rider in Article II, Special Provisions, requiring DHS and HHSC to develop a schedule and cost estimate for replacing SAVERR, whether or not TIES is implemented. The full House will take up consideration of CSHB 1 on April 13.

Senate Finance: The Senate Finance Committee’s budget draft recommended full funding for TIES (\$79 million). (See below for an explanation of the reduced cost of full implementation.) The Senate Finance Committee is scheduled to approve its budget proposal on April 19.

Significant Developments

WIC: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has been taken out of the scope of TIES. WIC is now considered an “inquiry only” component of TIES, which means that WIC providers will be able to access the TIES system to get information about clients and other programs and services, but will not be able to input information. Although the WIC program will not be included in the initial implementation of TIES, agency officials will continue to build a basic framework that would allow WIC and other programs to change their degree of participation in the future, if necessary.

Reasons for excluding WIC from TIES include strong federal opposition to the cost of including WIC given

the perceived limited benefits, and the broadly voiced concern that the TIES process would impose additional obstacles to clients seeking WIC services. When WIC was excluded from the funding equation, the implementation costs for TIES dropped to \$79 million for the 2000-01 biennium.

Request for Information (RFI) : In March, HHSC issued an RFI for development of the automated information system that will support the TIES system. The vendor requirements laid out in the RFI are subject to changes by the Legislature. A public hearing and vendor forum was held April 6, to answer questions regarding the RFI. You can read or download a copy of the RFI on HHSC's web site. Go to <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/ties97/default.htm> and click on "Procurement/Library." You can also access this site to view vendor's questions and HHSC responses and to submit comments on the RFI electronically. The deadline for submitting comments is 1 PM on April 29.

TIES-related Legislation

HB 2877 (Maxey) will be heard by the Human Services Committee on April 13. This bill would authorize health and human services agencies and TWC to lease office space from private service providers to co-locate offices and enable agency staff to work with these providers. HB 2877 also allows state agency staff whose positions are eliminated through privatization or other reductions in services by the agency to receive retirement options and health insurance.

HB 2683 (Coleman) was referred to the Human Services Committee one month ago, but no hearing has been set. This bill ensures continued public input and accountability during TIES implementation by requiring public hearings before any transfer of services to the new TIES system. HB 2683 also provides for several client protections under the TIES system, including ensuring that access to services is not diminished by office closure, consolidation or relocation, and for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The bill also directs HHSC to submit quarterly progress reports that evaluate TIES as it is implemented.

HB 956 (Maxey) was heard by the State Affairs committee in February and was left pending. This bill applies the open meetings and open records law to private companies that contract with the state to provide traditionally state-run services, specifically those that provide an "integrated eligibility determination and service delivery system for health and human services."

HB 2641 (Gray) and SB 372 (Brown)—the sunset bills to continue HHSC—direct the commission to implement TIES. The House bill was voted favorably from committee and has been referred to the Calendars committee where it will be scheduled for a vote by the full House. The Senate bill has been referred to the Human Services Committee, but no hearing has been set.

SB 445 (Moncrief), which implements the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), includes TIES as one of the many vehicles through which children will be able to access CHIP. SB 445, as amended by the House Public Health Committee, should go to the House floor for a full vote in the next few weeks. (Note: Because the funding proposal for TIES submitted to the Legislature was prepared prior to CHIP implementation, CHIP is not listed as one of the programs included in TIES).

Future developments

Given HAC's decision not to fund TIES' implementation and the concerns voiced by members of the committee, it is likely that agency officials will have some negotiating to do with legislators when the committee substitutes for HB 1 and SB 2 go to conference committee. Any changes to the current proposal, such as fewer staff reductions or changes in the location of call centers, would affect the funding needed to implement TIES, but could also result in improved service delivery to clients.

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