

VOTE YES -- HB 337

by Representatives Nicole Collier, Charles “Doc” Anderson,
Garnet Coleman, Oscar Longoria and Dade Phelan

DOES NOT expand Medicaid eligibility or benefits.

DOES help counties control uncompensated care costs and recidivism of persons with disabilities.

PROBLEM

The vast majority of adult inmates in county jails who receive Medicaid assistance receive this assistance because they are disabled and receive Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) benefits from the federal government. This is because Texas does not provide Medicaid to adults other than adults with disabilities receiving SSI/SSDI, pregnant women, and certain adults who serve as primary caregivers to dependent children who are on Medicaid.

When inmates who are on SSI/SSDI enter county jails, SSI/SSDI benefits are suspended after 30 days of detention. As a result, because these adults were only receiving Medicaid benefits because they were receiving SSI/SSDI, their Medicaid benefits are terminated.

Upon release from county jail, it often takes months or in some cases a year or more to restore a person’s eligibility for Medicaid through the application process for SSI/SSDI benefits reinstatement. During this time, the adult with a disability who lacks health insurance coverage is often left without access to therapy or medications, leading to higher recidivism rates. This also leads to higher medical costs for taxpayers, as these individuals are treated as uncompensated care when visiting county hospital ERs, which could potentially have been prevented if they had not lost access to their medications and therapy.

SOLUTION

HB 337 requires that a county sheriff that chooses to notify HHSC of the incarceration of an individual who was receiving SSI/SSDI benefits when incarcerated, also notify the Social Security Administration and HHSC of that individual’s release. In such cases, it also requires the sheriff’s office to provide the inmate, upon discharge, information to help the inmate contact the appropriate agencies to get their SSI, SSDI and Medicaid benefits reinstated.

Following the passage of HB 875 during the 84th session, which contained similar provisions, veterans were provided a postcard at release with their demographic information that they could mail off to start the process of getting their benefits reinstated. This was at no cost to the state. Finally, the bill enables, but does not require, a sheriff to enter into an agreement with a third party to help the discharged inmates with benefit reinstatement. These tools are needed to help counties control their health care costs for persons with mental illness, which have skyrocketed both in the jail system and outside of it as uncompensated care.

