



Feasibility Study for Creating a Single Registry for Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Divorces

**As Required By
Sunset Advisory Commission
Management Action Issue 12**



**Department of State Health Services
September 2016**

- This page is intentionally left blank -

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Prior Studies on Consolidation of Vital Event Registries	2
Conclusion	4

- This page is intentionally left blank -

Introduction

In the *Staff Report with Final Results, July 2015*, Management Issue 12, the Sunset Advisory Commission directed the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to conduct a feasibility study for creating a single registry for births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, to include an analysis of current systems and an estimate of cost and any statutory changes required to implement such a system. H.B. 1, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013 (General Appropriations Act), appropriated \$14.1 million to DSHS with no statutory changes for a new vital events registration system.

The DSHS Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) maintains the Texas Electronic Registrar (TER) system to electronically register birth, death, and marriage events. DSHS included TER and its function as part of three separate assessments conducted since 2010. The conclusion of the assessments resulted in the submission of a Legislative Appropriations Request to the 83rd Legislature proposing the consolidation of vital event registration systems and associated functions.

In September 2014, DSHS chartered the Texas Electronic Vital Event Registrar (TxEVER) Planning Project which developed a state level business case and statewide impact analysis supporting the creation of a single registry for births, deaths, marriages, and divorces and included an analysis of current systems, an estimated cost, and any statutory changes required to implement such a system.

On September 1, 2015, DSHS approved the TxEVER Implementation Project which will result in the consolidation of vital event registration systems.

Background

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the recognition that birth certificate issuance can create opportunities for fraud has served as the catalyst for an equally important function of vital records offices: helping to strengthen national security. Birth certificates constitute proof of identity and citizenship and are used by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to generate Social Security numbers, by the U.S. State Department as evidence for passports, and by state departments of motor vehicles to issue driver's licenses.

Vital records offices always have had to protect against fraud. Alterations to birth certificates can be used to change identities or to steal them. Death certificates may be altered to commit fraud against insurance companies or to escape arrest warrants. Heightened importance of security of vital records in issuance and access is underscored by the passage of key legislation.

Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-458, Section 7211) requires minimum standards for the use of birth certificates by federal agencies for official purposes. The Act requires that birth certificates incorporate document security features to protect against alteration and counterfeiting.

The electronic birth record component of TER was implemented in 2004, with electronic death registration following in 2006. In 2007, the Texas Legislature passed HB 1739 and amended Health and Safety Code, Title 3, Chapter 193 requiring electronic filing of death certificate information by funeral director and medical certifiers to create greater efficiency in the reporting process and increase the accuracy of death records.

In 2010, TER was considered for replacement due to the age of the technology implemented in 2004.

Prior Studies on Consolidation of Vital Event Registries

In 2010, MTG Management Consultants were engaged through competitive bid to perform an analysis of 12 existing Public Health Registries as part of the DSHS Health Registries Improvement Project. The assessment included three Vital Events Registries, Adoption Registry, Voluntary Adoption Registry, and Paternity Registry. The study observed that the three vital event registries were scheduled to be remediated and consolidated into a future Vital Events registrar system. Further MTG determined that there were two types of public health registries – Surveillance Case Management and Health Registries. The assessment determined that there was potential benefit from varying degrees of consolidation. This could be of common system architecture or ultimately consolidated into modules within a single system.

In regard to the Vital Event Registries, the study did not identify any point of interoperability with the other public health registries that would support expanded data exchange or consolidation.

In 2011, Article II, Texas Department of State Health Services, Rider 72, H.B. 1, 82nd Legislature, Regular Session, established a workgroup charged with the assessment of the security of vital records. The workgroup's final report "Strengthening the Texas Birth Record Information System" consists of 30 recommendations, 15 of which address the security and effectiveness of the state's vital record information system.

Rider 72, Recommendation 23 – *"Schedule the decommissioning of the current system and required VSU, in coordination with local registrars, to develop and deploy a new system that can serve as a single state electronic birth and death records system."*

In 2013, DSHS chartered and approved the TxEVER Planning Project. The project evaluated the feasibility of consolidating vital event registration systems. It concluded that there was a benefit to consolidation and the 2014 TxEVER Business Case outlined the needs and potential benefits.

The table represents existing applications that were assessed:

Software Items	Description
TER	TER source code is owned and maintained by a private vendor.
Fetal Death Database	<p>Reporting of fetal deaths is currently a manual paper process, with data maintained and issued from a FoxPro database.</p> <p>The database was created and is maintained by the DSHS Center for Health Statistics (CHS).</p>
Divorce and Court of Continuing Jurisdiction *	<p>Reporting of divorce and suit data is currently a manual paper process, with data maintained and issued from a standalone Oracle database.</p> <p>The application was created and is maintained by DSHS Information Technology (IT) Application Development.</p>
Quality Fee Pull*	<p>Reporting (productivity, financial, security).</p> <p>Data is extracted from TER into Access, and reports are run from Access.</p>
Remote Front Office*	<p>VB/.Net Application developed by DSHS IT that interfaces to TER and facilitates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance of abstracted state-wide birth certificates by local registrars. • Viewing of Acknowledgement of Paternity (AOP) images by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). • Ordering of birth certificates by Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS). • Verification of Social Security Numbers by Social Security Administration (SSA).
Adoption Registry (ADO)*, Voluntary Adoption Registry (VAR)*	<p>Standalone systems used for the Central Adoption Registry, adoption records from 1996-2005, and information from closed adoption agencies, all of which currently involve manual paper processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADO - VB6/Sybase application • VAR - Standalone Oracle database with a .NET front-end application
Paternity Registry*	Standalone Oracle database with a .NET front-end application used for storing and issuing Paternity Registry data.

Software Items	Description
Typewriter Function*	Disc Operating System utility used to create amendments for records that can't be amended with the current system (mostly older records with fields that are no longer included on birth and death records).
Affidavit of Paternity (AOP) Remote BirthMatch*	RightFax software Teleform/Optical Character Recognition software is used for reading faxed-in AOPs. BirthMatch is a utility that matches partial AOPs to other partial AOPs, and AOPs to Birth Records in TER.
Older Adoption records	Adoption Records from 1996 and earlier. Data is currently stored in FoxPro.
Birth Access by HHSC*	Also known as Gateway to DSHS and Birth Verification System to HHSC, this system allows the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System to query birth records. The front-end is written in .NET and the database is the TER birth database.
Birth Certificate Abstract Print*	Prints birth certificate abstracts for Child Protective Services on demand for requests made through the Remote Front Office System.
Birth Issuance History*	Allows the HHSC Inspector General Office to review transactions made to birth records.
Certificate Numbering*	Prints department identification, current date and State file number on non-TER birth\death certificate received by VSU.
Remote Site Billing*	Creates invoices for organizations that use the Remote Front Office, such as Birth Access by HHSC, and SSA.
Abortion Reporting	Abortion reporting is currently a manual paper process.

* Legacy applications and associated user interfaces created by Texas Department of Health (TDH) prior to consolidation to DSHS.

Conclusion

Implementation of a consolidated registry required no statutory changes and would cost an estimated \$14.1 million appropriated from the 83rd Legislature.

TxEVER will result in the consolidation of the agencies multiple vital event registration systems and achieve additional business goals:

- Support business functions across the organizations that rely on interoperability to support data exchange and preserve records integrity.

- Upgrade IT systems and processes to the latest hardware and software technology (based on policy) to improve functional capabilities, performance, capacity, scalability, reuse, and maintainability.
- Enhance security in order to safeguard records from fraud, misuse, and identity theft. The use of multifactor authentication, proactive flags, and enforced segregation of duties will aid in preventing fraudulent registration and unauthorized access and issuance of records.
- Enable stricter compliance with current Vital Statistics rules, laws, and requirements as defined in legislative statutes and TAC, and provide flexibility to configure the system for future changes in requirements.
- Implement S.B. 1, 82nd Legislature, Regular Session, 2011 (General Appropriations Act), DSHS Agency Rider 72 recommendations related to the TxEVER system functionality.
- Ensure system compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, TAC §206.50, TAC §213, and the Health and Human Services System accessibility standards.
- Serve as a data quality control system, including all possible data edits that prevent entering inaccurate information.
- Improve timeliness and quality of data at the point of event registration.
- Increase usefulness in tracking public health trends and targeting interventions through improved quality of data.
- Support registration officials in identifying issues and resolving constituent issues.
- Improve de-identification processes used to produce data sets for public health studies.
- Increase the integrity of the certified document.
- Address increasing cost for safeguarded physical storage of records. VSU houses an increasing volume of records from closed adoption agencies.

The TxEVER Implementation Project started September 1, 2015. The project will result in the consolidation of vital event registration systems. TxEVER has been designated as a DSHS Tier One Priority Initiative, requiring regular updates on progress to agency leadership.

DSHS awarded the contract for the TxEVER system following completion of the request for proposal evaluation process in May 2016.

TxEVER is currently on schedule for release January 1, 2018.