

SUBJECT: Exempting certain county commissioners from continuing education

COMMITTEE: County Affairs — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — R. Lewis, Chisum, Hamric, G. Lewis, Muñoz, Wohlgemuth
0 nays
3 absent — Gutierrez, Kamel, Longoria

WITNESSES: For — Craig Pardue, Dallas County; Jim Jackson, Dallas County Commissioners Court.

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Local Government Code sec. 81.0025 requires county commissioners to complete 16 hours of continuing education annually at an accredited college or university. A commissioner may carry over the next year up to eight hours beyond the 16-hour annual requirement.

DIGEST: HB 27, as amended, would exempt county commissioners in Harris and Dallas counties (counties over 1.5 million population) who have served in office for 10 consecutive years or more from the continuing education requirement.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 27 would allow county commissioners who have served in office for 10 consecutive years in a large urban county to choose whether to attend continuing education courses. Commissioners who have been in office have learned from their experience the subject matter that is taught in continuing education courses. Requiring them to attend classes is redundant and not a wise use of taxpayer's money.

Some commissioners do not need to attend a course that does not apply to their county — virgin asphalt requirements or vegetation guidelines, for example — may have little relevance.

Harris and Dallas County have full-time staff who are responsible for reporting to the commissioners court any legislative information that affects their counties. In addition, many of the topics addressed in continuing education programs are the responsibility of staff.

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OPPONENTS SAY:	Continuing education requirements are important for county commissioners to stay on top of new developments in the law and other matters regardless of how long they may have served.
OTHER OPPONENTS SAY:	All long-serving, experienced county commissioners, not just those in Harris and Dallas counties, should be exempted from continuing education requirements.
NOTES:	The committee amendment would limit the bill to counties with a population of 1.5 million or more.