

SUBJECT: Increasing fees for child safety trust funds

COMMITTEE: Criminal Jurisprudence — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Talton, Dunnam, Farrar, Galloway, Hinojosa, Keel, Nixon, A. Reyna
0 nays
1 absent — Place

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND : The 74th Legislature directed municipalities with populations greater than 850,000 — Houston, Dallas and San Antonio — to create within their treasuries child safety trust funds to be used for paying the expenses of school crossing guards. Funding comes from certain court fees assessed defendants by the Code of Criminal Procedure sect. 102.014 and optional county motor vehicle registration fees.

DIGEST: HB 1553 would amend the Code of Criminal Procedure to increase by \$5 the fees assessed defendants for the child safety trust funds.

The bill would take effective September 1, 1997.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1553 would enable the City of Houston and the Harris County Commissioner's Court to continue to provide full support for the school crossing guard program operated by the Houston Independent School District (HISD). This program is obviously of great value to the parents and children of Houston, but the city and county are providing the maximum amount allowable under state law. In 1995-1996, HISD received some \$1.1 million for the program, but had costs of approximately \$1.3 million, requiring the use of some \$200,000 in school district general funds to make up the shortfall.

This bill would enable the city and county to fully provide for this useful program without burdening Texas taxpayers, since all funds come from court costs assessed upon traffic violators in the area. The bill would not

create or enact additional laws, but would simply allow local officials to raise the allowable court costs upon charges that are already being imposed. Other eligible municipalities also would benefit from the increase in fees.

The continued crucial support of the crossing guard program should not be dependent upon the school district drawing from other sorely needed funds within its budget. The court costs listed in the Code of Criminal Procedure were specifically mandated for use in funding just such services for municipal areas. HB 1553 would simply raise the amount of the assessment to fully fund this valuable safety service to school children in the state's largest urban areas.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.