

SUBJECT: Election for Harris County ESD #1 board

COMMITTEE: County Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — R. Lewis, Kamel, Bonnen, Chisum, Christian, Denny, Flores, Gutierrez, G. Lewis

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Jeffery A. McCormick, Katie Vaugh, William I. Vaugh and Randy DeLay, Harris County Emergency Corp; Robert Eckels and 19 other individuals

Against — Howard Katz, Jesse Varela and Linda Maxwell, Harris County Emergency Services District #1; Patrick Siddons

BACKGROUND : Emergency services districts (ESDs) are taxing entities approved by voters and organized in counties to provide emergency medical and ambulance services and rural fire prevention and control services. The commissioners court of the county with an ESD located wholly within its boundaries appoints a five-member board to serve as the district's governing body. Board members serve staggered two-year terms and are eligible for reappointment. Board members of ESDs located in more than one county are elected to serve two-year terms.

DIGEST: CSHB 2454 would abolish the current board of an ESD that includes part of four or more rural fire prevention districts and is located in Harris County (Harris County ESD #1). It would require the district to hold and pay for an election of new board members on November 4, 1997. Current board members would serve until newly elected members took office on January 1, 1998. Members would serve two-year terms.

Subsequent elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of odd-numbered years. The county would pay for the cost of the initial election, but the district would be required to reimburse the county. A vacancy on the board would be filled by an appointment of the remaining board members.

CSHB 2454 would take effect September 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 2454 would ensure the board members of ESD #1 are directly accountable to the citizens they represent. ESD #1 board members have been accused of poor management and insufficiently responding to the needs and concerns of citizens. CSHB 2454 would ensure citizen viewpoints are adequately listened to and represented by elected board members.

More direct representation would be provided by elected officials versus appointed ones. ESDs are powerful taxing entities that should be directly responsible to constituents. It is only fair to all individuals taxed by the district to elect the members that represent them. Although board members can be removed in district court, this is a costly and lengthy process that few citizens can be expected to undertake.

In addition, the provisions for the election of board members for ESD #1 would be consistent with the election requirements for board members of ESDs located in more than one county. The benefits of locally elected officials outweigh the minimal cost of holding an election.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

It is unnecessary to enact a state law to address this local Harris County issue. Local problems are best solved by officials at the local level. State action is unnecessary because there are many ways this issue can be solved at the local level: local residents can remove members from an ESD board by going to district court, and county commissioners courts can remove members.

Electing ESD board members would politicize the board, which could decrease the effectiveness of service provided. In addition, an election would waste limited taxpayer money that would be better spent ensuring the safety of residents.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the original version of the bill to provide for elections in odd-numbered years.