

SUBJECT: Alternative selection system for police departments

COMMITTEE: Urban Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hill, Bailey, Burnam, Ehrhardt, Hodge, Shields, Wohlgemuth
0 nays
2 absent — Clark, Garcia

WITNESSES: For — Steve Lyons, Houston Police Department; Melvin Martin, Texas Police Chiefs Association; Kathleen Merrill; Ed Dye

Against — B. J. Browning, Irving Police Department; Ronald DeLord, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas; Jack Means, Texas Conference of Police and Sheriffs

BACKGROUND
:
Municipal civil service provisions of the Local Government Code apply to municipalities with paid fire and police departments and a population of 10,000 or more who have voted to adopt those provisions. Under those provisions, new positions that become available on a police force must be filled from a list of graded eligible candidates. The grade is based on the candidate's score on a competitive examination administered by the Fire Fighters' and Police Officers' Civil Service Commission, plus up to five additional points based on the candidate's previous military service. The police department head receives the names of the three persons with the highest grades on the eligibility list; the municipality's chief executive must appoint the person with the highest grade unless there is a valid recorded reason why the person having the second or third highest grade should be appointed. The municipality may set physical requirements for its applicants, but they are not part of the grade a candidate receives.

DIGEST: CSHB 2511 would authorize the commission to adopt an alternative selection system for filling beginning positions in the police department. Under an alternative selection system, the grade would be computed by adding points from alternative selection system criteria, if any, to the grade for the written exam.

The commission could adopt rules to award up to five points for each of the following categories:

- years of military service, if honorably discharged;
- years of service as a licensed peace officer;
- number of credits earned in any area of study at an accredited college or university;
- years of employment, in a position other than a classified police officer position, by the municipality;
- results of an oral interview conducted by an interview board or assessment center and based on predetermined objective criteria;
- bilingual language proficiency;
- whether the applicant was a first generation police officer; and
- the socioeconomic background of the applicant and the applicant's family.

CSHB 2511 would take effect September 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

The current system of choosing police officers based almost exclusively on their test scores often results in the best all-around candidates being passed over for consideration. Being a good test-taker does not necessarily make someone a good police officer. CSHB 2511 would provide for more comprehensive consideration of police officer candidates by allowing other factors to be considered, such as the candidate's education, years of former police or municipal employment, bilingual language ability, and socioeconomic background. In addition, the results of an oral interview could be used.

These factors would provide a more complete picture of each candidate and give municipalities more information upon which to base their hiring decisions for entry-level police officers. This would result in a higher quality police force for the municipalities that chose to adopt an alternate selection system. In addition, an alternate selection system could have the positive side effect of increasing the diversity of municipal police forces.

The limits placed by the bill on alternate selection systems would prevent any abuses. Candidates would still have to pass the exam and only a maximum of 40 points could be added to the exam grade based on

alternative selection system criteria. In addition, the number of points that could be added for any criterion would be limited to a total of five, and any oral interview would have to be based on predetermined objective criteria.

HB 2511 would be permissive. Municipalities would not have to adopt its provisions, but could choose to do so to ensure well-rounded selection processes.

OPPONENTS SAY: The current system for selecting new police officers provides crystal clear guidelines and should be maintained. The alternative selection system proposed by CSHB 2511 would inject too many variables that could be subject to abuse despite the limits the bill would impose.

OTHER OPPONENTS SAY: CSHB 2511 should retain the provision in the original bill requiring that a majority of the sworn police officers in a department vote in favor of an alternate selection system before it could be adopted. Those officers who came in under the current system should have a voice in the debate over any substantial changes proposed to the system.

NOTES: The committee substitute deleted the requirement of a vote by department police officers on the issue of an alternate selection system and added specific guidelines for the consideration of other factors in addition to a test score.