

**SUBJECT:** Increased funding for the Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna

0 nays

1 absent — Rodriguez

**WITNESSES:** For — None

Against — John H. Williams, Justice of the Peace and Constable Association of Texas, Inc.; Susan Horton, Texas Municipal League

On — None

**BACKGROUND :** The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute provides police management training for Texas peace officers. The institute receives 50 cents of state fees assessed against persons convicted of criminal offenses.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 2617 would increase to \$1 the portion of court costs assessed in criminal cases dedicated to the Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas fund.

CSHB 2617 would also authorize the Texas State University System board of regents to build, buy, improve or renovate, enlarge or equip any buildings, property, facilities, roads, or other infrastructure necessary for use by the institute. The board could issue bonds and irrevocably pledge to the payment of those bonds a portion of the proceeds collected for the Blackwood Institute.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997. Only criminal offense convictions occurring on or after that effective date would incur the extra fee.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 2617 would help ensure adequate financing for the operation of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute. The bill would impose only an additional 50 cents upon the standard court costs assessed against persons convicted of criminal offenses in order to fully fund this valuable law enforcement training resource. Fifty cents is a small fee for a criminal to pay.

CSHB 2617 would also authorize necessary steps to provide an adequate physical plant and facilities for use by the Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute. The institute has used any available buildings located on the three campuses where training courses have been offered since 1993. Now, with the proposed consolidation of training activities on the Sam Houston State University campus in Huntsville, there is an urgent need for permanent housing arrangements to handle the extra students. The institute is, and will continue to be, located on state university grounds; it is fitting that the state university system, with its economies of scale, help arrange for financing these needed improvements. CSHB 2617 would not propose using university funds for institute purposes; increasing the revenues to the Blackwood Institute fund would generate \$1.8 million annually after fiscal 1998.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

CSHB 2617 is one more in a long series of bills seeking to burden local municipal courts with collecting a dedicated state fee. This trend has occurred with increasing frequency over recent years. Right now, a person who pleads guilty in municipal court to a speeding charge will be assessed approximately \$52.00 in state court costs, with the proceeds going to support some five different state recovery funds, such as the criminal justice planning fund or the crime victims compensation fund. The municipal courts must pay the state its share of such costs first, while they absorb the administrative burden of tracking, collecting and distributing these state assessments. The continued increase in state-mandated court costs would likely result in a lower rate of payment of all fines.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute made technical changes to the original.

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HB 3256 by Oakley, also set for second reading on today's calendar, would consolidate functions of the Blackwood Institute at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville.