

**SUBJECT:** Continuing education requirements for court coordinators

**COMMITTEE:** Judicial Affairs — favorable, with amendments

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Thompson, Hartnett, Clark, Crabb, Garcia, Luna, Shields, Solis  
0 nays  
1 absent — Zbranek

**WITNESSES:** For — Dottie McDonald, Texas Association of Court Administrators; Bob Wessels, Harris County Criminal Court; Dianne Wilson, County and District Clerks Association; Martin L. Allen  
Against — None

**DIGEST:** HB 622, as amended, would require court coordinators of a district or statutory county court to obtain 16 hours of annual continuing education, unless the judge or commissioners court employing the court coordinator certified there were no funds available for this purpose.  
  
The Court of Criminal Appeals would monitor the education and training of court coordinators under its authority to adopt rules for programs related to education and training of attorneys, judges, justices of the peace, and other court personnel, including district and country clerks.  
  
HB 622 would take effect September 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 622 would extend continuing education requirements to an important segment of the court system. Court coordinators currently are the only court staff members who do not have to meet continuing education requirements. Court clerks, bailiffs, process servers, court reporters, lawyers and judges all have to complete annual training in order to stay current with the law and knowledgeable about any changes. Since court coordinators manage the court's docket, they are the persons most likely to deal with the public, witnesses, victims and attorneys. They must be knowledgeable about court settings, procedures, scheduling and case management.

Most of these professionals, especially new coordinators, already make a practice of enrolling in various training seminars in court coordination, administration, docket management, and training in victim rights and family violence. However, since such training is not mandated, some counties will not pay for it, requiring that coordinators cover the cost themselves, try to find scholarship money, or, at worst, just give up on trying to stay abreast of developments.

HB 622 would help to increase and maintain the efficiency of Texas courts by bringing court coordinators into an established system of court training and making them part of an ongoing educational process. Being part of this system would allow coordinators to tap into grant money available for training. The bill would not impose a hardship on small courts; if a judge or commissioners court certified that there was not enough money to pay for the training, a coordinator would be exempted from the requirement.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee amendments would provide that continuing education programs for district and county clerks also are subject to oversight by the Court of Criminal Appeals and add county commissioners courts as employing entities who could certify that funds were not available to pay for continuing education of court coordinators.

The companion bill, SB 825 by Ellis, has been scheduled for a public hearing today by the Senate Jurisprudence Committee.