

SUBJECT: Broadcast of open meetings over the Internet

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 13 ayes — Wolens, S. Turner, Alvarado, Bailey, Counts, Craddick, Danburg, Hilbert, Hunter, D. Jones, Longoria, Marchant, McCall

0 nays

2 absent — Brimer, Merritt

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — Eddie Esquivel and Martha Zottarelli, Department of Information Resources

BACKGROUND: Government Code, chapter 551 allows governmental bodies conducting open meetings to do so using telephone conference calls and video conferencing.

DIGEST: HB 1264, as amended, would establish open-meeting notice standards for meetings broadcast over the Internet and would require the Department of Information Resources (DIR) to examine the feasibility of Internet broadcasts of public meetings.

For a meeting to be broadcast over the Internet, the governmental body would have to post notice of the meeting on the Internet site in the same form and within the same time frame as required for posting live meetings.

DIR would have to establish a task force to determine whether the audio and video signals broadcast over the Internet would be of sufficient quality for viewers to observe the demeanor and hear the voice of participants of such meetings. The task force also would have to study the feasibility of receiving real-time testimony and comments from persons viewing open meetings over the Internet. DIR's report would be due to the Legislature no later than September 1, 2000.

HB 1263 would take effect September 1, 1999.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

As more people become connected to the Internet and as technology advances to allow live audio and video transmissions over the Internet, it is incumbent on governmental bodies to take advantage of this new medium to allow as many people as possible to observe the processes of government.

This bill would establish a task force to examine some unresolved issues related to Internet broadcasts — specifically, the quality of the transmission and the ability of people watching the meeting to participate. Once these issues were resolved, the structure would be in place to allow the broadcast of meetings over the Internet.

Current efforts by governmental bodies, including the Texas House of Representatives and the Senate, to broadcast their meetings over the Internet have been very successful and have opened the process up to many Texans who now can watch their government at work.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would replace the original version of the bill below the caption. The original bill would have required:

- governmental bodies to provide a way for the public to comment to the governmental body over the Internet;
- each portion of the meeting to be open, visible, and audible to the public over the Internet;
- the governmental body to make an audio recording of the meeting available to the public; and
- DIR to establish minimum standards for audio and video signals.

The companion bill, SB 1252 by West, passed the Senate on April 7 by voice vote and was reported favorably, without amendment, by the House State Affairs Committee on April 26, making it eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 1264.