

SUBJECT: Revising requirements for holding a public meeting by videoconference

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Wolens, S. Turner, Brimer, Counts, Craddick, Danburg, Hunter, Longoria, McCall, McClendon, Merritt

0 nays

4 absent — Bailey, Hilbert, D. Jones, Marchant

WITNESSES: For — Cathy Douglass, Texas Association of School Boards, Tom “Smitty” Smith, Public Citizen; Suzy Woodford, Common Cause of Texas

Against — Donnis Baggett, Texas Daily Newspaper Association, Texas Press Association

On — Eddie Esquivel, Department of Information Resources

DIGEST: CSHB 35 would allow a meeting of a state governmental body that extended into three or more counties to be held by videoconference call if a majority of the quorum were physically present at one location. A notice of the videoconference meeting would have to specify each location where a majority of the quorum would be physically present.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 35 would make it easier for a governmental body to hold a meeting by videoconference. Technological developments, such as the proliferation of high-bandwidth Internet connections, have made videoconference meetings more practical than in previous years. The bill would allow state government to take advantage of these developments. In addition, if a board member were sick or out of town, they still would be able to participate in a meeting.

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OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 35 could hinder public access to state government meetings. The bill would not require a majority of a quorum to meet in a location accessible to all the public. It is possible that a physical location of a meeting could take place in a location with restricted access, such as a country club.

NOTES:

The substitute would require a majority of a quorum to be present at one location rather than allowing one or more members to be present at any location. The substitute also would allow a governmental body to meet by videoconference if it extended into three counties.