

SUBJECT: Prohibiting degree requirements as a minimum for peace officer licensure

COMMITTEE: Public Safety — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — B. Turner, Berman, Driver, Isett, P. King
1 nay — Villarreal
3 absent — Keel, Gutierrez, Hupp

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 8 — 29-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 1121:*)
For — Chris Heaton, Texas Municipal Police Association; Rebecca Radcliff, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Occupations Code, sec. 1701.255 requires the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) to establish by rule minimum qualifications for a person to enroll in peace officer or county jailer training. TCLEOSE has set as its minimum educational requirements either passing a general education development (GED) test indicating high school graduation level, being a high school graduate, or having 12 semester hours of credit from an accredited college or university. The minimum training requirement is either a basic peace officer course; the criminal justice transfer curriculum, the peace officer sequence approved by TCLEOSE, and at least an associate degree; or out-of-state licensure with certain requirements (Texas Administrative Code, Title 37, part 7, sec. 217.1).

DIGEST: SB 455 would prohibit TCLEOSE from requiring an applicant to hold an associate or higher degree to be eligible for a law enforcement license.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

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SUPPORTERS SAY:	Effective March 2001, TCLEOSE by rule added the requirement of an associate degree to meet the minimum education standards for initial licensure. SB 455 would prevent the commission from adding an immediate undue burden on students who are trying to qualify for initial licensure through the junior college curriculum route.
OPPONENTS SAY:	It is not unreasonable for TCLEOSE to require that an officer applicant have at least an associate degree. A person who has shown the self-discipline to finish at least an associate degree is better able to face the rigors of police academy training. College exposes students to a wide variety of experiences and people. Raising the minimum education level of peace officer trainees would improve the applicant pool and raise the level of professionalism.
NOTES:	The House companion bill, HB 1121 by B. Turner, passed the House on May 11 and passed the Senate as amended on May 21.