

SUBJECT: Changing requirements for police and fire department examinations

COMMITTEE: Urban Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Talton, Van Arsdale, Bailey, Edwards, Hunter, Wong
0 nays
1 absent — Menendez

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Local Government Code, sec. 143.025 requires the Fire Fighters’ and Police Officers’ Civil Service Commission to administer entrance examinations to establish eligibility lists for beginning positions in fire and police departments in municipalities with a population greater than 10,000.

DIGEST: HB 2038 would require that the entrance examination for beginning police officers and fire fighters be based on a person’s “general knowledge and aptitude,” rather than “knowledge of and qualifications for fire fighting and work in the fire department or for police work and work in the police department.”

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 2038 would allow the Fire Fighters’ and Police Officers’ Civil Service Commission to test a broader range of prospective applicants’ general knowledge and aptitude. This would allow the commission to find and recruit people who might have little specific knowledge about fire and police work but who still had the ability to become fire fighters or police officers.

The bill would provide a more appropriate way to examine prospective fire fighters and police officers. Since the exam is used to create an eligibility list for beginning positions, it should be designed to assess primarily whether a person can learn the skills necessary to become a public servant. The specific skills themselves are taught during training. HB 2038 would not diminish the quality of police officers or fire fighters in Texas communities but simply

would aid in recruiting people for these positions. Candidates would continue to undergo extensive training and testing before being certified as police officers or fire fighters.

Several Texas cities have moved toward the type of test that HB 2038 would authorize, and this bill would make sure that these exams are in accordance with state law. More and more cities have recognized the need to test general knowledge and aptitude of prospective fire fighters and police officers and have structured their entrance exams along those lines.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.