

SUBJECT: Word limits on ballot propositions or constitutional amendments

COMMITTEE: Elections — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Denny, Bohac, Anchia, Anderson, Hughes
0 nays
2 absent — J. Jones, T. Smith

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Dana DeBeauvoir, Legislative Committee of the Texas County and Districts Clerks Assoc.)
Against — None
On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Elizabeth Winn, Secretary of State)

BACKGROUND: Election Code, sec 52.072 provides that propositions must be printed on ballots in the form of a single statement and may appear only once. Sec. 274.001 says constitutional amendments on ballots must describe the proposed amendment in terms that clearly express its nature.
No guidelines currently are provided to govern the length of propositions or proposed constitutional amendments.

DIGEST: CSHB 1023 would amend Election Code, secs. 52.072 and 274.001(b) to limit to 75 words all propositions and proposed constitutional amendments on an election ballot. The headings of propositions could not exceed 15 words. The word limit would not apply to any translation of the propositions or headings into a language other than English.
The bill would take effect September 1, 2005, and would apply only to elections taking place on or after that date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Some recent propositions presented to Texas voters have been too long. Some have filled half a page of a paper ballot and the full screen on a Direct Record Electronic voting machine. Long propositions and proposed amendments often confuse voters to the point that they do not understand what they are voting for or against. Limiting the length of

propositions and proposed amendments would help the voting public understand them better.

Various states already have similar caps in place for proposition language. A cap on length would allow voters a clearer understanding of the measures they are voting on.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1023 would not allow exceptions for complicated propositions and proposed amendments. While it is important that these ballot proposals are condensed for easy voter understanding, some difficult-to-understand proposals may require more than 75 words fully to describe and detail. Sometimes voters need more information, not less.

NOTES:

The committee substitute specified that the 75-word limit would not apply to any translation of the proposition or proposed constitutional amendment into a language other than English. HB 1023 as introduced would have allowed an exception only for Spanish translations.