

**SUBJECT:** Online access to state agency publications

**COMMITTEE:** Government Reform — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 6 ayes — Uresti, Otto, Frost, Gonzales, Hunter, Veasey  
0 nays  
1 absent — Y. Davis

**WITNESSES:** For — Gloria Meraz, Texas Library Association  
Against — None

**BACKGROUND:** A number of state agencies produce publications that they periodically distribute to subscribers in physical form, such as newsletters, videos, and audio tapes. These publications often are mailed or otherwise distributed in physical form at no cost to the subscriber.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 423 would require state agencies that produce subscription publications and distribute them at no cost to make such publications accessible to subscribers from the agency's Web site. State agencies would inform subscribers of the online availability of free publications and allow them the option of accessing the publication online rather than receiving it physically.

Agencies would discontinue mailing or otherwise distributing publications to subscribers who opted to access the online version and would notify such subscribers each time a new edition appeared on the agency Web site through a message containing an electronic link to the publication.

This bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** CSHB 423 would save the state costs associated with distributing state publications. Encouraging subscribers to receive their subscriptions online would help state agencies reduce printing, production, and postage and handling fees, which can be significant expenses for many agencies. Given

the budget restrictions imposed on agencies, any opportunity to save money should be exercised.

Many subscribers would prefer to access state agency publications online because online access creates less clutter than paper and allows subscribers to receive their publications sooner. As Internet use becomes more widespread, individuals and groups increasingly are taking advantage of its benefits. It is important for the state to keep pace with advances in technology, and by doing so agencies can save money and better serve the public.

The bill would not mandate that agencies stop distributing hard copies of publications. It would require only that subscribers have the option of accessing their subscriptions online. Subscribers who did not wish to exercise this option could continue to receive the publications in a physical form.

All state agencies currently have Web sites, and the placement of additional content on these sites generally should not be a difficult task. The Department of Information Resources is well equipped to assist state agencies in posting publications on the Web.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

It is unlikely that this bill would result in significant cost savings to state agencies, and complying with the bill could create new costs and work for some agencies. While subscribers may appreciate the convenience of using the Web to access publications, it is unlikely that many will choose to cancel their free subscriptions by mail, particularly for long publications that are time-consuming and unwieldy to print. Agencies would be required to maintain two lists and distribution/notification systems — one for subscribers by mail and one for online subscribers. In addition, agencies could incur significant technology and staff training costs in offering streaming audio or video to online subscribers.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute addresses the distribution of publications in any form whereas the original addressed only the distribution of publications through the mail. Also, the substitute would apply to subscriptions that are sent at no cost to the subscriber and refers to the “subscriber” rather than the “recipient.”