

SUBJECT: Requiring Internet video access for boards of higher education systems

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Branch, Patrick, Clardy, Darby, Howard, Murphy, Raney
0 nays
2 absent — Alonzo, Martinez

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Donnis Baggett, Texas Press Association; Ashley Chadwick, Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas; Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business; Michael Schneider, Texas Association of Broadcasters; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

Against — None

On — Steven Collins and Kristy Orr, University of Texas System; Kent Hance, Texas Tech University System; (*Registered, but did not testify:* James Crowson, Office of Attorney General)

BACKGROUND: Government Code, sec. 551.128 authorizes a governmental body to broadcast an open meeting over the Internet. A governmental body that broadcasts a meeting over the Internet is required to establish an Internet site from which it provides access and must provide notice of the meeting.

DIGEST: CSHB 31 would require the governing board of a general academic teaching institution or university system to broadcast on the Internet all of its open meetings. The board would have to comply with existing notification requirements under Government Code, ch. 551 and would make available on its website a written agenda and related documents. The bill also would require the board to record the broadcast and make it available in an archive on its website. The bill would provide for some exemptions that would include an act of God, force majeure, and causes not reasonably within the board's control.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2013, and would apply only to board meetings set by notice on or after January 1, 2014.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 31 would increase the transparency and accountability of the governing boards that guide Texas' public universities. Connecting citizens to the decision-making processes that determine how the state's higher education institutions function serves a valuable public interest. Online viewers could watch up-to-the-minute proceedings at boards of regents meetings, where policy decisions are made that affect the lives of students, parents, and educators. Higher education funding accounts for about 12 percent of all state expenditures, and tracking decisions that affect how taxpayer money is used also is important.

Implementing the technology necessary to broadcast meetings over the Internet would not present a significant fiscal implication, according to the Legislative Budget Board. In fact, The University of Texas Board of Regents and the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents already live video stream their meetings. The bill would offer reasonable exemptions for boards that failed to broadcast in certain circumstances.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.