

SUBJECT: Requiring certain PACs to file expenditure reports with ethics commission

COMMITTEE: Elections — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Laubenberg, Goldman, Israel, Reynolds, Schofield

0 nays

2 absent — Fallon, Phelan

WITNESSES: For — Bill Fairbrother, Texas Republican County Chairmen's Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jesse Romero, Common Cause Texas; LaQuan Rogers, Get Fit Wit Me; Alan Vera, Harris County Republican Party Ballot Security Committee)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Michael Quinn Sullivan, Empower Texans; MerryLynn Gerstenschlager, Texas Eagle Forum - Vice President; Jeremy Newman, Texas Home School Coalition; Tony McDonald; Trey Trainor)

On — Colleen Vera

BACKGROUND: Under Election Code, sec. 252.007, a specific-purpose committee for supporting or opposing a measure at an election ordered by a political subdivision other than a county must file its campaign treasurer appointment with the secretary of the governing body of the political subdivision or, if the political subdivision has no secretary, with the governing body's presiding officer.

Election Code, sec. 254.130 requires all specific-purpose committees to file reports of political contributions and expenditures with the authority with whom the political committee's campaign treasurer appointment is required to be filed.

DIGEST: HB 1114 would require that a specific-purpose political committee created to support or oppose a measure on the issuance of bonds by a school

district file reports of political contributions and expenditures with the Texas Ethics Commission.

This bill would take effect on September 1, 2015 and would apply only to reports due on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1114 would help school districts focus on teaching and preparing students instead of dealing with cumbersome open records requests. The bill would shift the responsibility for publishing reports and responding to open records requests to the Ethics Commission, which is specifically geared toward dealing with these requests. The bill would not impose a reporting requirement; it would simply change the authority that would receive the reports. Under the bill, candidates for school boards still would file their reports of political contributions or expenditures to the school districts.

Collecting these reports would not burden the Ethics Commission. Their system is fully automated, and reporting is done through software that is available on their website. Once reports are submitted, they are published on the Internet within 24 hours. This provides faster access to these records than making school districts handle the reports.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

This bill would put an unnecessary burden on both specific-purpose political committees and on the Texas Ethics Commission. Specific-purpose political committees that focus on school district bond issues are often small groups of citizens that should not be forced to comply with the overly strict reporting requirements of the Ethics Commission, which are often more strictly enforced than the requirements of school districts. The Texas Ethics Commission is already understaffed and overburdened without the massive influx of reports that could come from specific-purpose political committees.

There is no demonstrable need to move reporting requirements from the school districts to the Ethics Commission. Because these are local issues, interested parties would often find it easier to get reports directly from the school board, rather than waiting to get them from the ethics commission.