

- SUBJECT:** Allowing electronic jury questionnaires
- COMMITTEE:** Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Smithee, Gutierrez, Hernandez, Laubenberg, Murr, Neave, Rinaldi, Schofield
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Farrar
- WITNESSES:** For — Craig Pardue, Dallas County; Charles Reed, Dallas County Commissioners Court; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Donna Warndof, Harris County Commissioners Court; Mark Mendez, Tarrant County; Rick Thompson, Texas Association of Counties; John Dahill, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Deece Eckstein, Travis County Commissioners Court; Thomas Parkinson)
- Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code, sec. 62.0132 lists the required contents of jury questionnaires sent to potential jurors along with their summons.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1755 would provide an alternate method by which counties could send jury summons questionnaires. Instead of including a physical copy of the questionnaire in the summons, the bill would allow counties to send a written jury summons to potential jurors that included the internet address of the court's website where a potential juror could find an electronic copy of the questionnaire that could easily be printed.
- The bill also would allow counties that had adopted plans for electronic jury selection to allow individuals to complete and submit a questionnaire on the court's website.
- The bill would take effect September 1, 2017, and would apply to written summons sent on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1755 would help counties save money on postage and administrative costs associated with the delivery of hard copy jury summons and questionnaires. Instead of being required to send potential jurors a summons, a return envelope, and a hard-copy questionnaire, the bill would allow counties instead to mail the summons bearing an internet address at less cost — by postcard, for example. By some estimates, such a system could save up to \$225,000 a year in Dallas County alone.

While internet access today is widespread, those who could not or did not complete the online form in advance would be able to fill out the questionnaire when they reported for jury service, which counties currently allow when someone has forgotten to complete the questionnaire or made a mistake when doing so.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1755 could have a disparate impact on low-income individuals, who are less likely to have internet access. Currently, counties include a return envelope and questionnaire for the potential juror to complete and mail. It is unlikely the bill would save money unless a county chose to place the entire questionnaire process on the court's website, but this could result in reduced jury service participation.

NOTES:

A companion bill, SB 259 by Huffines, was approved by the Senate on March 28 and referred to the House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence Committee on April 18.

The committee substitute differs from the original bill in that CSHB 1755 would allow counties that adopt plans for electronic jury summons to allow potential jurors to fill out and submit jury summons questionnaires on the court's website.