

- SUBJECT:** Eliminating one-punch, straight-party voting
- COMMITTEE:** Elections — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 5 ayes — Laubenberg, R. Anderson, Fallon, Larson, Swanson  
2 nays — Israel, Reynolds
- WITNESSES:** For — Jacquelyn Callanen, Bexar County; Herbert Gonzales Jr., Green Party of Bexar County; Katija Gruene, Green Party of Texas; Tom Glass, League of Independent Voters; Mark Miller, Libertarian Party and Texans for Electoral Competition; Robert Stovall, Republican Party of Bexar County; Jeff Blaylock, Texas Election Source; Erin Lunceford; Ryan Simpson; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Linda Curtis, League of Independent Voters of Texas; Carly Rose Jackson, Texans for Voter Choice; Michael Pacheco, Texas Farm Bureau; and seven individuals)
- Against — Manny Garcia, Texas Democratic Party; Yannis Banks, Texas NAACP; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Goodwille Pierre, Office of Ann Harris Bennett, Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar; Crystal Perkins, Texas Democratic Party; John Richie, Texas Democratic County Chairs Association; Brad Parsons)
- On — Ed Johnson, Harris County Clerk's Office; Alan Vera, Harris County Republican Party Ballot Security Committee; Bill Fairbrother, Texas Republican County Chairmen's Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Keith Ingram, Texas Secretary of State, Elections Division)
- BACKGROUND:** Election Code, sec. 1.005(20) defines a straight-party vote as a vote by a single mark, punch, or other action by the voter for all the nominees of one political party and no other candidates. Several sections of the Election Code provide for straight-party voting in Texas elections.
- DIGEST:** HB 25 would eliminate straight-party voting and repeal several sections of the Elections Code that reference straight-party voting.

This bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 25 would encourage voters to consider more carefully candidates running in elections by eliminating straight-party voting. While voters research candidates at the top of the ballot, they may not make as much effort to research down-ballot candidates, resulting in a system that poorly vets elected officials for offices that most directly affect the lives of constituents. In some cases, one-punch voting also causes voters to miss out on casting votes in nonpartisan races or propositions.

Texas is one of the few states that still allows one-punch, straight-party voting. Data from several states that have eliminated one-punch voting show that its elimination not only reduces ballot roll-off but increases voter turnout. For example, Texas and Georgia held statewide ballot propositions for transportation funding in 2014. In Texas, 17.3 percent of voters casting votes in the governor's race did not cast a vote for the proposition. Conversely, in Georgia only 2.6 percent of voters casting votes in the governor's race did not cast a vote for their proposition.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

HB 25 would eliminate straight-party voting, which many Texas voters use. Party labels are an immediate set of boundaries that voters use to make their ballot decisions. If a voter wants to vote for all of the candidates of a single party, that voter should be allowed to do so easily. Eliminating the one-punch option does not eliminate straight-party voting, it just makes it more cumbersome. While some suggest that eliminating straight-party voting is necessary to encourage voters to make better-informed choices with regard to down-ballot candidates, there are better ways to solve that problem than removing the ability to use one-punch, straight-party voting.

The bill also could make Texas vulnerable to lawsuits. In 2016, Michigan enacted a bill that eliminated straight-party voting, which was blocked by a federal district court, with higher courts, up to the U.S. Supreme Court, declining to hear the state's case. The decision to block the law was based on evidence showing high correlations between the size of the African-American voting population within a district and the use of straight-party

voting in that district. Those districts also historically have faced some of the longest wait times to vote in Michigan, which meant that eliminating straight-party voting would impact African-American voters to a greater degree.

**OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

While eliminating straight-party voting could be a good idea, it is important to consider the effect this would have on the state's larger cities and counties. Harris County consistently has one of the longest ballots in the country. Ending one-punch voting could extend the time it takes a voter to cast a ballot, which could lengthen the wait time for voters in line at each polling place.

**NOTES:**

A companion bill, SB 2175 by Hughes, was referred to the Senate State Affairs Committee on March 29.