

SUBJECT: Allowing associate judges, referees to hear pleas in certain juvenile cases

COMMITTEE: Juvenile Justice and Family Issues — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Dutton, Dale, Biedermann, Cain, Moody, Schofield, Thierry  
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Susanna Woody, LUTU, Our Revolution Central Texas; Mark Williams, Coke, Concho, Irion, Runnels, Schleicher, Sterling, and Tom Green counties; Jacob Aronowitz, Young Active Labor Leaders; Danielle King; Thomas Parkinson; Roy Woody)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kaci Singer, Texas Juvenile Justice Department)

BACKGROUND: Family Code, sec. 54.10 allows referees and associate judges to hold hearings under certain conditions but prohibits referees from presiding over trials or certain hearings.

DIGEST: HB 678 would allow associate judges or referees to hear juvenile pleas and stipulations of evidence in cases in which the child is subject to a determinate sentence. The associate judge or referee then would report written findings and recommendations on the matter to the juvenile court judge, who could accept or reject the plea or stipulation.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017, and would apply only to conduct that occurred on or after that date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 678 would protect due process and increase efficiency in the juvenile court system. Pleas and stipulations by definition mean the parties are in agreement about a particular matter. Allowing associate judges and referees to make the necessary factual findings in these cases would free up time that juvenile court judges could use to hear contested cases.

Juvenile court judges still would consider every plea or stipulation before ruling, just as they do under current law.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.