

- SUBJECT:** Exempting firefighters and police officers from jury duty
- COMMITTEE:** Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 5 ayes — Leach, Farrar, Julie Johnson, Meyer, Smith
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Y. Davis, Neave
- 2 present not voting — Krause, White
- WITNESSES:** For — Greg Shipley, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, Corpus Christi Police Officers Association; Scott Leeton, Corpus Christi Police Officers' Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: TJ Patterson, City of Fort Worth; Chris Jones, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas; Ray Hunt, Houston Police Officers' Union; Aidan Alvarado, Laredo Fire Fighters Association; Glenn Deshields, Texas State Association of Fire Fighters; Ray Wilkinson, Texas Municipal Police Association)
- Against — Lee Parsley, Texans for Lawsuit Reform
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Patti Henry and Cary Roberts, County and District Clerks Association of Texas)
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code sec. 62.106 establishes several categories of people who may establish an exemption from jury service, including those older than 70, those with legal custody of a child younger than 12, college and university students, and elected officials and employees of the Legislature.
- DIGEST:** HB 354 would add certain types of employees to the list of people who could establish an exemption from jury service. These would include firefighters, including fire chiefs, who were permanent, paid employees of the fire department of a city or county or of a special district or authority that provided firefighting services. The bill also would establish an

exemption for police officers, including police chiefs, who were permanent paid employees of a city or county police department.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2019, and would apply only to those summoned to appear for jury service on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 354 would allow firefighters and police officers, who often work overnight shifts or have unusual hours, to opt out of jury service. The bill would keep cities and counties safer, especially cities with smaller police and fire departments that may not have the resources to cover the shifts of police and firefighters called to jury duty.

Firefighters and police officers represent a small fraction of the population, so the bill would not burden the justice system. The exemption would be voluntary, so the bill would not deny anyone the opportunity to serve.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 354 would undermine a fundamental part of the justice system by allowing certain people to opt out of jury service. This narrows the potential jury pool and could send a message to others that jury duty is unimportant.