

SUBJECT: Using certain language to refer to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing

COMMITTEE: House Administration — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 11 ayes — Geren, Howard, Anchia, Anderson, Flynn, Ortega, Parker,
Sanford, Sherman, Thierry, E. Thompson

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 17 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: *On House companion bill, HB 588:*
For — Beth Hamilton, Texas Association of the Deaf; Caroline Burks;
Avalyn Hamilton; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Chris Masey, Coalition
of Texans with Disabilities; Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas;
Ender Reed, Harris County Sheriff's Office; Otis Sizemore, Texas
Association for the Deaf)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Ruth York)

On — Bobbie Scoggins, Educational Resource Center on Deafness

BACKGROUND: Government Code ch. 392, establishes the Person First Respectful
Language initiative, which establishes preferred terms and phrases to
describe persons with disabilities in new and revised law by requiring the
use of language that places the person before the disability.

DIGEST: SB 281 would direct the Legislature and the Texas Legislative Council to
avoid using in any new statute or resolution the terms "hearing impaired,"
"auditory impairment," and "speech impaired" in reference to a person
who is deaf or hard of hearing. The entities would be directed to replace
existing instances of those phrases with "deaf" or "hard of hearing," as
appropriate, when enacting or revising a statute or resolution.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

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SUPPORTERS
SAY:

SB 281 would require the Legislature and the Texas Legislative Council to employ respectful language preferred by deaf and hard of hearing persons. Although the currently used terminology is well meaning, use of the word "impaired" can have a negative connotation by focusing on what the person cannot do.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No concerns identified.