

- SUBJECT:** Authorizing all counties to create an ethics commission
- COMMITTEE:** County Affairs — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Coleman, Bohac, Anderson, Cole, Dominguez, Huberty, Rosenthal
- 1 nay — Biedermann
- 1 absent — Stickland
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 8 — 30-0
- WITNESSES:** For —Mark Keough, Montgomery County Commissioners Court; Eric Yollick; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Deece Eckstein, Travis County Commissioners Court; Tamara Yollick)
- Against — Tony McDonald, Empower Texans
- BACKGROUND:** Local Government Code ch. 161 authorizes county commissioners courts to create a county ethics commission. The chapter establishes procedures for appointing members to the commission and describes the powers and duties of the county ethics commission, including to:
- adopt, publish, and enforce an ethics code governing county public servants;
 - issue advisory opinions regarding the application of the ethics code, upon request;
 - adopt processes for complaint procedures and hearings; and
 - subpoena witnesses and documents.
- Ch. 161 applies only to a county that has a population of 800,000 or more, is located on the international border; and before September 1, 2009, had a county ethics board appointed by the commissioners court (El Paso County).

DIGEST: SB 710, the J.D. Lambright Local Government Ethics Reform Act, would repeal a Local Government Code provision that restricted the creation of a county ethics commission to certain counties.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 710 would improve local accountability and enforcement of existing codes of ethics by allowing all counties, rather than just El Paso County, to create an ethics commission. The bill would provide counties with an important mechanism to enforce ethical standards for certain elected officials, lobbyists, and vendors.

OPPONENTS SAY: By authorizing every county in Texas to create a county ethics commission, SB 710 could risk creating a system of regulation and punishment that could be improperly used to target individuals for personal or political reasons.