

SUBJECT: Entering data on missing persons, unidentified bodies in national database

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security and Public Safety — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — White, Bowers, Goodwin, Harless, Hefner, E. Morales, Patterson, Schaefer, Tinderholt

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Lynn Holt, Justices of the Peace and Constables Association of Texas; Brian Hawthorne, Sheriffs Association of Texas; Alice Almendarez; David Fritts; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jennifer Szimanski, CLEAT; Andy Kahan and Sydney Zuiker, Crime Stoppers of Houston; Tom Nobis, Harris County Republican Party; Noel Johnson, JPCA; Carlos Lopez and Jama Pantel, Justices of the Peace and Constables Association of Texas; Kathy Mitchell, Just Liberty; Jimmy Rodriguez, San Antonio Police Officers Association; AJ Louderback, Sheriffs Association of Texas; Michael Fossum; Zoila Vega-Marchena)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Thomas Parkinson)

DIGEST: CSHB 1419 would require a law enforcement agency, on receiving a report of a missing child or missing person, to enter into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) within 60 days of receiving the report the name of the missing child or person, all available identifying features, and all available information describing any person believed to have taken or retained the missing child or person. The bill would be known as John and Joseph's Law.

A justice of the peace or a medical examiner investigating the death of an unidentified person would have to enter all available identifying features of the unidentified body into NamUs within 10 working days after one or more identifying features were determined or within 60 days after the

investigation began, whichever was earlier.

Examples of identifying features would include fingerprints, dental records, physical characteristics, and a description of the clothing worn when last seen or found on the body.

Immediately after the return of the missing child or person or the identification of the unidentified body, the local law enforcement having jurisdiction of the investigation would have to notify NamUs.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021, and would apply only to the report of a missing person or child that was made or the investigation of a death of an unidentified person that commenced on or after that date.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 1419 would help bring closure to the loved ones of missing persons and reduce the anguish families endure by empowering law enforcement to use a tool that could resolve cases more quickly. Every year, thousands of people go missing and many unidentified bodies are found but not matched to a missing person. The bill would offer a way to bridge the gap between missing persons and unidentified bodies by requiring the use of a centralized database of records and identifying information that would help law enforcement and loved ones solve missing persons cases.

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is a national resource for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases throughout the United States. Funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice through a cooperative agreement with the University of North Texas Health Science Center, all NamUs resources are provided to law enforcement, medical examiners, and family members of missing persons at no cost. The system helps agencies conserve resources and solve missing persons cases by ensuring nationwide access to important identifying information and other data.

While some law enforcement agencies use NamUs as an investigative tool, Texas state law currently does not require information relating to missing persons or unidentified remains to be entered into NamUs. Just as

several other state have done, Texas should require all law enforcement agencies, justices of the peace, and medical examiners to use NamUs to ensure access to complete information and to be sure that a life-saving, effective, and invaluable tool for law enforcement and the public did not continue to be underutilized.

CRITICS  
SAY:

No concerns identified.