

SUBJECT: Requiring lobbyists to take sexual harassment prevention, ethics training

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 13 ayes — Paddie, Hernandez, Deshotel, Harless, Howard, Hunter, P. King, Lucio, Metcalf, Raymond, Shaheen, Slawson, Smithee
0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 5 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: No public hearing.

BACKGROUND: Government Code ch. 305 requires certain persons who lobby members of the Legislature or executive branch of state government to register with the Texas Ethics Commission.

DIGEST: SB 2233 would require individuals who are required to register as a lobbyist with the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) to attend a sexual harassment prevention training and an ethics training course every two years. The courses would have to be approved by the commission. The lobbyist would have to submit to the commission a certificate of completion of the course.

TEC would have to adopt rules to implement the bill's provisions by December 1, 2021.

Lobbyists would have to include with their registration form a certificate showing they completed the sexual harassment prevention training course and the ethics training course in the previous two years.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021, and would apply only to a lobbyist registration required to be filed after January 1, 2022.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 2233 would help address the issue of sexual harassment in Texas government workplaces by requiring registered lobbyists to take courses

in sexual harassment prevention and ethics. The bill would be one step in addressing and preventing the issue of a culture of harassment at the Capitol. Making the registration of a lobbyist contingent on taking courses in sexual harassment prevention and ethics would help contribute to a safer work environment. While more needs to be done to combat sexual harassment and to study the best way to do so at the Capitol, SB 2233 would set the stage to continue the work of the Legislature in this area.

The requirement in SB 2233 would be in line with similar requirements in many professions. The Texas Ethics Commission would be able to identify appropriate courses or develop its own, and the commission could integrate the certificates into its registration system. Those who did not submit a completion certificate would not be able to complete their registration.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

SB 2233 would not go far enough in addressing problems related to sexual harassment in Texas government. Sexual harassment should be defined and explicitly prohibited to ensure that everyone working at the Capitol understood that such conduct would not be tolerated. An avenue in which victims felt safe making complaints to an entity outside of their immediate workplace should be established, and accountability should be increased by having a neutral body review and possibly take action on complaints. Training and accountability should be extended beyond registered lobbyists to others.

**OTHER
CRITICS
SAY:**

SB 2233 would go too far by adding an occupational requirement for registered lobbyists, as the state should not impose requirements that make it more difficult to work in an occupation.