

SUBJECT: Authorizing the employment of chaplains at state schools

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Buckley, Cunningham, Cody Harris, Harrison, Hefner, K. King, Schaefer

3 nays — Allison, Hinojosa, Talarico

3 absent — Allen, Dutton, Longoria

WITNESSES: For —Austin Lanier, Austin Lanier Inc; Greg McBrayer, DFW Airport Interfaith Chaplaincy; Bobby Herring, Eyes On Me Inc; Mike Flores, Eyes on Me and ACE; Nathan Kirby, FDR Engineers; GF Watkins, Jordan Ranch; Robert Coon, Lorena Garza, Josien Knigge Malloy, Rocky Malloy, National School Chaplain Association; Brad Dacus, Pacific Justice Institute; Gay Herrin, Project Destiny Texas; Cindi Castilla, Texas Eagle Forum; and 18 individuals (*Registered, but did not testify*: Richard Vega, At His Feet Ministries/ CT Church; Juan Tijerina, At His Feet Ministry; Donald Southall, Dray South; Mary E Castle, Texas Values; Robert L. Green, Travis County Republican Party Election Integrity Committee for Legislation; Perla Muñoz Hopkins, TX Director Moms For America; and 15 individuals)

Against —Chloe Goodman, EQTX Equality Texas; Carrie Proctor, Texas Counseling Association and Texas School Counseling Association; Joshua Houston, Texas Impact; Billie Beard; Meaghan Bihun; Sophia DeLoretto-Chudy; Mandy Giles (*Registered, but did not testify*: Ash Hall, ACLU of Texas; Tricia Cave, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Maggie Stern, Children's Defense Fund - Texas; Wayne Ferguson, Civic Influencers; Ricardo Martinez, EQTX Equality Texas; Jaime Puente, Every Texan; Preston Knight, Human Rights Campaign; Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association; Amber Mills, MOVE Texas Action Fund; Bryan Mares, National Association of Social Workers - Texas Chapter; James Jackson, OUTreach Denton and PRIDENTON; Anna Nguyen, PFLAG Austin;

Rose Kantorczyk, SOJOURN; Nyssa Li, Student; Emily Amps, Texas AFL-CIO; Kelsey Kling, Texas AFT; Amanda Afifi, Kelsey Theis, Texas Association of School Psychologists; Holly Eaton, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Rocio Fierro-Perez, Carisa Lopez, Texas Freedom Network; Jennifer Easley, Texas PTA; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Carrie Griffith, Texas State Teachers Association; Erin Walter, Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry; Andrea Segovia, Transgender Education Network of TX; and 212 individuals)

On — Julie Pickren, Texas State Board of Education, District 7
(*Registered, but did not testify*: John Litzler, Texas Baptists Christian Life Commission; Eric Marin, Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Some have suggested that public schools would benefit from additional qualified individuals to counsel students, and that chaplains could provide such services.

DIGEST: CSHB 3614 would allow a school district or an open-enrollment charter school to employ or accept as a volunteer a chaplain to provide support, services, and programs for students as assigned by the district's board of trustees or the charter school's governing body. A chaplain employed or volunteering under the bill would not be required to be certified by the State Board for Educator Certification.

Each school district's board of trustees and each charter school's governing body would be required to take a record vote no later than six months after the effective date of the bill on whether to adopt a policy authorizing a campus of the district or school to employ or accept a chaplain as a volunteer.

The bill would include school chaplains in certain provisions related to counseling, mental health, and behavioral health supports for the use of funds allocated to improve school safety and security.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.

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, 2023.