

SUBJECT:	Authorizing counties to allow the sale of fireworks during Diwali
COMMITTEE:	County Affairs — favorable, without amendment
VOTE:	9 ayes — Neave Criado, Stucky, Gerdes, Jones, Orr, Rosenthal, Schatzline, Slaton, Tinderholt  0 nays
WITNESSES:	For — ( <i>Registered, but did not testify</i> : Brad Schlueter, Texas Pyrotechnic Association; Nishi Pahuja; Mehul Pahuja; Priyanka Pahuja)  Against — None
DIGEST:	HB 608 would add Diwali, including the five days preceding the holiday, to the periods during which county commissioners' courts may allow licensed retailers to sell fireworks.  The Texas A&M Forest Service would have to be available, per any county's request, to determine whether drought conditions existed in the county during the Diwali fireworks season.  A county's order to prohibit or restrict the sale or use of fireworks due to a determination that drought conditions existed would have to be adopted at least 15 days before the beginning of the Diwali fireworks season.  The bill would take effect September 1, 2023.
SUPPORTERS SAY:	Current firework restrictions limit certain groups from celebrating religious holidays. HB 608 would allow Texas' rapidly growing Hindu community to celebrate the religious festival of Diwali in the traditional manner of using fireworks.
CRITICS SAY:	No concerns identified.