

SUBJECT: Appointment of Tarrant County bailiffs

COMMITTEE: Judicial Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Thompson, Hartnett, Alonzo, Goodman, Solis
1 nay — Zbranek
3 absent — Duncan, Nixon, Willis

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Bailiffs assist in keeping order, maintaining security and increasing the efficiency of courtroom proceedings. The Government Code requires the judge of the 297th district court in Tarrant County to appoint two bailiffs and a grand jury bailiff and the Tarrant County sheriff to appoint a bailiff for the same court.

DIGEST: HB 1420 would strike the reference to the 297th District Court and instead specify that the judges of the district courts in Tarrant County that give preference to criminal cases must appoint two persons to serve as bailiffs and one person to serve as grand jury bailiff. The bill would require the sheriff to appoint one bailiff for each district court that gives preference to criminal cases.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Tarrant County has three state district courts and two county courts that handle criminal matters but are not provided by the county with the number of bailiffs as prescribed by law: three each. Creating an inconsistency is another provision that specifies that only the judge of the 297th District Court is required to appoint two persons to serve as bailiffs and one person to serve as grand jury bailiff.

HB 1420 would broaden language concerning bailiffs in the Government Code to clarify that language requiring the appointment of bailiffs applies to all Tarrant County district courts that give preference to criminal cases, not just the 297th District Court. This would result in the appropriate number of bailiffs being appointed to Tarrant County's criminal district courts and bring such courts into compliance with state law.

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OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1420 addresses a local problem that should be addressed by Tarrant County and not by the state, especially since the county will have to pay the costs of hiring additional bailiffs.