

**SUBJECT:** Requiring interior-release mechanisms on burglar bars

**COMMITTEE:** Public Safety — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — B. Turner, Keel, Berman, Carter, Gutierrez, P. King, Najera  
1 nay — Hupp  
1 absent — Driver

**WITNESSES:** For — David Coble, Texas Coalition of African American Firefighters;  
Salvador Morales, National Association of Hispanic Firefighters  
Against — None

**DIGEST:** CSHB 1365 would amend the Health and Safety Code to prohibit a person from installing security bars on a residence unless the bars on at least one bedroom door or window had an interior-release mechanism, or unless at least one bedroom window or door could be opened from the outside for emergency escape or rescue.

An interior-release mechanism would have to be tested and shown to be effective by the state fire marshal or by a testing laboratory. The fire marshal would have to adopt rules regarding these safety regulations.

A person could not sell security bars or offer them for sale unless their packaging was labeled in accordance with rules adopted by the fire marshal. The label would have to note the regulations on interior release mechanisms.

CSHB 1365 would take effect September 1, 1999, and would apply only to bars installed, sold, or offered for sale on or after January 1, 2000. The fire marshal would have to adopt the necessary rules by December 15, 1999.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** An estimated 16 people die every year because security bars on doors and windows prevent them from escaping a house fire. Requiring quick-release mechanisms on security bars and requiring that at least one bedroom door or window could be opened from the outside could save many lives.

Some cities already require interior-release mechanisms. However, a state law is necessary to ensure that people in rural areas or cities without these ordinances are not at risk.

The notice of the new regulations on packaging of security bars offered for sale would make certain that people knew of the law. It also would ensure that people were aware that burglar bars with interior-release mechanisms are available.

The new labeling requirements would not affect small businesses or manufacturers adversely. The bill would require only that notice of the state regulations be included somewhere on the packaging. The retailer could tape an inexpensive photocopied notice to each package. Manufacturers in other states would not have to alter their business practices to conform to Texas law.

This bill would not interfere with consumer choice. It would require only that one window in a bedroom have a quick-release mechanism, or that one door or window could be opened from the exterior. This would not limit severely what people could buy.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

State law should not dictate consumers' choice of security bars. This bill contains excessively detailed, inflexible requirements that would adversely affect small businesses and manufacturers without adequate justification.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSHB 1365 should be accompanied by a public service campaign to inform people with existing security bars that a new internal-release option is widely available and preferred by the state fire marshal. Packaging on burglar bars offered for sale might not be sufficient to inform people who are already at risk.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the original bill to conform with the Legislative Council format.

The companion bill, SB 839 by West, passed the Senate on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on April 19 and was reported favorably by the House Public Safety Committee on May 4, making it eligible to be considered in lieu of HB 1365.