

**SUBJECT:** Allowing private non-volunteers to teach hunter education course

**COMMITTEE:** Culture, Recreation, and Tourism — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 4 ayes — Hilderbran, Kuempel, Baxter, Dukes  
0 nays  
2 absent — Gallego, Phillips  
1 present not voting — Dunnam

**WITNESSES:** For — Kirby Brown, Texas Wildlife Association  
Against — None  
On — Steve Hall, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

**BACKGROUND:** Under Parks and Wildlife Code sec. 62.014, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has established a mandatory hunter education program that requires every hunter born on or after September 2, 1971, successfully to complete a Hunter Education Training Course. Courses are offered by volunteer instructors and department game wardens and as part of some school programs. Under the statute, the course fee cannot exceed \$15. The commission may allow volunteer instructors to retain an amount from the fees to cover their actual and necessary out-of-pocket expenses. The commission has capped the fee at \$10 and allows volunteer instructors to keep up to \$5 for their expenses. Fees, less any instructor expenses approved by the department, are deposited in the game, fish, and water safety account.

**DIGEST:** HB 2024 would require the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to establish a procedure for "certified hunter education providers" to obtain certificates so they could offer a hunting education course that meets the course requirements adopted by TPWD. These certified providers would not be employees or volunteers of TPWD

TPWD would have to determine the qualifications necessary for a hunter education provider to obtain a certificate and determine the requirements

that a course offered by them would have to satisfy to be comparable to the course offered by the department.

The commission would be required, instead of permitted, to consider residents or nonresidents who had successfully completed a hunter education class to have satisfied the statutory and department's requirements.

The bill would take effect January 1, 2006. TPWD would have to adopt rules to implement HB 2024 as soon as possible after that date but no later than January 1, 2006.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 2024 is necessary to give hunters more options for taking hunter education classes and to relieve some of the pressure on TPWD and volunteer instructors who offer these courses now. Currently, some prospective hunters may not be able to make scheduled classes and may not be able to get the required education through other available means. This problem often occurs if someone needs to take the course on short notice. Volunteers already are providing many classes and can become overburdened or burned out trying to meet the demands of hunters who want to take classes. Others want to offer the courses but find that the \$5 expense payment is not enough to cover their cost of volunteering. HB 2024 would create another option for the course to fill a niche that the volunteers cannot.

HB 2024 would create another group who could offer the classes and who would offer convenience to hunters that volunteers could not. For example, large retailers such as sporting goods stores could have employees certified as hunting providers to offer the course at times not offered by volunteers. TPWD also could develop another model for the course more suited to private providers. A retail store could, if approved by TPWD, purchase a simulator to offer the skills testing part of the course, something that a volunteer would be unable to do. Some certified hunting education providers may be able to offer courses on a demand basis, rather than scheduling them in advance as volunteers typically do.

HB 2024 would simply add to the current program without taking anything away from the volunteer program or resulting in the demise of the volunteer hunting education providers. Volunteers are the backbone of the program, and most hunters would continue to take courses offered by them. The point of the hunter education program is to nurture safe,

informed hunters and by creating opportunities for more Texans to easily take the education class, and HB 2024 would help meet this goal.

Other similar programs such as concealed handgun courses and driver safety courses are offered by the private sector, and this model should be extended to hunter education courses.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

HB 2024 is unnecessary and could result in volunteers being driven from the hunter education program, which would change its nature.

Hunter education classes are readily available. Anyone needing the course should be able to attend one of about 4,400 courses offered annually by one of the 2,500 volunteers or one of the 500 game wardens who teach them. At least two courses are offered in most counties annually, and large urban counties may have five to 10 courses per month during parts of the year and around 20 per month near and during hunting season. TPWD also tries to help hunters who cannot make a scheduled course. The department will try and locate a known course nearby the hunter, try and have a volunteer schedule a course to meet the needs of the hunter, and can send game wardens or department staff to an area to provide the education. In addition, hunters can take a home-study course and then meet with an instructor for the skills testing. Allowing private entities to offer the course could lower the demand for volunteers to teach the course and result in a valuable resource feeling underutilized and slighted.

Private retailers already could be involved in the education courses. Nothing in current law prohibits a large retailer or anyone else from having an employee be approved as a volunteer educator and having the employee schedule and offer courses.

Hunter education courses should not be compared to driver education or concealed handgun licensing courses. The recreational nature of hunting means that the reason for taking and teaching hunting education courses is fundamentally different from the reasons people take defensive driving or concealed handgun licensing courses.

If volunteer educators were driven from the program, the cost of the course could rise for hunters and the spirit of the program could fundamentally change for the worse. Since its inception the program has been marked by some of the hallmarks of resource conservation programs

– volunteers helping others become involved and knowledgeable without a profit motive.

HB 2024 could result in a move to have the cap of \$15 on the price of the course lifted, which could result in the cost for hunters being set prohibitively high since non-volunteers almost certainly would want to charge more for the course.

**OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

HB 2024 should lift or modify the current cap of \$15 that can be charged for the hunter education safety course. Fifteen dollars is not enough to provide an incentive for private entities to offer the courses or to adequately compensate volunteers.