

SUBJECT: Establishing a state statistician at Texas A&M University

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Morrison, McCall, F. Brown, Alonzo, Aycock, Giddings, D. Howard, Patrick, Rose

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — Simon Sheather; (*Registered, but did not testify*: F. Michael Speed)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 88 governs the agencies and services of The Texas A&M University System.

DIGEST: HB 3464 would add subch. K to require the head of the statistics department, in consultation with the dean of the college of science, to establish the office of state statistician in the Department of Statistics at Texas A&M University. A member of the faculty or staff of the department would be designated as the state statistician. In addition to the duties assigned to the statistician by the Department of Statistics or the university, the office would, upon request, conduct statistical analysis and research for public and private entities.

The office would be allowed to charge and collect enough fees to cover the costs of providing those services or could enter into a contract that would provide for a recovery of those costs.

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, 2007.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The Department of Statistics at Texas A&M University was founded in 1962, and with 35 statisticians, it is the third-largest statistics department in the United States. Texas A&M is the only public university in Texas

that grants Ph.Ds in applied and theoretical statistics, making the university the logical place to establish an official state statistician. There are many day-to-day processes that are affected by statistics, and having a formal state statistician would elevate the use of statistics and provide a valuable service to the entire state.

The department has widely known superior qualifications and already provides data analysis and research for a wide array of state agencies, including TCEQ, the Parks and Wildlife Department, the Water Development Board, and the General Land Office. Projects for which an agency would need statistical analysis might include environmental or water level data, data on fresh water flow and salinity level data, pollution control data that could be used to assist in water management plans or plans to protect bays and estuaries, or data collection to help in the remediation of oil spills, to name just a few.

The statistics department already provides informal initial consultations and full-scale analyses on a range of issues and processes. The requesting entities simply are billed for these services, so HB 3464 would institute formally what already is common practice. The state statistician at Texas A&M University would be in line with other offices at the university that provide services to the state, including the state climatologist and the state chemist, as well as other service agencies at the university, including the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, the Texas Cooperative Extension, the Texas Engineering Experiment Station, the Texas Transportation Institute, the Texas Forest Service, and the Texas Engineering Extension Service agencies.

The office would not duplicate the mission and efforts of the Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer at the University of Texas at San Antonio. The state demographer's office has a well defined area of expertise and functions as the focal point for the distribution of census information, population estimates and projections for Texas.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the university states it would not require any new funds from the university but should generate revenue.

The companion bill, SB 1803 by Uresti, has been referred to the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education.