

- SUBJECT: Residential smoke detectors for the hearing impaired
- COMMITTEE: Business and Industry — favorable, with amendment
- VOTE: 8 ayes — Deshotel, Elkins, England, Giddings, Keffer, S. Miller, Orr, Quintanilla  
0 nays  
3 absent — Christian, Gattis, S. Turner
- SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 17 — 28-0
- WITNESSES: For — Steve Baldwin, Texas Association of the Deaf; Betty Burks; Tyrus Burks; Jennifer Cutrer, Parkland Health and Hospital System; Faye Kuo, Advocacy, Inc.; David Mintz, Texas Apartment Association; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Carmen Mitchell, Mitchell Goff Mitchell; Mark Seeger, Communication Services for the Deaf; Laurie Vanhoose, AARP)  
  
Against — None
- DIGEST: SB 1715 would require a residential smoke detector to be capable of alerting a hearing-impaired person in the bedrooms it served if requested by a tenant or required by law as a reasonable accommodation for a hearing-impaired person.  
  
As amended, the bill would take effect January 1, 2010.
- SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 1715 would protect apartment- or multifamily-housing residents who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires a reasonable accommodation for deaf and hard-of-hearing tenants, but does not require landlords to install visual smoke alarms for these residents. SB 1715 would require landlords to install smoke detectors with flashing lights that could alert hearing-impaired residents.  
  
Under current law, developers who build or retrofit apartments and other residences with visual smoke alarms are eligible for federal tax credits and tax deductions. As amended, the bill's later effective date would allow

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more time for landlords and developers to comply with the requirements of the bill.

SB 1715 would be enacted to honor the memory of Sephra Burks, a 26-year-old deaf mother of four who died in an apartment fire in West Dallas in January 2005 along with her two youngest children because she could not hear the sound of the smoke detector.

OPPONENTS SAY:  
No apparent opposition.

NOTES:  
The committee amendment would change the bill's effective date to January 1, 2010.