

- SUBJECT:** Establishing a public law school in the Rio Grande Valley
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 11 ayes — C. Turner, Stucky, Button, Frullo, Howard, E. Johnson, Pacheco, Schaefer, Smithee, Walle, Wilson
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Fátima Menendez, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund)
- Against — None
- On — Rex Peebles, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- BACKGROUND:** Some have suggested that a law school in the Rio Grande Valley is needed to provide access to legal education in a more geographically isolated and traditionally underserved area to help address the shortage of attorneys from underrepresented populations in Texas.
- DIGEST:** HB 103 would allow the governing board of a university system to establish and operate a school of law in Cameron County or Hidalgo County.
- The governing board could:
- prescribe courses leading to customary degrees offered at other leading American law schools and award those degrees;
 - assign responsibility for the management of the law school to a general academic teaching institution in the university system; and
 - accept and administer gifts and grants from any public or private or entity for the use and benefit of the law school.
- The establishment of the law school would be subject to the availability of funding either through appropriation or from another source.

The governing board of a system that intended to establish the law school would be required to notify the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). If more than one governing board notified THECB of their intent to establish a law school, THECB would determine which of the governing boards could establish the law school based on:

- the need for a law school in a geographic area;
- potential student demand;
- available system resources;
- the feasibility of each proposal; and
- other criteria considered appropriate by the board.

The governing board would have to request THECB prepare a feasibility study to determine the actions the system would have to take to obtain accreditation of the law school. THECB would have to deliver a copy of the study to the governing board and to the chair of each legislative standing committee with jurisdiction over higher education.

The bill would prohibit any state funds from being appropriated for the law school on or before August 31, 2025.

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, 2019.