

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 3556
By: Hinojosa (Lucio)
Jurisprudence
5-13-97
Engrossed

DIGEST

Currently, in Hidalgo County, there is a problem of overcrowded dockets in the district courts, and criminal cases tend to dominate the majority of district court time. As a result, civil suits often must wait years before having an opportunity to be presented for trial. By raising the jurisdictional limit of the four county courts at law, more civil cases will be heard in the county courts at law, thus relieving the district courts of some of their burden. In addition, the judges presiding over the four county courts at law are presently paid at a rate far below that of the district court judges in the county and other county court at law judges from around the state. In order to equalize the salaries of the judges, the pay rate of the county court at law judges should be tied to the rate of pay for district court judges. H.B. 3556 would add civil jurisdiction to a Hidalgo County court at law concurrent with a district court in which the matter in controversy does not exceed \$500,000, and would also provide that the judges not be paid less than \$1,000 less than the total annual salary of a district judge in the county. This bill also increases the stenographer's fee for the making of a record.

PURPOSE

As proposed, H.B. 3556 establishes provisions regarding the county courts at law of Hidalgo County.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Sections 25.1102(a), (c), and (f), Government Code, to establish that in addition to the jurisdiction provided by Section 25.0003 and other law, a county court at law in Hidalgo County has concurrent jurisdiction with the district court in civil cases in which the matter in controversy does not exceed \$500,000, excluding interest, statutory or punitive damages and penalties, and attorney's fees and costs, as alleged on the page of the petition. Requires the judge of a county court at law to be paid an annual salary that is not less than \$1,000 less than the total annual salary, including supplements, received by a district judge in the county. Deletes existing text regarding the annual salary of County Court at Law No. 3 of Hidalgo County. Requires the clerk of the court to tax as costs in certain cases a stenographer's fee of \$20, rather than \$3.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 1997.
Makes application of this Act prospective.

SECTION 3. Emergency clause.