

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 223
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Criminal Justice
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Background

- Several recent cases involving the death or serious injury to suspected offenders during arrests have involved situations where law enforcement agencies have been involved in filming reality television shows at the time.
- One case involved Javier Ambler II, who was chased by Williamson County deputies for 22 minutes after he failed to dim his headlights, then used their Tasers on him four times after he was stopped as the events were filmed for "Live PD." Ambler said he could not breathe and died of congestive heart failure.
- Other cases have included allegations that law enforcement officers used excessive force or overreacted and forsook sound policing policies that endangered the public because the TV cameras were rolling.
- Other cases in Williamson County involved the filming of an arrest where several deputies unleashed a barrage of punches, knee jabs, and Taser shocks as Mitchell Ramsey tried to run away from a traffic stop in June, 2019.
- In another case, a Williamson County SWAT raid that the show's TV cameras filmed broke down Asher Watsky's father's front door in May, 2019, to arrest his son on a warrant stemming from a fight with his roommate. Watsky had sat peacefully in Williamson County court hours earlier, where deputies could have taken him into custody without fanfare.
- Critics contend the practice can lead to unfair consequences for people who have not been convicted of a crime, exploit people of color, and do little to improve or further the dialogue on policing in America.
- The Ambler case has resulted in the indictment of a sheriff and several deputies and raised serious questions about whether police should be acting in the line of duty as part of a reality TV show.

Bill Summary

- S.B. 223 prohibits law enforcement departments from contracting with television crews or authorizing a television crew to film peace officers in Texas from acting in the line of duty as a part of a reality television show.
- The bill moves to halt a practice that has been demonstrated to be detrimental to good police work, to public safety, and to the interests of Texans who face police interaction.
- It would also prevent police from unwittingly becoming involved in situations where solid police work could be compromised for ratings and celebrity.
- The measure would take effect on September 1, 2021.

As proposed, S.B. 223 amends current law relating to prohibiting law enforcement departments from contracting with television crews to create reality shows.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 180, Local Government Code, by adding Section 180.008, as follows:

Sec. 180.008. PROHIBITING CONTRACTS WITH REALITY TELEVISION CREWS.

(a) Prohibits any law enforcement department that employs peace officers from authorizing a television crew to film peace officers while acting in the line of duty for the purpose of creating a reality television show.

SECTION 2. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 411, Government Code, by adding Section 411.02096, as follows:

Sec. 411.02096. PROHIBITING CONTRACTS WITH REALITY TELEVISION

CREWS. (a) Prohibits any law enforcement department that employs peace officers from authorizing a television crew to film peace officers while acting in the line of duty for the purpose of creating a reality television show.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2021.