

By: A. Johnson of Harris

H.B. No. 166

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the creation of additional judicial districts composed of Harris County; making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that:

(1) in the last five years, Harris County has been devastated by multiple disasters, including Hurricane Harvey and the COVID-19 pandemic, that have resulted in the closure of courthouses in the county and created a backlog of criminal cases waiting to be heard;

(2) ongoing restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and construction at the Harris County Criminal Justice Center will continue to restrict access to jury trials;

(3) an increase in defendants released on personal bond or monetary bail while awaiting trial has lead to an increase in the levels of crime in Harris County; and

(4) without additional courts, the Harris County Criminal District Courts will take 15 years to clear the backlog of criminal cases and return to the number of pending criminal cases seen prior to Hurricane Harvey, further endangering the safety of the Harris County community, law enforcement, and victims.

SECTION 2. Subchapter C, Chapter 24, Government Code, is amended by adding Sections 24.60031, 24.60032, and 24.60033 to read as follows:

Sec. 24.60031. 486TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (HARRIS COUNTY).

(a) The 486th Judicial District is composed of Harris County.

(b) The 486th District Court shall give preference to criminal cases.

(c) On February 1, 2024:

(1) this section expires; and

(2) the 486th Judicial District is abolished.

Sec. 24.60032. 487TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (HARRIS COUNTY).

(a) The 487th Judicial District is composed of Harris County.

(b) The 487th District Court shall give preference to criminal cases.

(c) On February 1, 2024:

(1) this section expires; and

(2) the 487th Judicial District is abolished.

Sec. 24.60033. 488TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (HARRIS COUNTY).

(a) The 488th Judicial District is composed of Harris County.

(b) The 488th District Court shall give preference to criminal cases.

(c) On February 1, 2024:

(1) this section expires; and

(2) the 488th Judicial District is abolished.

SECTION 3. The amount of \$595,716 is appropriated from the general revenue fund to the Comptroller of Public Accounts, Judiciary Section for the state fiscal biennium beginning September 1, 2021, for the purpose of providing funding for the judicial salaries and other necessary expenses for the 486th, 487th, and 488th Judicial Districts.

1 SECTION 4. The 486th, 487th, and 488th Judicial Districts
2 are created on the effective date of this Act.

3 SECTION 5. This Act takes effect January 1, 2022, if this
4 Act receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each
5 house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution.
6 If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for effect on that
7 date, this Act takes effect February 1, 2022.