

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 1660
By: Flores
County Affairs
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Current law does not require that county jails operate video camera surveillance systems within their respective facilities. In Texas, county jails are multi-function facilities. Inmates awaiting pretrial, inmates sentenced and awaiting their transfer to a prison, and those sentenced for short terms for misdemeanors are housed in any given county jail. County jails hold inmates convicted of felonies and misdemeanors alike. Unlike prisons, many inmates have not yet been convicted of a crime, but because they do not have the resources, they remain incarcerated for weeks and longer awaiting a court-appointed attorney.

A high level of surveillance cameras is necessary within these facilities to ensure that the inmates, depending upon their incarceration program, are maintained in their areas, along with guaranteeing the security of the guards and the inmates. In many instances, it has been reported that the lack of man-power and video cameras in certain areas contributed to violent outbreaks and occurrences such as rapes, suicides, and even murders. These acts often lead to costly suits against the county jails by the family members of the victims.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

The bill requires the Commission on Jail Standards to submit a report which investigates the feasibility, benefits, and alternatives of using jail cameras as a preventative measure for violent acts in county jails to each house of the legislature and to the House standing committee which has jurisdiction over county affairs by December 1, 2004.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2003

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

CSHB 1660 requires the Commission on Jail Standards to submit a report which investigates the feasibility, benefits, and alternatives of using jail cameras as a preventative measure for violent acts in county jails.

CSHB 1660 modifies the original by deleting the requirement of each county jail to install a video camera surveillance system and expands the investigation report to include alternatives of such systems in order to take measures in the progression of solving the violent acts in the county jail dilemma. Additionally, the substitute modifies the due date of the report to December 1, 2004 and expires on December 2, 2004. CSHB 1660 adds the requirement of the report to also be given to the House standing committee which has jurisdiction over county affairs.