

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 1144
By: Brown, Betty
Elections
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

A watcher, also known as a poll watcher, is a person appointed to observe the conduct of an election on behalf of a candidate, a political party, or the proponents or opponents of a measure. Currently, a watcher must be a registered voter of the county in which the election is held if the election is countywide, of that part of the county in which the election is held if the election is less than countywide, or of a political subdivision in which the election is held.

The primary duty of a watcher is to observe the conduct of the election at the location where the watcher has been appointed. A watcher may point out to an election judge or clerk any observed irregularity or violation of the state election laws. Watchers are assigned to observe early voting polling place activities, election day polling place activities, early voting ballot board meeting activities, central counting station activities, signature verification committee activities, voters being assisted by an election official, the inspection and securing of the voting equipment, the delivery of election results, and the return of defective mail ballot applications.

Some counties have a shortage of people willing to serve as a watcher. Allowing a watcher to be appointed to watch any election increases the pool of available watchers and increases polling place security in Texas, especially in areas with a history of voting irregularities.

H.B. 1144 removes all eligibility requirements to be a watcher except that of being a qualified voter.

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

H.B. 1144 amends the Election Code to remove all eligibility requirements to be an election watcher except that of being a qualified voter.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.