

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

C.S.S.B. 331  
By: Johnson  
Elections  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

In Texas, voters are permitted to select an interpreter to communicate with election officials and to translate a ballot. To be eligible to serve as an interpreter, a person must be a registered voter in the same county as the voter. However, a recent court ruling invalidated this law for violating the federal Voting Rights Act and determined that the statute impermissibly narrowed the right guaranteed by the act. A final, revised district court injunction was issued in 2018, compelling election officials not to enforce specific provisions of state law regarding the eligibility to serve as a voter's interpreter. C.S.S.B. 331 seeks to align state law with the court's decision by revising the methods under which a voter may select an interpreter to communicate with election officials and to translate a ballot.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **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**

C.S.S.B. 331 amends the Election Code to make any person other than a voter's employer, an agent of a voter's employer, or an officer or agent of a labor union to which a voter belongs eligible to serve as a voter's interpreter. The bill restricts the appointment of an interpreter by an election official to a registered voter of the county in which the voter needing the interpreter resides or the adjacent county.

C.S.S.B. 331 removes the authorization for an interpreter to accompany a voter to the voting station for the purpose of translating the ballot to the voter if the voter cannot comprehend the language in which the ballot is printed and authorizes such a voter instead to receive assistance in accordance with statutory provisions governing voter assistance with a ballot. The bill requires a person who will be providing that assistance to also take the requisite oath and to meet all other requirements of those provisions.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2021.

### **COMPARISON OF SENATE ENGROSSED AND SUBSTITUTE**

While C.S.S.B. 331 may differ from the engrossed in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the engrossed and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute does not include a provision present in the engrossed that conditions the eligibility of a person to serve as a voter's interpreter on the person being selected by the voter.