

AN ACT

relating to the creation of a court reminder program for criminal defendants.

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

SECTION 1. Chapter 75, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter J to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER J. COURT REMINDER PROGRAM

Sec. 75.601. ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE PROGRAM FOR PARTICIPATING COUNTIES. (a) The Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System shall develop and make available to each county a court reminder program that allows the county to send a text message to notify criminal defendants of scheduled court appearances. The purposes of the program must include:

(1) reducing costs associated with defendants who fail to appear for a scheduled court appearance;

(2) improving the efficiency of courts in this state;

(3) reminding criminal defendants to appear at each scheduled court appearance; and

(4) reducing the number of criminal defendants who are confined in a county jail due solely to the defendant's failure to appear for a scheduled court appearance.

(b) The program must:

(1) be available to each county at no cost;

(2) comply with applicable state and federal laws

1 requiring the consent of an individual before sending a reminder by  
2 text message;

3 (3) provide text message reminders for each court  
4 appearance of a defendant who has access to a device with the  
5 technological capability of receiving text messages and provides  
6 the court administrator with an operational phone number for the  
7 device;

8 (4) document each occurrence of a criminal defendant  
9 receiving a text message reminder;

10 (5) identify criminal defendants with scheduled court  
11 appearances who lack access to devices with the technological  
12 capability of receiving text messages;

13 (6) document the number of criminal defendants who  
14 fail to appear at scheduled court appearances after being sent one  
15 or more text message reminders;

16 (7) include the technological capability, at the  
17 discretion of the local administrative judge, to provide additional  
18 information to criminal defendants concerning scheduled court  
19 appearances, such as the location of the court appearance,  
20 available transportation options, and procedures for defendants  
21 who are unable to attend court appearances;

22 (8) support partnerships with local law enforcement  
23 agencies, local governments, and local public defenders in  
24 accordance with the purposes described by Subsection (a); and

25 (9) provide one or more publicly available Internet  
26 websites through which criminal defendants may request text  
27 reminders.

1       Sec. 75.602. ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNTY PROGRAMS. (a) The  
2 justices of the justice courts and judges of the county courts,  
3 statutory county courts, and district courts with jurisdiction over  
4 criminal cases in each county may establish a court reminder  
5 program that allows the county to send a text message to notify  
6 criminal defendants of scheduled court appearances.

7       (b) In developing the court reminder program, the justices  
8 and judges may join the state program developed under Section  
9 75.601 or develop a county program that allows the county to send  
10 text message notifications to criminal defendants and that complies  
11 with the requirements of Section 75.601(b).

12       Sec. 75.603. MUNICIPAL PROGRAM. (a) The Office of Court  
13 Administration of the Texas Judicial System, or the justices of the  
14 justice courts and judges of the county courts, statutory county  
15 courts, and district courts with jurisdiction over criminal cases  
16 in each county, may partner with municipalities and local law  
17 enforcement agencies to allow:

18               (1) individuals to whom a peace officer issues a  
19 citation and releases to receive text message reminders of  
20 scheduled court appearances; and

21               (2) criminal defendants in municipal court to receive  
22 text message reminders of scheduled court appearances.

23       (b) Any municipality that partners with the Office of Court  
24 Administration of the Texas Judicial System shall pay all costs of  
25 sending reminders to municipal criminal defendants, including the  
26 costs of linking the municipal court database with the state court  
27 administrator database.

1           SECTION 2. (a) Not later than September 1, 2022, the Office  
2 of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System shall develop  
3 and make available the court reminder program as required by  
4 Section 75.601, Government Code, as added by this Act.

5           (b) The Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial  
6 System is required to implement a provision of this Act only if the  
7 legislature appropriates money specifically for that purpose. If  
8 the legislature does not appropriate money specifically for that  
9 purpose, the office may, but is not required to, implement a  
10 provision of this Act using other appropriations available for that  
11 purpose.

12           SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2021.

---

President of the Senate

---

Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 4293 was passed by the House on May 13, 2021, by the following vote: Yeas 123, Nays 19, 1 present, not voting; and that the House concurred in Senate amendments to H.B. No. 4293 on May 28, 2021, by the following vote: Yeas 118, Nays 25, 2 present, not voting.

---

Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 4293 was passed by the Senate, with amendments, on May 24, 2021, by the following vote: Yeas 29, Nays 1.

---

Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_

Date

---

Governor