

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 298

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: March 17, 2021 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Martin Saucedo, Mayor Pro-Tem

City of Blanco

Blanco, TX

March 16, 2021

The Honorable Philip Cortez
House Committee on Urban Affairs
Room E2.126
Austin, TX 78768

Attn: Angelina Lopez, Committee Clerk

Dear Chairman Cortez:

The City of Blanco would like to express support for House Bill 298. This legislation would enable communities that have applied for or have been designated as an International Dark Sky Community to regulate outdoor lighting in their extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).

The City of Blanco supports this bill because it would materially help our efforts to protect the night sky above and around our small community. Blanco has applied to the International Dark Sky Association to be designated an International Dark Sky Community. We are hopeful that we will soon attain that designation. Unfortunately, light pollution does not stop at the city limits. If we can have some control over outdoor lighting in our ETJ, it will materially improve the night sky above Blanco and enhance our status as an International Dark Sky Community.

We believe that having a pristine night sky, free of light pollution will enable Blanco to become a night sky tourism destination which will, in turn, positively affect our restaurants, motels, B&Bs, and numerous other businesses. Additionally, we believe that a beautiful night sky is part of the sense of place felt by our residents and visitors alike. For us, it is a quality-of-life issue as well as an economic issue.

This legislation would aid the City of Blanco by helping us limit light pollution, support a growing night sky tourism industry, and improve the overall quality of life for our residents

Thank you for your willingness to consider our support for House Bill 298.

Sincerely,

Martin Saucedo
Mayor Pro-tem
Blanco, Texas

Micah Grau, Deputy City Manager

City of Buda

Buda, TX

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Dear Chairman Cortez and Members of the Urban Affairs Committee,

For the past several years, the City of Buda has been working to protect the natural resources and environment that makes the State of Texas one of the best places to live. Our City Council, various boards and commissions, and staff have crafted a Unified Development Code customized to Buda that seeks to guide development impacting our region in a way that creates a unique sense of place and that protects the sensitive natural resources in the region. The passage of HB 2439 last session eroded the City's ability to accomplish these goals as it removed the ability for a community to regulate building materials.

One of the most immediate impacts of HB 2439 was that it removed a city's ability to regulate outdoor lighting. Buda, located at the edge of the Texas Hill Country, has been working since 2017 to become a certified Dark Sky Community through the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). A Texas city is now preempted from regulating outdoor lighting unless they are already a certified Dark Sky Community. In order to become a Dark Sky Community, a city must have a lighting ordinance and be able to enforce its lighting ordinance. As you can see, the passage of HB 2439 prevents any other Texas cities from becoming a Dark Sky Community.

Representative Erin Zwiener introduced HB 298 to address this issue. The bill would lessen the impacts of HB 2439 by amending Chapter 229 of the Local Government Code to enable a city that has applied for the International Dark Sky Community designation to again regulate outdoor lighting. Doing so would allow and encourage more Texas communities to seek this important designation.

Tenured Buda residents can still remember being able to look up in the Hill Country Night Sky and seeing the Milky Way. We are on the cusp of losing this great natural resource. Our slogan in Buda is "Breathe Easy Here." It is a way of life that we want to promulgate with our residents and guests. We want our hometown to be a source of relaxation and renewal away from the busyness of the big city. We want to preserve this resource for future generations of Texans.

We support the passage of HB 298 and ask for your support as well.

Sincerely,

Evan Ture
Mayor Pro Tem – City of Buda

Carol Kumpf, Mrs
Dripping Springs
Austin, TX

Please protect our dark sky status by making builders of developments, business owners and home owners to use down facing outdoor lighting and use as few streetlights as possible.
I support this bill to help us protect our dark sky status.

Sharon Walther
self
Austin, TX

Dark Sky Communities are a fragile commodity. They provide tourism for rural areas while giving residents an opportunity to enjoy their environment. Once the designation is lost due to light pollution from surrounding land, it is very difficult, if not impossible to receive the designation again. All too often business interests undermine the ecology of an area with no repercussions. Please consider this bill for the future of Central Texas residents. Thank you.

dianne feray-hicks
self, counselor

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Dripping Springs, TX

i live in a etj and have a neighbor whose light is on all night and shines directly in my bedroom. i have contacted this individual on a number of occasions about his light but his argument is that the light does not have to comply with the city's night sky regulation because we are in the etj. let's pass this bill and have a true dark sky regulation that preserves a dark sky!!!

Monica Newton

Self - Teacher

Austin, TX

We've live in the Dripping Springs ETJ for nearly 13 years and appreciate that Dripping Springs has been recognized a Dark Sky Community. Being able to see the stars at night is one of the things that attracts people to the Hill Country. As our population grows, it is even more important to limit light pollution to protect the view for current and future generations to enjoy. Thank you!

Amie Ibarra, Dr

Self

Dripping Springs, TX

Better accountability for our dark skies communities is pertinent. Many people move here or visit here for the beauty of the night sky and wildlife viewing which is greatly affected by artificial night lighting. I support this bill.

Mary Cummings

Big Country subdivision

Austin, TX

Please protect our wildlife by supporting our dark skies! Thank you!

Nancy Hanus

Myself

Blanco, TX

I support regulation of outdoor lighting and protecting our hill country dark skies

Rebecca Rodriguez

Self

Clute, TX

I agree

Allisa Carter

Self, homemaker

Dripping Springs, TX

I feel that it's really important to limit bright lights so that our community can keep its dark sky designation. The quiet, country feel and ability to see the stars at night is a large part of why we moved here in the first place.

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Deb McClintock

self retired

Johnson City, TX

Please pull in grandfathered light polluting sites and extend to ETJ to protect our skies, the refusal to use night sky lighting fixtures due to their status is pervasive.

Angelica Johnsen, President, Save Hamilton Pool Alliance

Save Hamilton Pool Alliance

Dripping Springs, TX

Hamilton Pool Preserve was designated a nature preserve by the Travis County Commissioner's Court in 1990. Located 3/4 mile upstream from its confluence with the Pedernales River, Hamilton Creek spills out over limestone outcroppings to create a 50-foot waterfall as it plunges into the head of a steep box canyon.

With over 450 plant species, some of which are rare and endemic, this tract of land is incredibly diverse in both floral and faunal species.

The preserve is critical habitat for the federally endangered, Golden-cheeked warbler, as well as over 170 species of both resident and migrant avian species.

Hamilton Pool is located in the vital Central Flyway zone. Bi-annually, birds follow this route as they migrate between their nesting and wintering grounds.

This bill is **IMPERATIVE** to protect the natural habitat of this treasured area from light pollution.

?Light pollution – the inappropriate use of artificial light at night – is an environmental pollutant that harms our planet and robs us of the opportunity to experience the wonder of a natural night sky.

Save Hamilton Pool Alliance is in full support of HB 298 to preserve Save Hamilton Pool's habitat and the hundreds of species that will be harmed by light pollution.

Martha Meacham

Delf

Driftwood, TX

I support the need for this bill as our neighborhood is being encroached upon by a wine and beer bar! In our small rural residential neighborhood! Developers are moving into residential neighborhoods and ruining the quality of life. We need protection from outdoor lighting to preserve our neighborhoods in the Hill Country.

Karolyn Tybor

Self

Wimberley, TX

I fully support Rep Zweiner's HB 298 to give our communities the right to have dark skies in our boundaries, including our ETJ's. We live in a dark sky community, within the city limits but without the ability to enforce outdoor lighting, neighbors can flood our skies with bright lights all night. Our night skies should be protected if we are designated a Dark Sky Community.

Elizabeth Craig

Self - homemaker

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Driftwood, TX

I support this bill. Give us our starry nights, big and bright, deep in the heart, and all over Texas.

Michael Shelton

Self

Austin, TX

One of the biggest things that drew us to the dripping springs area is the dark sky designation. Please protect this. It is such a beautiful and rare experience to actually be able to enjoy the night sky.

Suzanne Teshera

Self, tour guide

Driftwood, TX

This bill is necessary to protect our communities. The influx of night -operating businesses such as event venues, sports fields and wine bars into residential neighborhoods has created noise and light pollution right in our backyards and bedroom windows. There needs to be a way for businesses and residents to peacefully coexist, and regulating the negative impact businesses can have on next-door residents is a good start.

Arthur Simon

self, artist

Austin, TX

I support this bill because light pollution detracts from the beautiful dark night skies of Texas.

Linda Thomas

Self / retired

Driftwood, TX

Please vote to support HB 298. We need to keep whatever remains of our dark skies. The light pollution from Austin and Kyle affects our quality of life in a negative way.

Gina Zatylny

self - homemaker

Dripping Springs, TX

I support this bill. When you're out in the ETJ, the City can't protect you and businesses just ignore their "requests" to abide by the dark sky ordinances.

Walt Smith, Hays County Commissioner

Hays County

Driftwood, TX

I rise in support of the expansion of the Dark Skies initiative and specifically Rep Zweiner's Bill. As the home of two dark skies communities including the first in the state of Texas, the preservation of our rural nighttime sky is important to Hays county. The Commissioners Court in which I serve has passed multiple resolutions in support of this initiative and I hope the state sees fit to

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expand our ability to bring a more uniform dark skies initiative to our community.