

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1820

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION

Hearing Date: April 12, 2021 2:00 PM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Karen Hixon

self, investments

San Antonio, TX

I am in favor of passage of this bill

John Tate

self; retired

Austin, TX

Favoring HB 1820, by Zwiener

Most of the thousands of industrial companies operating in Texas recognize their responsibility to the environment and to the health and safety of their employees, neighbors, and generations of future Texans. However, a few do not, and repeatedly violate environmental laws and the conditions of their permits, or through inadequate safety and control measures allow environmental releases through accidents and so-called upset events.

Some of these companies regard the fines levied by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality as just another business expense. The fines are not high enough to serve as an incentive for these companies to operate within the law. HB 1820 would raise the maximum fines that the TCEQ could levy for some offenses, and for the most egregious cases, would allow the TCEQ to revoke a facility's permit.

Lawful and responsible operations by most companies show that the economic benefits of industrial production are consistent with protecting the health of Texans and our environment. Please vote in favor of HB 1820.

Ferrell Riley, Mr

Self

Houston, TX

I live in Houston and over the past several years, the city - especially low income black and brown neighborhoods - have had to endure constant poor air quality caused by a series of natural disasters, plant fires, and illegal release of toxic pollutants into the air we breathe. During Winter Storm Uri alone, over 3.5 million pounds of extra pollutants were released in the atmosphere by oil refineries, petrochemical plants and other facilities. Despite these shocking statistics with very real health and safety impacts for community members, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on financially penalized 3% of all illegal pollutant releases. This dismal amount of regulation and accountability sends a clear message that the companies responsible for the release of toxic chemicals have undue influence in accountability procedures that results in serious health consequences for majority low income black and brown communities, particularly those living in the cancer cluster along the Houston Ship Channel.

The Texas State Constitution states that "political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded in their authority, and instituted for their benefit." Where is the benefit? Where is the accountability? The government is responsible for the health and well-being of constituents, not the interests of profit seeking corporations. This bill will give communities the power to fight for their own health, their right to breathe fresh air, and the right to seek a better future.

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Margaret Sugarek

Self

Humble, TX

Please pass this bill and protect our precious rivers.

Abhinav Kumar

Houston

Houston, TX

Please pass this bill. In the real world a 3% success rate would result in immediate dismissal. When it comes to law enforcement, catching 3% of all murderers would mean trouble for everyone. Let's build a society for our children and their children that doesn't turn Texas into a toxic wasteland. We can do better. Please help. Thank you.

Daria Smith

Self

ROUND ROCK, TX

The TCEQ must have the ability to monitor and penalize agencies and business acts that are failing in eco-efficiency, ignoring upgrades, and following suit of progressive environmental changes.

Robert Eby

Self - Green Building Specialist

San Marcos, TX

I SUPPORT this bill.

Kelly Davis

Save Our Springs Alliance

Austin, TX

On behalf of Save Our Springs Alliance, I write in support of HB 1820 and urge this Committee's Honorable Members to report HB 1820 favorably out of Committee and on to the House floor for a vote without delay.

This bill would allow TCEQ, if it chooses, to increase the penalties it may assess against polluters when an actual violation has been found. The bill allows common-sense, reasonable assessments commensurate with the damage caused. Currently, TCEQ-assessed penalties are often so low that they do not have the intended deterrent effect—it is cheaper to pollute our air and water and pay the penalty than to proactively take the measures necessary to prevent such pollution. This is backwards. TCEQ needs adequate authority to enforce rules that ensure clean air and water. After-the-fact fines cannot always undo the damage that has already been done—especially regarding the adverse health impacts of pollution.

The bill would not affect TCEQ's ability to negotiate agreed enforcement orders with violators—where appropriate, fines may still be reduced in exchange for a party taking action that would remediate past violations and/or prevent future ones. The bill would give TCEQ more flexibility to tailor enforcement settlement agreements to the specific circumstances in a manner that protects Texans' health.

The bill will result in economic benefit from reduced health care costs and increased productivity from citizens not experiencing the adverse health impacts of dirty air, exposure to toxic chemicals, and polluted water. In the first years after its enactment, the bill would generate a revenue increase that would more than offset the costs to maintain a toxic chemical emergency alert system

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and implement other provisions.

This bill strikes the right balance and gives the public confidence in our state environmental agency's ability to protect Texans' health and welfare.

Thank you.

Donald Simanton
Self, Engineer
Dripping Springs, TX

TCEQ is fairly toothless, as I have found when trying to report illegal dumping and sewage in the Hill Country. This bill will help TCEQ actually have some power against environmental offenders. Vote for this bill and save Texas wild lands and ranches.

David Todd
Self
Austin, TX

As a former enforcement attorney for the state, I can vouch for the need for this bill.

Cheryl Hamilton, Dr.
Self, Retired senior citizen
San Antonio, TX

I support this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Alan Montemayor, Mr.
Self, Retired senior citizen
San Antonio, TX

I support this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Jonathan Grant
Self/retired
San Marcos, TX

I support the passage of HB 1820.

Steve Hixon
GEAA
San Antonio, TX

I totally support this very needed bill.

Carol Schlachter
Mr. and Mrs.

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Johnson City, TX

Please pass this bill to make the Texas commission on Environmental Quality do their jobs. I feel like they have rubber-stamped too many new projects and it has led to unnecessary destruction in my beautiful state of Texas.

George Yaffe

Self, retired

Dripping Springs, TX

I support this bill.

Jensie Madden

Self- Retired Educator

Fischer, TX

Please SUPPORT HB 1820. Fees and penalties for noncompliance with TCEQ regulations need to be strong enough to deter behavior that leads to pollution or hazards to health.

Hal Strickland

Clean water

Austin, TX

No wastewater discharge into Texas flowing waters

Susan Cook

self

Driftwood, TX

I support HB 1820. Please help us give teeth to our environmental regulations. The environment is being savaged by uncaring development, destroying our source of life and health, in the service of short-term profit.

We need to make the destruction of the environment unprofitable, as it seems that some people only understand right and wrong via their pocketbooks.

Texas's future depends on a healthy natural environment, as the health of her people is our wealth, and that depends on following the dictates of Mother Nature.

Stop allowing people to destroy our land, our water and our air, and if they do, make them pay dearly for their mistakes, and make them go back and fix what they have done, if possible.

Cathy Ramsey

self; retired

Dripping Springs, TX

I fully support this bill and Representative Zwiener's proposals to better direct the TCEQ to provide real protection for our waterways.

Bill Holt

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self

Austin, TX

HB 1820 represents long-needed protections for Texans.

Dixie Camp

Self

Dripping Springs, TX

I support the passage of HB 1820.

Abbe W Delozier

Myself

Austin, TX

We have a cement facility in our neighborhood that is polluting our wells. We need tough fines as the cement company Easy Mix Master pools is ignoring repeated requests to stop polluting. TCEQ is doing NOTHING on this matter! We need laws to enforce action and penalties against these cement companies!

Elizabeth Bowerman

Comal County Conservation Alliance

New Braunfels, TX

On behalf of the Board and 927 members of the Comal County Conservation Alliance (CCCA), I enthusiastically support HB 1820.

Donna Gottwald

Self retired dentist

Helotes, TX

I support HB 1820

Mark Cuda

Self. Retired

Driftwood, TX

With increasing population and density we need this bill to ensure we have adequate water with pristine quality that the hill country has long been known for.

Kathy McColl

Self

Austin, TX

I support passage of HB 1820

SANDRA PARKS

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Self, retired

NEW BRAUNFELS, TX

Very much support this. TCEQ needs to be able to follow through on enforcement of sanctions rather than being impotent to make any impact

chrys grummert

self, caregiver

woodcreek, TX

I support this bill and ask all involved to do the same. Please work to better protect our waterways.

Penny Bradshaw

Retired, Self

Spring, TX

For too long, TCEQ has failed to make polluters pay for what they are doing to our health. With air pollution released illegally every day somewhere in Texas, TCEQ takes action only a small percentage of the time. And when they do, they tend to issue fines for approximately one penny for every pound of air pollution. In Texas, it costs large oil companies a fine of only \$25,000 for illegally releasing air pollutants — but these companies can make that back in MINUTES.nd

HB 1820 would also require reviews that could lead to the revocation of permits if companies allow the chemical disasters we have seen far too often that injured residents and killed workers.

HB 1820 makes fiscal sense. The bill would require TCEQ to increase fines issued by 100 percent to \$1 dollar for every pound of pollution released illegally. This could potentially add \$2.3 billion in fines every year that could help to offset our current budget shortfall.

If corporate polluters don't fear consequences, they won't change, and Texans will continue to suffer.

I am writing to express my support for HB 1820 – please vote yes for this important bill. All Texans need to know that their elected leaders and legislators actually care about them and not just the big oil corporations.

Thank you, Penny Bradshaw

Cindy Fuqua

78209

San antonio, TX

I support this bill

Sydney Dunlap

self/educator

Spring, TX

Please support this bill. Clean air is so important for good health, and pollution increases cancer risk. Let's do what we can to have safer air for everyone.

Carolyn Croom, Ms.

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Self; Child care

Austin, TX

Please vote "yes" on HB 1820. A small minority of industrial companies in Texas are guilty of regular violations of the law: explosions, fires, discharges into water and land, and air pollution emissions. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is charged with fining these violators in order to protect Texans' health and safety.

But the TCEQ is only as strong as the laws it enforces. Many companies in Texas see fines as just the cost of doing business. If we don't create an economic incentive for them to reduce pollution, they will keep putting us at risk.

I support HB 1820 because it gives the TCEQ more tools to go after environmental violators. If a company is operating within the bounds of the law, it has nothing to fear from environmental enforcers. But by strengthening the TCEQ's ability to punish violators, you will send a clear message to polluters.

HB 1820 gives TCEQ the option to assess larger fines, especially for companies that have too many pollution events in a year, very large events, or incidents that cause injury or death. These are the very worst violators, and TCEQ needs more options to hold them accountable. In the worst cases, TCEQ would even have the option to pull permits.

I want the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to do everything it can to protect me and everyone else in the state. HB 1820 gives TCEQ more tools to do its job better. Let's expand the slogan on litter, "Don't mess with Texas", to include clean air, water, and land. Vote "yes" on HB 1820 to support a safe and healthy Texas for all.

Thank you.

James Doyle

retired/ self

Canyon Lake, TX

I support the proposed bill HB 1820.

Klaudia Forgacova

Self - Operations Manager

Dallas, TX

My name is Klaudia Forgacova and I support HB 1820. Environmental responsibility needs to be on businesses, and unless regulated and enforced with reprimands, businesses don't seem to act in the interest of our environment and health. This will ensure businesses keep up with environmental needs and notify people of concerns. I encourage the passing of HB 1820.

Michael Spano

Coalition for Responsible Environmental Aggregate Mining (CREAM)

Georgetown, TX

We support this bill and the increasing of penalties for violations. The current penalties are far too low to have impact on changing the behavior of businesses. For some, it's cheaper to pay the fines than to pay for the improvements

David Drewa

Self/Business Owner

San Antonio, TX

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I SUPPORT and am commenting FOR HB 1820. Across the state, it is clear that Texans have lost confidence in TCEQ's ability to protect Texans' health and our natural resources.

TCEQ has a poor track record of monitoring and enforcing compliance. These failures require legislative solutions with common sense requirements to improve the public health and safety of Texas. In 2019, TCEQ penalties averaged just one cent per pound of pollution, while 97 percent of all illegal air pollution events were not penalized, according to research from Environment Texas.

This bill is a start in the right direction and would help rein in the millions of pounds of air pollution that are emitted both during adverse events and normal conditions.

I strongly urge you to pass HB 1820 favorably out of committee. Thank you!

David Drewa

Preserve Our Hill Country Environment

San Antonio, TX

We are FOR HB 1820. This bill is a start in the right direction and would help TCEQ rein in the millions of pounds of air pollution that are emitted both during adverse events and normal conditions. Across the state, it is clear that Texans have lost confidence in TCEQ's ability to protect Texans' health and our natural resources. TCEQ has a poor track record of monitoring and enforcing compliance. These failures require legislative solutions with common sense requirements to improve the public health and safety of Texas. TCEQ penalties average just one cent per pound of pollution, while 97 percent of all illegal air pollution events were not penalized at all. We urge you SUPPORT and move forward HB 1820.

Carol Geiger, Ms

Self

Austin, TX

I Support HB 1820 for matters under the jurisdiction of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and providing the agency with the authority to assess or increase civil and administrative penalties.

Joseph Robles

Humanity

Houston, TX

The Environment is top priority over EVERYTHING ! Those of us that have, up to this point, been blessed to not have suffered from the poison that the Oil, Gas, and Refinery Complex, continually releases into the Air, Water, and Land. We must be adamantly diligent about restriction of the pollutants that this "Corporate Complex" avoids being responsible for discharging this poison into our Environment !

Roxanne de la Garza

Self

Houston, TX

I support HB 1820. We should be prioritizing air quality and public health. Neighborhoods close to large polluters are usually low income. All people deserve clean air.

Ben Stickney

Self/designer

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Houston, TX

I am extremely excited to voice my support for this bill. I live in Houston and over the past several years, the city - especially low income black and brown neighborhoods - have had to endure constant poor air quality caused by a series of natural disasters, plant fires, and illegal release of toxic pollutants into the air we breathe. During Winter Storm Uri alone, over 3.5 million pounds of extra pollutants were released in the atmosphere by oil refineries, petrochemical plants and other facilities. Despite these shocking statistics with very real health and safety impacts for community members, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality financially penalized 3% of all illegal pollutant releases. This dismal amount of regulation and accountability sends a clear message that the companies responsible for the release of toxic chemicals have undue influence in accountability procedures that results in serious health consequences for majority low income black and brown communities, particularly those living in the cancer cluster along the Houston Ship Channel. The Texas State Constitution states that "political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded in their authority, and instituted for their benefit." Where is the benefit? Where is the accountability? The government is responsible for the health and wellbeing of constituents, not the interests of profit seeking corporations. This bill will give communities the power to fight for their own health, their right to breathe fresh air, and the right to seek a better future.

Robert Corbin

myself

Austin, TX

FOR

Dorrine Fisher

Self

Austin, TX

Vote for !