

PUBLIC COMMENTS

SB 23

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: May 6, 2021 8:00 AM

Ellen Friar, County Auditor

Ward, County of

Monahans, TX

This being blanket, regardless of size, is going to be a problem for smaller counties.

Loving County has increased the number of deputy sheriffs from 3 to 7, meaning we have more deputy sheriffs than counties much larger than us. It is due to oilfield activity. Once the activity goes away, Loving County will not need 7 deputy sheriffs. I believe the Loving County Commissioners Court has always been appropriately responsive to the needs of the citizens of Loving County for law enforcement. Even during this last year when things slowed down tremendously due to COVID 19, the Court did not reduce the size of the sheriff's office and knew the activity would return once people could go back to work. The oilfield is back. Is there any way that a population bracket could be placed on this bill for smaller counties to allow for unusual circumstances that occur? Thank you.

Sarah Berel-Harrop

self/seminarian

Farmers Branch, TX

Please oppose this harmful bill. Why is this harmful? Voters elect their city council and county officials and work with those elected officials in accountability relationships. One issue that many localities are working on is community safety. Police officers have been killing and harming black and brown people with near immunity for years and the historical response is to give them more funding. With that backdrop, communities are experimenting with other models and ways ensure community safety.

This patronizing legislation assumes that voters are not involved in local budgeting processes and requires a vote on the budget itself if the line item for police services decreases. This essentially voids the power of localities to construct their budgets by delaying implementation and requiring the added expense of an election. Why only police? Why not have such a provision for health services? This opens the door to an ideological veto on any number of local initiatives.

Furthermore, as Austin Police Department Acting Chief Chacon has mentioned, this legislation could impact public safety funding that is not within the police budget - for example, crime labs or mental health services.

The legislature - which only meets every two years and has NO accountability to the voters of particular localities - needs to stop tinkering with the ability of localities to make their own decisions. Please vote no on this bill.

Charles Cox, City Manager

City of Farmers Branch

Farmers Branch, TX

Honorable Chair Chris Paddie,

As you are aware, numerous bills (ex. SB 23) have been introduced this session related to police reform. Many of the reforms have already been made by our Police Department. Our Mayor, Council, and a recent Police Reform Task Force have endorsed the changes, indicated support for our police officers, and identified areas for further dialogue.

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Well-intentioned but extremely problematic language has been added to many of the reform bills to stop Police Department “defunding”. The bill language typically requires an election or punitively reduces city property or sales tax revenue by the amount a Police Department budget is reduced in any given year.

Please realize that trying to legislate a city’s budget is extraordinarily complicated. In our City alone, replacing retired officers with new hires, outsourcing a function, increasing the total City budget at a greater rate than the Police budget, or finding a more efficient way to provide services would all trigger the legislative “defunding” mechanism. In small rural cities that can no longer afford local police protection, outsourcing this function to the County would be problematic. Under SB 23, someone believing that a City "defunded" a police department would be required to file a complaint with the Criminal Justice division of the Governor's Office which would then be further reviewed by the Comptroller's Office - an extremely time consuming endeavor when cities are under tight deadlines to pass a budget and adopt a property tax rate.

As fiscal conservatives, it’s hard for our City leadership to endorse a scenario where budgets can only go up and never go down. We therefore respectfully ask that you oppose efforts to legislate a city’s budget process this way. To our knowledge, only large cities in Texas have even entertained "defunding" police departments. Our recommendation would be to bracket this bill for large cities rather than imposing unnecessary and unneeded bureaucratic restriction on the majority of Texas cities.

Sincerely,
Charles S. Cox
City Manager
City of Farmers Branch, Texas