

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence  
For SB 1173

Compiled on: Wednesday, April 26, 2023 8:45 PM

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Hearing Date: April 26, 2023 8:00 AM

Chris Morton, Judge  
230th District Court  
Houston, TX

I am Judge Chris Morton, 230th Dist. Ct. Harris County TX. I do not support or oppose SB1173 but seeks to explain the practical implications of the bill.

First, requiring Harris County magistrates alone to be board certified when all other Magistrates are not would end our decades long 24/7 magistrate program. In Texas approximately 1% of attorneys are board certified in specialized areas. The purpose for board certification in criminal law is to market oneself to clients. There is no other benefit. It is overly burdensome to require the added expense to Harris County hearing officers for certification when that requirement is not necessary for the judges that they report to nor is it required by any other person performing magistration in TX. It will be impossible to replace our magistrates per SB1173. Losing our magistrates will pose a serious public safety risk to victims and the community because Federal law requires magistration within 48 hrs for all felony cases. That is the purpose of our magistrate program. Failing to have that hearing results in the release of the defendant in even the most violent of cases without posting bail and more importantly no bond conditions to protect victims.

Next, SB1173 adds an additional layer of bureaucracy by placing the appointed presiding regional judge between our county's judiciary and the local funding by our county's commissioners court hampering our ability to meet the ethical and legal requirement to administer our courts.

Lastly, SB1173 will end the Harris County District Courts' ability to choose who and how to administer our courts. It will strip our current local administration judge of her position; the first African-American female to hold that title. All other jurisdiction with more than 2 courts elect their LAJ. Harris County has 61 courts, the most of any jurisdiction.

My colleagues and I care deeply for our community and work to serve it. The practical result of SB1173 will be to make it very difficult to serve our community and will endanger it.