

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 3626

By: Holt

Homeland Security, Public Safety & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The bill author has informed the committee that justices of the peace, despite their critical role in public safety and health, do not receive the same level of recognition and benefits as other first responders in Texas such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel. C.S.H.B. 3626 seeks to address this issue by extending eligibility for certain financial assistance awards to survivors of justices of the peace, creating the Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace, and providing for a justice of the peace representative on the First Responder Advisory Council.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 3626 amends the Government Code to make several statutory changes relating to justices of the peace.

First Responder Advisory Council

C.S.H.B. 3626 expands the composition of the First Responder Advisory Council to include a justice of the peace.

Survivor Financial Assistance

C.S.H.B. 3626 expands the applicability of statutory provisions relating to financial assistance awarded to survivors of certain law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and other public officers and employees to include eligible survivors of a justice of the peace. This change applies only in relation to a death that occurs on or after the bill's effective date. Matters regarding eligibility, payment, and benefits under the applicable statutory provisions in relation to a death that occurs before the bill's effective date are governed by the law in effect when the death occurs, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace

C.S.H.B. 3626 establishes the Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace, which must be awarded as follows:

- to each justice of the peace who is seriously injured in the line of duty; and
- to the surviving next of kin of each justice of the peace who is killed or sustains a fatal injury in the line of duty.

The bill establishes the Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace Advisory Committee, which consists of three current or retired justices of the peace appointed by the governor, and requires the committee to advise the governor on the issuance, design, and presentation of that award.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2025.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 3626 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

Both the introduced and the substitute expand the composition of the First Responder Advisory Council. However, whereas the introduced expanded that composition to include one representative for coroners, as represented by a justice of the peace or medical examiner required to conduct inquests under applicable state law and appointed by the governor or the governor's designee, the substitute expands that composition to include a justice of the peace.

Both the introduced and the substitute expand the applicability of statutory provisions relating to financial assistance awarded to survivors of certain law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and other public officers and employees. However, the substitute makes those provisions applicable to eligible survivors of a justice of the peace, whereas the introduced made those provisions applicable to a justice of the peace or medical examiner required to conduct inquests under applicable state law or a death investigator or employee who assists the applicable justice of the peace or medical examiner.

Whereas the introduced established the Coroners' Star of Texas Award to be awarded to coroners or the surviving next of kin of coroners under certain circumstances, the substitute establishes a similar Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace to be awarded to justices of the peace or the surviving next of kin of justices of the peace under such circumstances. Accordingly, whereas the introduced established the Coroners' Star of Texas Award Advisory Committee consisting of three current or retired coroners to advise the governor on the issuance, design, and presentation of the applicable award, the substitute establishes the Star of Texas Award for Justices of the Peace Advisory Committee consisting of three current or retired justices of the peace to advise the governor on those matters. The substitute also omits the introduced version's provision defining "coroner" for these purposes as a justice of the peace or medical examiner required to conduct inquests under applicable state law or a death investigator or employee who assists the justice of the peace or medical examiner.