

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 2835
By: Johnson
Land & Resource Management
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The bill sponsor has informed the committee that single-stair buildings are small-scale apartments that are built with a small number of apartments per floor, all served by a single stairwell. The bill sponsor has also informed the committee that this building typology is used widely across the globe, but in the United States, it has a limited presence due to restrictions imposed by the International Building Code (IBC), a model design and building code that is used almost exclusively in the U.S. The IBC dictates that for apartments over three stories tall, each unit must have access to two stairwells. The bill sponsor has also informed the committee that to meet the multi-staircase requirement, large apartment complexes are built using double-loaded corridors with apartment units on both sides of a windowless hallway; that to offset the loss of rentable space that is taken up by the second stairwell, double-loaded corridor buildings must be large; and that the single-stairway prohibition means that multifamily apartments are only economically feasible at great density. Further, the bill sponsor has informed the committee that single-stairway buildings are smaller and fit on lots that cannot accommodate large complexes; that they can achieve 95 percent floor plan efficiency and exist more cohesively within existing neighborhoods; and that they have better cross-ventilation and energy-efficiency, and, with access to more light on multiple sides of a unit, can accommodate dwelling units with more bedrooms for families.

S.B. 2835 seeks to address this issue by authorizing a municipality to authorize an apartment building to have a single stairway under certain conditions in order to claw back authority to allow for the housing market to respond to the varied needs of Texas families.

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

S.B. 2835 amends the Local Government Code to authorize a municipality to authorize an apartment building to have a single stairway only if the building:

- does not have more than six stories above grade plane and is not a high-rise as defined by the International Building Code as adopted for municipal commercial building code purposes;
- does not have more than four dwelling units on any floor;

- has automatic sprinkler locations in each interior exit stairway, regardless of the type of stairway construction, that comply with the requirements prescribed by National Fire Protection Association Standard 13 for combustible stairways;
- has either an exterior stairway or an interior exit stairway for which the doors:
 - into the stairway from the interior of the building swing into the stairway regardless of the occupant load served; and
 - from the interior exit stairway to the building exterior swing in the direction of exit travel;
- has interior exit stairway enclosures that have a fire resistance rating of not less than two hours and do not contain an elevator opening;
- has on each floor a corridor from each dwelling unit entry or exit door to an interior exit stairway, including any related exit passageway, that has a fire resistance rating of at least one hour;
- does not have more than 20 feet between the entry or exit door of a dwelling unit and an exit stairway;
- does not have more than 125 feet of exit access travel distance;
- has an exit serving the portion of the building that contains two or more dwelling units that does not discharge through a portion of the building with a different occupancy category, including an accessory parking garage;
- has an exit that terminates in an egress court for which the court depth does not exceed the court width, unless it is possible to exit the egress court to the public way in either direction;
- does not have an opening within 10 feet of an unprotected opening into an exit stairway other than a required exit door that has a fire resistance rating of at least one hour;
- has emergency escape and rescue openings that comply with Section 1031 of the adopted International Building Code on each floor served by a single exit;
- does not have an electrical receptacle in an interior exit stairway; and
- has an automatic smoke and fire detection system that activates an occupant notification system that complies with Section 907.5 of the adopted International Building Code installed in each:
 - common space outside of a dwelling unit;
 - laundry room, mechanical equipment room, and storage room;
 - interior corridor serving a dwelling unit; and
 - main floor landing or interior or exterior exit stairway.

The bill authorizes a municipality to exercise the authority under the bill's provisions regardless of whether the municipality has adopted local amendments to the International Building Code.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2025.