

By: Eckhardt

S.B. No. 343

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to abolishing the death penalty.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 12.31, Penal Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 12.31. CAPITAL FELONY. (a) An individual adjudged guilty of a capital felony [~~in a case in which the state seeks the death penalty shall be punished by imprisonment in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for life without parole or by death. An individual adjudged guilty of a capital felony in a case in which the state does not seek the death penalty~~] shall be punished by imprisonment in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for:

(1) life, if the individual committed the offense when younger than 18 years of age; or

(2) life without parole, if the individual committed the offense when 18 years of age or older.

(b) In a capital felony trial [~~in which the state seeks the death penalty, prospective jurors shall be informed that a sentence of life imprisonment without parole or death is mandatory on conviction of a capital felony. In a capital felony trial in which the state does not seek the death penalty~~], prospective jurors shall be informed [~~that the state is not seeking the death penalty and~~] that:

(1) a sentence of life imprisonment is mandatory on

1 conviction of the capital felony, if the individual committed the  
2 offense when younger than 18 years of age; or

3 (2) a sentence of life imprisonment without parole is  
4 mandatory on conviction of the capital felony, if the individual  
5 committed the offense when 18 years of age or older.

6 SECTION 2. Articles 1.13(a) and (b), Code of Criminal  
7 Procedure, are amended to read as follows:

8 (a) Subject to Subsection (b), the ~~[The]~~ defendant in a  
9 criminal prosecution for any offense is entitled ~~[other than a~~  
10 ~~capital felony case in which the state notifies the court and the~~  
11 ~~defendant that it will seek the death penalty shall have the right]~~,  
12 upon entering a plea, to waive the right of trial by jury,  
13 conditioned, however, that, except as provided by Article 27.19,  
14 the waiver must be made in person by the defendant in writing in  
15 open court with the consent and approval of the court, and the  
16 attorney representing the state. The consent and approval by the  
17 court shall be entered of record on the minutes of the court, and  
18 the consent and approval of the attorney representing the state  
19 shall be in writing, signed by that attorney, and filed in the  
20 papers of the cause before the defendant enters the defendant's  
21 plea.

22 (b) In a capital felony case ~~[in which the attorney~~  
23 ~~representing the State notifies the court and the defendant that it~~  
24 ~~will not seek the death penalty]~~, the defendant may waive the right  
25 to trial by jury but only if the attorney representing the state  
26 ~~[State]~~, in writing and in open court, consents to the waiver.

27 SECTION 3. Articles 26.04(b) and (g), Code of Criminal

1 Procedure, are amended to read as follows:

2 (b) Procedures adopted under Subsection (a) shall:

3 (1) authorize only the judges of the county courts,  
4 statutory county courts, and district courts trying criminal cases  
5 in the county, or the judges' designee, to appoint counsel for  
6 indigent defendants in the county;

7 (2) apply to each appointment of counsel made by a  
8 judge or the judges' designee in the county;

9 (3) ensure that each indigent defendant in the county  
10 who is charged with a misdemeanor punishable by confinement or with  
11 a felony and who appears in court without counsel has an opportunity  
12 to confer with appointed counsel before the commencement of  
13 judicial proceedings;

14 (4) ~~[require appointments for defendants in capital~~  
15 ~~cases in which the death penalty is sought to comply with any~~  
16 ~~applicable requirements under Articles 11.071 and 26.052,~~

17 ~~[(5)]~~ ensure that each attorney appointed from a public  
18 appointment list to represent an indigent defendant perform the  
19 attorney's duty owed to the defendant in accordance with the  
20 adopted procedures, the requirements of this code, and applicable  
21 rules of ethics; and

22 (5) ~~[(6)]~~ ensure that appointments are allocated  
23 among qualified attorneys in a manner that is fair, neutral, and  
24 nondiscriminatory.

25 (g) A countywide alternative program for appointing counsel  
26 for indigent defendants in criminal cases is established by a  
27 formal action in which two-thirds of the judges of the courts

1 designated under this subsection vote to establish the alternative  
2 program. An alternative program for appointing counsel in  
3 misdemeanor and felony cases may be established in the manner  
4 provided by this subsection by the judges of the county courts,  
5 statutory county courts, and district courts trying criminal cases  
6 in the county. An alternative program for appointing counsel in  
7 misdemeanor cases may be established in the manner provided by this  
8 subsection by the judges of the county courts and statutory county  
9 courts trying criminal cases in the county. An alternative program  
10 for appointing counsel in felony cases may be established in the  
11 manner provided by this subsection by the judges of the district  
12 courts trying criminal cases in the county. In a county in which an  
13 alternative program is established:

14 (1) the alternative program may:

15 (A) use a single method for appointing counsel or  
16 a combination of methods; and

17 (B) use a multicounty appointment list using a  
18 system of rotation; and

19 (2) the procedures adopted under Subsection (a) must  
20 ensure that:

21 (A) attorneys appointed using the alternative  
22 program to represent defendants in misdemeanor cases punishable by  
23 confinement:

24 (i) meet specified objective  
25 qualifications for that representation, which may be graduated  
26 according to the degree of seriousness of the offense and whether  
27 representation will be provided in trial court proceedings,

1 appellate proceedings, or both; and

2 (ii) are approved by a majority of the  
3 judges of the county courts and statutory county courts trying  
4 misdemeanor cases in the county;

5 (B) attorneys appointed using the alternative  
6 program to represent defendants in felony cases:

7 (i) meet specified objective  
8 qualifications for that representation, which may be graduated  
9 according to the degree of seriousness of the offense and whether  
10 representation will be provided in trial court proceedings,  
11 appellate proceedings, or both; and

12 (ii) are approved by a majority of the  
13 judges of the district courts trying felony cases in the county; and

14 (C) ~~[appointments for defendants in capital~~  
15 ~~cases in which the death penalty is sought comply with the~~  
16 ~~requirements of Article 26.052; and~~

17 ~~[(D)]~~ appointments are reasonably and impartially  
18 allocated among qualified attorneys.

19 SECTION 4. Article 34.01, Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
20 amended to read as follows:

21 Art. 34.01. SPECIAL VENIRE. A "special venire" is a writ  
22 issued in a capital case by order of the district court, commanding  
23 the sheriff to summon either verbally or by mail such a number of  
24 persons, not less than 50, as the court may order, to appear before  
25 the court on a day named in the writ from whom the jury for the trial  
26 of such case is to be selected. Where as many as 100 ~~[one hundred]~~  
27 jurors have been summoned in such county for regular service for the

1 week in which such capital case is set for trial, the judge of the  
2 court having jurisdiction of a capital case in which a motion for a  
3 special venire has been made, shall grant or refuse such motion for  
4 a special venire, and upon such refusal require the case to be tried  
5 by regular jurors summoned for service in such county for the week  
6 in which such capital case is set for trial and such additional  
7 talesmen as may be summoned by the sheriff upon order of the court  
8 as provided in Article 34.02 [~~of this Code, but the clerk of such~~  
9 ~~court shall furnish the defendant or his counsel a list of the~~  
10 ~~persons summoned as provided in Article 34.04~~].

11 SECTION 5. Article 35.15(b), Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
12 amended to read as follows:

13 (b) In [~~non-capital~~] felony cases [~~and in capital cases in~~  
14 ~~which the State does not seek the death penalty~~], the state [~~State~~]  
15 and defendant shall each be entitled to 10 [~~ten~~] peremptory  
16 challenges. If two or more defendants are tried together each  
17 defendant shall be entitled to six peremptory challenges and the  
18 state [~~State~~] to six for each defendant.

19 SECTION 6. Article 35.16(b), Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
20 amended to read as follows:

21 (b) A challenge for cause may be made by the state [~~State~~]  
22 for any of the following reasons:

23 1. That the juror has conscientious scruples in regard  
24 to the imposition [~~infliction~~] of a sentence of imprisonment for  
25 life without parole [~~the punishment of death for crime,~~] in a  
26 capital case[~~, where the State is seeking the death penalty~~];

27 2. That the juror [~~he~~] is related within the third

1 degree of consanguinity or affinity, as determined under Chapter  
2 573, Government Code, to the defendant; and

3           3. That the juror [~~he~~] has a bias or prejudice against  
4 any phase of the law upon which the state [~~State~~] is entitled to  
5 rely for conviction or punishment.

6           SECTION 7. Article 35.17, Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
7 amended to read as follows:

8           Art. 35.17. VOIR DIRE EXAMINATION

9           [1]. When the court in its discretion so directs, [~~except as~~  
10 ~~provided in Section 2,~~] the state and defendant shall conduct the  
11 voir dire examination of prospective jurors in the presence of the  
12 entire panel.

13           [~~2. In a capital felony case in which the State seeks the~~  
14 ~~death penalty, the court shall propound to the entire panel of~~  
15 ~~prospective jurors questions concerning the principles, as~~  
16 ~~applicable to the case on trial, of reasonable doubt, burden of~~  
17 ~~proof, return of indictment by grand jury, presumption of~~  
18 ~~innocence, and opinion. Then, on demand of the State or defendant,~~  
19 ~~either is entitled to examine each juror on voir dire individually~~  
20 ~~and apart from the entire panel, and may further question the juror~~  
21 ~~on the principles propounded by the court.~~]

22           SECTION 8. Article 35.25, Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
23 amended to read as follows:

24           Art. 35.25. MAKING PEREMPTORY CHALLENGE. The [~~In~~  
25 ~~non-capital cases and in capital cases in which the State's~~  
26 ~~attorney has announced that he will not qualify the jury for, or~~  
27 ~~seek the death penalty, the]~~ party desiring to challenge any juror

1 peremptorily shall strike the name of such juror from the list  
2 furnished the party [~~him~~] by the clerk.

3 SECTION 9. Article 35.26, Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
4 amended to read as follows:

5 Art. 35.26. LISTS RETURNED TO CLERK. [~~(a)~~] When the parties  
6 have made or declined to make their peremptory challenges, they  
7 shall deliver their lists to the clerk. The [~~Except as provided in~~  
8 ~~Subsection (b) of this section, the~~] clerk shall, if the case be in  
9 the district court, call off the first 12 [~~twelve~~] names on the  
10 lists that have not been stricken. If the case be in the county  
11 court, the clerk [~~he~~] shall call off the first six names on the  
12 lists that have not been stricken. Those whose names are called  
13 shall be the jury.

14 [~~(b) In a capital case in which the state seeks the death~~  
15 ~~penalty, the court may direct that two alternate jurors be selected~~  
16 ~~and that the first fourteen names not stricken be called off by the~~  
17 ~~clerk. The last two names to be called are the alternate jurors.]~~

18 SECTION 10. Article 36.29(a), Code of Criminal Procedure,  
19 is amended to read as follows:

20 (a) Not less than 12 [~~twelve~~] jurors can render and return a  
21 verdict in a felony case. It must be concurred in by each juror and  
22 signed by the foreman. After [~~Except as provided in Subsection (b),~~  
23 ~~however, after~~] the trial of any felony case begins and a juror dies  
24 or, as determined by the judge, becomes disabled from sitting at any  
25 time before the charge of the court is read to the jury, the  
26 remainder of the jury shall have the power to render the verdict;  
27 but when the verdict shall be rendered by less than the whole



1 number, it shall be signed by every member of the jury concurring in  
2 it.

3 SECTION 11. Section 2(b), Article 37.07, Code of Criminal  
4 Procedure, is amended to read as follows:

5 (b) If [~~Except as provided by Article 37.071 or 37.072, if~~]  
6 a finding of guilty is returned, it shall then be the responsibility  
7 of the judge to assess the punishment applicable to the offense;  
8 provided, however, that (1) in any criminal action where the jury  
9 may recommend community supervision and the defendant filed the  
10 defendant's [~~his~~] sworn motion for community supervision before the  
11 trial began, and (2) in other cases where the defendant so elects in  
12 writing before the commencement of the voir dire examination of the  
13 jury panel, the punishment shall be assessed by the same jury,  
14 except as provided in Section 3(c) of this article and in Article  
15 44.29. If a finding of guilty is returned, the defendant may, with  
16 the consent of the attorney for the state, change the defendant's  
17 [~~his~~] election of one who assesses the punishment.

18 SECTION 12. Section 1, Article 42.01, Code of Criminal  
19 Procedure, is amended to read as follows:

20 Sec. 1. A judgment is the written declaration of the court  
21 signed by the trial judge and entered of record showing the  
22 conviction or acquittal of the defendant. The sentence served shall  
23 be based on the information contained in the judgment. The judgment  
24 shall reflect:

- 25 1. The title and number of the case;
- 26 2. That the case was called and the parties appeared,  
27 naming the attorney for the state, the defendant, and the attorney

1 for the defendant, or, where a defendant is not represented by  
2 counsel, that the defendant knowingly, intelligently, and  
3 voluntarily waived the right to representation by counsel;

4           3. The plea or pleas of the defendant to the offense  
5 charged;

6           4. Whether the case was tried before a jury or a jury  
7 was waived;

8           5. The submission of the evidence, if any;

9           6. In cases tried before a jury that the jury was  
10 charged by the court;

11           7. The verdict or verdicts of the jury or the finding  
12 or findings of the court;

13           8. In the event of a conviction that the defendant is  
14 adjudged guilty of the offense as found by the verdict of the jury  
15 or the finding of the court, and that the defendant be punished in  
16 accordance with the jury's verdict or the court's finding as to the  
17 proper punishment;

18           9. In the event of conviction where [~~death or~~] any  
19 punishment is assessed that the defendant be sentenced to [~~death,~~  
20 a term of confinement or community supervision, or to pay a fine, as  
21 the case may be;

22           10. In the event of conviction where the imposition of  
23 sentence is suspended and the defendant is placed on community  
24 supervision, setting forth the punishment assessed, the length of  
25 community supervision, and the conditions of community  
26 supervision;

27           11. In the event of acquittal that the defendant be

1 discharged;

2           12. The county and court in which the case was tried  
3 and, if there was a change of venue in the case, the name of the  
4 county in which the prosecution was originated;

5           13. The offense or offenses for which the defendant  
6 was convicted;

7           14. The date of the offense or offenses and degree of  
8 offense for which the defendant was convicted;

9           15. The term of sentence;

10           16. The date judgment is entered;

11           17. The date sentence is imposed;

12           18. The date sentence is to commence and any credit for  
13 time served;

14           19. The terms of any order entered pursuant to Article  
15 [42.08](#) that the defendant's sentence is to run cumulatively or  
16 concurrently with another sentence or sentences;

17           20. The terms of any plea bargain;

18           21. Affirmative findings entered pursuant to Article  
19 [42A.054](#)(c) or (d);

20           22. The terms of any fee payment ordered under Article  
21 [42.151](#);

22           23. The defendant's thumbprint taken in accordance  
23 with Article [38.33](#);

24           24. In the event that the judge orders the defendant to  
25 repay a reward or part of a reward under Articles [37.073](#) and [42.152](#),  
26 a statement of the amount of the payment or payments required to be  
27 made;

1           25. In the event that the court orders restitution to  
2 be paid to the victim, a statement of the amount of restitution  
3 ordered and:

4                   (A) the name and address of a person or agency  
5 that will accept and forward restitution payments to the victim; or

6                   (B) if the court specifically elects to have  
7 payments made directly to the crime victim, the name and permanent  
8 address of the victim at the time of judgment;

9           26. In the event that a presentence investigation is  
10 required by Subchapter F, Chapter 42A, a statement that the  
11 presentence investigation was done according to the applicable  
12 provision;

13           27. In the event of conviction of an offense for which  
14 registration as a sex offender is required under Chapter 62, a  
15 statement that the registration requirement of that chapter applies  
16 to the defendant and a statement of the age of the victim of the  
17 offense;

18           28. The defendant's state identification number  
19 required by Article 66.152(a)(2), if that number has been assigned  
20 at the time of the judgment; and

21           29. The incident number required by Article  
22 66.152(a)(4), if that number has been assigned at the time of the  
23 judgment.

24           SECTION 13. Section 557.012(b), Government Code, is amended  
25 to read as follows:

26           (b) An offense under this section is punishable by[+]

27                   [~~(1) death, or~~

1           ~~[(2)]~~ confinement in the Texas Department of Criminal  
2 Justice for:

3           (1) ~~[(A)]~~ life; or

4           (2) ~~[(B)]~~ a term of not less than two years.

5           SECTION 14. The following provisions of the Code of  
6 Criminal Procedure are repealed:

7           (1) Article 34.04;

8           (2) Articles 35.13 and 35.15(a);

9           (3) Article 36.29(b);

10          (4) Articles 37.071, 37.0711, and 37.072;

11          (5) Articles 38.43(i), (j), (k), (l), and (m); and

12          (6) Article 42.04.

13          SECTION 15. The change in law made by this Act:

14           (1) applies to a criminal action pending, on appeal,  
15 or commenced on or after the effective date of this Act, regardless  
16 of whether the criminal action is based on an offense committed  
17 before, on, or after that date; and

18           (2) does not affect a final conviction that exists on  
19 the effective date of this Act.

20          SECTION 16. This Act takes effect immediately if it  
21 receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each  
22 house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution.  
23 If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate  
24 effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2025.