

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence
For HJR 15

Compiled on: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 11:00 PM

Note: Comments received by the committee reflect only the view of the individual(s) submitting the comment, who retain sole responsibility for the content of the comment. Neither the committee nor the Texas House of Representatives takes a position on the views expressed in any comment. The committee compiles the comments received for informational purposes only and does not exercise any editorial control over comments.

Hearing Date: March 18, 2025 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Regina Castro

Self

Dickinson, TX

My name is Regina Castro and I ask for your support of HJR 15.

- I am deeply concerned about the existing bail bond system and have heard how difficult it currently is to keep dangerous criminals off the streets while they await trial, especially in some counties.
- Certain violent criminals who have demonstrated they are a safety risk should be kept off the streets while awaiting trial. I support giving judges a tool they can use to keep violent offenders off our streets.
- Please vote yes on HJR 15.

Adrian Garcia, Commissioner

Harris County Precinct 2

Houston, TX

Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia

In Support of House Joint Resolution 15

Texas House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence

March 18, 2025

Chair Smithee, Vice Chair Wu, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Joint Resolution 15. As Commissioner for Harris County Precinct 2, I represent a community that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all its residents.

HJR 15 proposes a constitutional amendment authorizing the denial of bail under limited circumstances. Specifically, this resolution allows a judge or magistrate to deny bail if they believe—on the basis of clear and convincing evidence provided by prosecutors—that any amount of cash bail is insufficient to reasonably ensure:

1. The person's appearance in court as required; or
2. The safety of the community, law enforcement, or the victim of the alleged offense.

This resolution is about protecting our communities and ensuring that our judges have sufficient tools at their disposal to prevent further harm. By allowing the judiciary to consider the denial of bail under these specific and limited circumstances, we can better safeguard our neighborhoods and uphold the integrity of our legal system.

I respectfully urge this committee to advance HJR 15 and work toward its passage, recognizing the tangible benefits it will bring to communities across Texas. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Adrian Garcia

Harris County Precinct 2

Laura Deleon

Self

Magnolia, TX

I support HJR15

Judy Rodriguez

Self

Conroe, TX

I vote for HJR 15

Kathy Ponce

Self

Maypearl, TX

I support this bill. Let Bail Reform go to the vote of the people. Time to make Texas safe again.

George Brian Vachris, P.E.

self

Humble, TX

FOR HJR 15

sandra molinari

self /workplace violence specialist

Austin, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

Maura Kinney

self

Austin, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges are professionals, skilled at assessing cases individually and making informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, destabilizing families and increasing financial insecurity. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

Julie Griffin

Self , Retired Teacher and Lawyer

Fort Worth, TX

To the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee regarding HJR 15, HJR 16, & HB 75.

My name is Julie Griffin and I live in Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas.

I write to urge you to vote NO on, or alternatively, amend to mitigate the harm from, first, HJR 15 and HJR 16. Both of these bills seek to amend the Texas Constitution. Clearly, a high bar must be met to enact a constitutional amendment. That bar is not reached in either of these bills. They also harm our communities.

HJR 15 would undo principles of American jurisprudence we've enjoyed from our country's founding. To wit: that persons accused of crimes are largely guaranteed the right to liberty, or pretrial release, except in carefully limited circumstances with appropriate procedural safeguards. "In our society, liberty is the norm, and detention prior to trial or without trial is the carefully limited exception." *United States v. Salerno*, 481 U.S. 739, 756 (1987). This amendment would put in place the outright denial of bail – forced pretrial incarceration -- in specified criminal charges: murder, aggravated kidnapping, robbery, or assault with a weapon, without the due process safeguard of representation of defense counsel. This amendment reverses the historical primacy of liberty first, deprivation of liberty the carefully limited exception. It also specifically fails to acknowledge the existence of those with serious mental illness (SMI) or developmental disability (IDD) commonly caught in the cross-hairs of assault charges arising out of their disability or a crisis.

HJR 16 similarly contradicts constitutional principles: it restricts judges from offering bail to "illegal aliens" so broadly defined as to result in the detention of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents and other lawful residents. Judges in this provision are prohibited from ordering pretrial release for immigrants so defined who are charged with "any" felony. In addition to reversing the primacy of liberty before trial, the amendment forces state court judges into the role of determining immigration status and deprives them of discretion and decisionmaking authority they might have used especially in cases of SMI or IDD individuals in crisis. The proposed amendment outright violates the due process and equal protection provisions of the U.S. Constitution, and would most likely fail any challenge in court.

HB 75 is also a misguided legislative effort. It further narrows who is eligible for release on a low-cost or cashless bond.

Included in the charges no longer available for PR bonds are "unlawful possession of a firearm" and "terroristic threat." The former is a nonviolent offense. The latter reaches so broadly as to include the utterance of casual threats and is typical of charges made against persons in the homeless community and those with mental illness.

These bills would increase the county jail population in Texas by at least 10%. That increase is not tenable. Our jails maxed out.

Tammy Baker
Self
Corsicana, TX

I am writing to provide my support for this Bill. Please Vote Yes for this Bill.

noor saleh
Self, Law Studnet
the woodlands, TX

HJR 15 represents a dangerous overreach of government power, empowering punitive actions without due process. The resolution's vague language subjects the accused to unjust detainment solely to ensure court appearance. Any reforms to pretrial detention must include strict limits on the conditions imposed, preventing undue court overreach and protecting individual rights.

Melanir Infiget, Ms.
Self-House Manager
Kingwood, TX

January 2019 is where my story begins. My worst fears became true. My 20 year old daughter, Caitlynne, sent me a picture of her face, eyes swollen shut, and nose and lips busted. She texted "He took it too far this time."

I was in shock, I was unaware of any prior abuse. I was at work, so my mother brought her to the E.R. She was ready to leave him and press charges until the nurse came in and told her that she was pregnant. Her abuser promised he would change and get help...she soon took him back. She miscarried a few days later.

The next 6 months consisted of her leaving and returning several times. Her husband tried running her over, cops were called, and he was arrested for a hit and run and DWI. He was quickly let out on P.R. bonds. He moved their home an hour away. Away from her support system.

Only a few weeks after they moved I was picking her and her 7 month old daughter up after he strangled her and forced her to have sex with him. Then, weeks later on July 31 she had him arrested for assault. She had been in a hotel due to him beating her up a few days before and upon her return to the apartment, she walked into a horrific scene. Her kitten was deceased and in a bag of bleach. She had him arrested for assault. I was so proud of her. My prayers had been answered. It was finally over.

She had his parents get all of his belongings out of the apartment. She knew she had to protect herself, unborn child and 8 month old daughter. She was starting over. She convinced me that she was okay because no judge would let him out with him having open cases and priors.

We thought she was safe. She was convinced the justice system had her back and that he would be held accountable for killing her cat and beating her up.

She could not have been more wrong...

Saturday, August 3, 2019, my worst nightmare came true. He was let out again. 4 hours later the medical examiner called me and informed me that he had killed my baby. She was stabbed 19+ times.

My world stopped. My baby was gone. When I was finally able to come back from my shock and devastation I wanted to know WHO bailed him out. Who would bail him out knowing how dangerous he was? I was in disbelief when I was told no one bailed him out, but he was let out on a P.R. bond...a signature...his word. The same justice system that is supposed to protect and serve is to blame for my daughter and unborn grandson's murder.

Had they had an ounce of humanity and looked at his history - the red flags were there. My daughter and the community were in danger with him out.

I've made it my mission to make sure this miscarriage of justice is corrected. He had a violent history and prior P.R. bonds. His chances should have been over. Why would criminals stop committing crimes if they know they will be released before the ink is even dry from the initial arrest? Enough is enough. Please help put an end to insanity.

Lisa Healy
Self
Midlothian, TX

Please pass this amendment out of committee. It is vital to have bail reform in Texas.

Robert Nuelle Jr
Texas Crime Victims United
Spring, TX

My comments on House Bill 1135. My daughter Elizabeth Barraza was murdered In January of 2019. I am still waiting on arrest in this case I have spent quite a bit of time thinking through the bail process and how this could impact us when we get our arrest. I particularly would like to see greater transparency when it comes to the regulation of charitable bill organizations. It's not enough that violent offenders frequently get released after multiple violent offense charges but to have an organization with no accountability after bail to release these individuals poses a threat to public safety.

Subject: Support for HJR 15 – Enhancing Public Safety

Dear Representative John T. Smithee,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Joint Resolution 15, introduced by Representative Smithee, which proposes a constitutional amendment to authorize the denial of bail for individuals accused of violent or sexual offenses or involvement in continuous human trafficking.

This resolution is a vital step toward ensuring public safety and protecting our communities from individuals who pose a significant risk. By allowing courts the discretion to deny bail in these cases, HJR 15 prioritizes the well-being of victims, their families, and the broader community.

As someone personally affected by the tragic consequences of violent crime, I have seen firsthand the critical need for policies that prevent repeat offenses and prioritize the safety of law-abiding citizens. My daughter Elizabeth Barraza was murdered In January of 2019. I am still waiting on arrest in this case I have spent quite a bit of time thinking through the bail process and how this could impact us when we get our arrest. I particularly would like to see greater transparency when it comes to the regulation of charitable bill organizations. It's not enough that violent offenders frequently get released after multiple violent offense charges but to have an organization with no accountability after bail to release these individuals poses a threat to public safety. The ability to deny bail in cases involving serious offenses will not only act as a deterrent but also reinforce public confidence in our justice system.

I respectfully urge you to support HJR 15 and work to advance this important resolution. Thank you for your commitment to improving public safety in Texas.

Personal Impact Statement: We need to refocus attention on the rights of Crime Victims and the safety of the public at large. It is time that we make these reforms for the good of all involved.

Thank you very much for your efforts in this regard.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Nuelle, Jr.
Board Secretary for Texas Crime Victims United
21603 Astipalia Drive
Spring TX 77388
(713) 397-9516
bob.nuelle.jr@gmail.com

Carol Goodwin
Retired
Austin, TX

As a Texas citizen, I strongly urge you to vote NO HJR 15. Our judicial system was put in place to provide checks and balances, by allowing judges the discretion to decide individual cases based on a review of all the facts. Any blanket bill that strips judges of this discretionary power can lead to people being falsely accused and put in unnecessary detention, which can destabilize families, worsen financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Please vote NO on HJR 15. Thank you.

Michelle Ramirez

Self

Weslaco, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

dexton shores, Rev.

Srlf

San Antonio, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dexton Shores

Nan Terry

self

Fort Worth, TX

Change the term “violent offense” in Article I, 11d (a) to “violent offense punishable as a felony of the first degree.” This will ensure that preventative detention is truly limited to the most serious cases.

Tarrant County charged a young man with an IDD from a group home with a felony - assault with a deadly weapon - which happened to be a skateboard. Later, common sense prevailed and DA's office dropped the charges.

I worry what would have happened to this young man had this bill been in effect as currently written.

In addition, please add the requirement for representation by defense counsel at hearings where there are charges eligible for preventative detention by adding the following provision to Article 1, Section 11d: “A judge or magistrate may not deny a defendant release on bail except during a hearing at which the defendant is entitled to representation by counsel. The judge or magistrate shall appoint counsel to represent the defendant at the hearing if counsel does not enter an appearance to represent the defendant before the hearing, unless the defendant voluntarily waives their right to counsel.” Finally - require attorneys to be present at bond hearings when defendants are Intellectually Developmentally Disabled or severely mentally ill or a match or probable match for Continuity of Care Queries.

Ana Martinez

Self

Houston, TX

My name is Ana Martinez and I ask for your support of HJR 15.

- I am deeply concerned about the existing bail bond system and have heard how difficult it currently is to keep dangerous criminals off the streets while they await trial, especially in some counties.
- Certain violent criminals who have demonstrated they are a safety risk should be kept off the streets while awaiting trial. I support giving judges a tool they can use to keep violent offenders off our streets.
- Please vote yes on HJR 15.

Manaal Salman
Self
San Antonio, TX

Proposed expansion of pretrial detention without bail is too broad
Does not allow for judicial risk determinations
Inappropriately allows for preventative detention solely based on risk of nonappearance in court making the measure more punitive than protective
INSTEAD ? advocate for least restrictive conditions setting to provide reasonable assurance of the accused to appear in court

Jessika Gaehring
Self - victim turned victim advocate
Cibolo, TX

I strongly support HJR 15, which proposes a constitutional amendment allowing the denial of bail in cases involving serious violent crimes, sexual offenses, and human trafficking. When individuals accused of these heinous crimes are released on bail, they often pose a continued threat to victims and the public. This amendment ensures that courts have the necessary authority to prioritize public safety in the pretrial process.

I know firsthand the devastating impact of violent crime. I lost my fiancé to homicide, a tragedy that forever changed my life. But that is not the only trauma I have endured. Like 1 in 5 women in the United States, I am also a survivor of sexual assault. The justice system must take serious violent and sexual offenses with the gravity they deserve. Survivors of these crimes should not have to live in fear that their attackers will be released, free to reoffend or retaliate.

Public safety must come before the freedom of violent offenders. The unfortunate reality is that when individuals charged with violent, sexual, and trafficking crimes are granted bail, many of them go on to commit additional offenses—sometimes against the same victims they were previously accused of harming. Studies have shown that recidivism rates for violent and sexual offenders are high, and allowing them the opportunity to reoffend puts innocent lives at risk. (studies from United States Sentencing Commission & Office of Justice Programs)

Human trafficking is another grave concern. Traffickers prey on the vulnerable, especially women and children, and destroy lives for their own gain. When these criminals are released on bail, they often return to their trafficking networks, making it even harder for survivors to escape their grasp. The system should not allow traffickers the opportunity to continue exploiting and victimizing others.

As a volunteer victim advocate and someone who has personally experienced the life-altering impact of violent crime, I firmly believe that HJR 15 is a necessary step toward justice and protection for victims. We deserve safety from our attackers, and we deserve a justice system that prioritizes the rights of victims over those who cause harm.

I urge the committee to pass this resolution and take a stand for public safety, justice, and the protection of crime victims.

Jonathan Copeland
Self
Spring, TX

Please support HJR 15. This resolution allows voters to decide in November on crucial bail reform. It empowers judges to deny bail for heinous crimes: felony sexual assault, violent offenses, and human trafficking, if the defendant poses a clear threat. Our current bail system is failing. It releases dangerous, repeat offenders back into our communities, leaving us vulnerable. HJR 15 is about prioritizing public safety. No mother of a slain child should live with the fear of their child's murderer getting bailed out and showing up at their doorstep. This isn't about taking away rights. It's about protecting lives. It targets those with proven violent histories, while still upholding the presumption of innocence. Defendants can contest bail denial. And crucially, it shields domestic violence victims, who face unimaginable danger in our current system. Vote yes on HJR 15. It's time to put victims and communities first.

Jennifer Bunch

Self

Houston, TX

My name is Jennifer and I ask for your support of HJR 15.

- I am deeply concerned about the existing bail bond system and have heard how difficult it currently is to keep dangerous criminals off the streets while they await trial, especially in some counties.
- Certain violent criminals who have demonstrated they are a safety risk should be kept off the streets while awaiting trial. I support giving judges a tool they can use to keep violent offenders off our streets.
- Please vote yes on HJR 15.

Key points:

- Everyone is innocent until proven guilty.
- Some defendants have a track record of violent conduct and are ongoing risks to their communities.
- Defendants would get a chance to contest the request to deny bond.
- Many of these defendants will be domestic violence offenders. Denying bail will give their victims a chance to execute on their safety plan. (Half of murder victims in Harris County are killed by domestic violence)

Thank you

Carmen Dufilho-Fairchild

Self

Houston, TX

My name is Carmen Dufilho-Fairchild and I ask for your support of HJR 15.

- I am deeply concerned about the existing bail bond system and have heard how difficult it currently is to keep dangerous criminals off the streets while they await trial, especially in some counties.
- Certain violent criminals who have demonstrated they are a safety risk should be kept off the streets while awaiting trial. I support giving judges a tool they can use to keep violent offenders off our streets.
- Please vote yes on HJR 15.

Lauren Lo

self/Banker

Bellaire, TX

My name is Lauren Lo and I ask for your support of HJR 15.

- I am deeply concerned about the existing bail bond system and have heard how difficult it currently is to keep dangerous criminals off the streets while they await trial, especially in some counties.
- Certain violent criminals who have demonstrated they are a safety risk should be kept off the streets while awaiting trial. I support giving judges a tool they can use to keep violent offenders off our streets.
- Please vote yes on HJR 15.

Michelle Adler

Self, therapist

Austin, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

Cassie Sodergren

Self, Development & Partnerships Manager

Austin, TX

I am strongly against HJR 15 because of its false assumption that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.

Oscar Chacon

Self

Carrollton, TX

I strongly oppose HJR 15 because it undermines judicial discretion and falsely assumes that denying bail will improve public safety. Judges should have the ability to assess each case individually and make informed decisions based on the facts. Limiting their discretion risks unnecessary detention, which destabilizes families, worsens financial insecurity, and makes it harder for people to reintegrate into their communities. Texas should invest in proven safety strategies—not harmful and costly policies like this one. Please vote NO on HJR 15.