

HCS HB 2206 -- POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS

SPONSOR: West

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Government Efficiency and Downsizing by a vote of 8 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 2.

This bill requires political subdivisions, by July 1, 2025, to adopt a meeting speaker policy to ensure that certain requirements set out in the bill are followed at each meeting of the governing body of the political subdivision.

The requirements include setting an amount of time at the beginning of every meeting for public comment; not banning or removing an individual from a meeting unless he or she is committing or has committed a crime at the place where the meeting is held; and providing a method of submitting written public comment for persons who cannot attend the meeting.

The governing body may include in its speaker policy a time limit on individual speakers of not less than three minutes per speaker, and a cumulative limit of one hour of public comment or 20 speakers, whichever is less based upon the number of minutes designated per speaker, and identifying information of each speaker.

If the governing body needs to hold a meeting on less than 24 hours' notice, or if the meeting will be conducted exclusively electronically, or at a time that is not reasonably convenient for the public, the nature of the good cause justifying departure from the normal requirements must be stated in the minutes. Meetings held in person and not subject to being closed under the Sunshine Law will be conducted so as to allow in-person public attendance.

This bill further relates to political subdivisions. Please see the Summary Sheet for a detailed list of the additional language added in the committee version of the House bill.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this bill addresses meetings of governing bodies of political subdivisions. The bill mandates that political subdivisions adopt speaker policies for conducting public hearings or open forums, with minimum standards specified, while allowing political subdivisions to otherwise determine their own

policies. Additionally, the bill requires political subdivisions to hold open forums to facilitate public input. However, one witness residing in a particular political subdivision notes that it does not currently allow time for public comment, potentially resorting to police intervention for those expressing disagreement. This situation undermines confidence in the system, as dissenting voices risk being silenced by the political subdivision. Consequently, individuals may fear attending meetings due to the risk of being shut down, ridiculed, or embarrassed, discouraging their participation. Even when individuals submit statements as required by policy, political subdivisions may fail to address them by omitting them from the agenda. Furthermore, the requirement of a \$50 deposit before responding to a Sunshine request by political subdivision adds an additional barrier. While the bill is commendable, it lacks mechanisms for citizen enforcement, rendering it toothless. Therefore, while proponents encourage its passage, they acknowledge its limitations in effectively safeguarding citizens' rights.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative West; Kerri Vanmeveren; and April Cederburg.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.