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FACT SHEET 2021

HB 3334

Increase Transparency and Accountability With a Statewide Criminal Justice Sentencing Database

LACK OF DATA ON INDIVIDUAL JUDGES LEAVES VOTERS UNABLE TO ASCERTAIN JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE

Despite being in the majority of states that chooses their judges by election,¹ Texas voters have rarely been provided with information relevant to the performance of elected judges. Though the state's Office of Court Administration (OCA) collects and reports 68 data points from the district courts in each of Texas' 254 counties, that data does not allow users to identify individual courts and judges.

HB 3334 fills a major gap in publicly available judicial data by creating a statewide criminal justice sentencing database. Providing this data to the public will better allow for voters to objectively evaluate judicial candidates on their policies and performance and compare judges both within and outside of their home counties. Such a database will also allow for the identification of judges that are overly reliant on extended periods of incarceration, which waste valuable resources and the tax dollars of all Texas residents.

IN SHORT

HB 3334 promotes transparency in Texas' court system by creating a centralized database for sentencing data. Since the availability and quality of court data varies by jurisdiction, this bill ensures that reliable data on sentencing is accessible to the public so that judges can be held accountable for their sentencing decisions.

The election of criminal court judges is a long-standing tradition in Texas. HB 3334's statewide sentencing database is a resource that will promote government transparency and judicial accountability while giving Texas voters access to the relevant information necessary to make informed choices in the voting booth.

KEY FINDINGS

- Texas' Office of Court Administration (OCA) currently has a Court Activity Database that collects basic information for the district courts in each of Texas' 254 counties.² Though the OCA's reports shine light on court function in each Texas county, they do not separate statistics based on individual judges.³
- Absent individual judicial statistics, voters are unable to make informed decisions about the performance of judges and judicial candidates. Creation of a criminal justice sentencing database solves this problem while promoting government transparency, judicial accountability, and responsible allocation of state resources.

HELP TEXAS VOTERS GET INFORMED ABOUT JUDGES: SUPPORT HB 4189 BY REPRESENTATIVE ALLEN

HB 3334 increases access to information for the public. Specifically, it requires the Office of Court Administration to:

- Collect, compile, and analyze data on the sentencing of each defendant, to include the court and presiding judge, offense category, and sentence imposed.
- Create a database with de-identified sentencing data, searchable by judge, which will increase public transparency and enhance the voting public's ability to hold elected criminal court judges accountable.

Citations on reverse.

Citations

¹ National Center for State Courts, *Methods of Judicial Selection*,

http://judicialselection.us/judicial_selection/methods/selection_of_judges.cfm?state=. Accessed April 5, 2021.

² The Texas Office Of Court Administration, *Court Activity Reporting and Directory System*, <https://card.txcourts.gov/>. Accessed April 5, 2021.

³ *Id.*