

SUBJECT: Victim appearance before parole panel

COMMITTEE: Corrections — favorable, with amendments

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hightower, Gray, Allen, Culberson, Longoria, Pitts, Telford
0 nays
2 absent — Farrar, Serna

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 22 — voice vote

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — Carl Reynolds, Texas Board of Criminal Justice

DIGEST: SB 48 would require parole panels, when considering granting parole, to allow crime victims, their legal guardians or close relatives of deceased victims to appear in person before board members and present a statement about the offense, the offender and the effect of the offense on the victim. If more than one person would be entitled to appear before the board members, only the person chosen by all of those entitled to appear as a representative could make the appearance. Prosecutors would be required to give crime victims written notice of their right to appear before a member of the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

SB 48 would take effect September 1, 1995.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 48 would ensure that crime victims have direct input into parole decisions. Although persons can currently send written statements to parole board members, victims deserve the right to appear in person and voice their stories and options.

SB 48 would codify a current practice of allowing victims who request it to appear before parole panel members. Judging from current requests, the parole board members would not be overwhelmed with requests for face-to-

face meetings. The criminal justice policy impact statement on the bill estimates no significant impact of the workload of state agencies. In addition, the bill allows only a victim, guardian, close relative of deceased victims or a representative of all those entitled to appear to meet with board members. It would be inappropriate for the state to dictate how a representative would be chosen.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Allowing victims to meet with parole board members could overwhelm the members with requests to meet with victims. SB 48 is unclear about how a representative of persons entitled to appear would be chosen.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would require that several persons who are entitled to make an appearance before board members choose a representative.

The House approved a similar provision May 8 in HB 11 by Allen et al.