

SUBJECT: Posting cost-efficiency suggestions on certain state agency websites

COMMITTEE: Government Efficiency and Reform — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Harper-Brown, Perry, Capriglione, Stephenson, Taylor, Scott Turner, Vo
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Rita Beving and David Power, Public Citizen; Richard Lavine, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Michael Schneider, Texas Association of Broadcasters; Tom Smitty Smith, Public Citizen)
Against — None
On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Beth Hallmark, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts)

DIGEST: CSHB 1128 would require each state agency that has at least 1,500 or more employees, except institutions of higher education, to accept cost-efficiency suggestions and ideas from employees through a link on its intranet or public Internet website.

The bill would require each agency to provide a link on its Internet website for members of the public to monitor, in real time or on a weekly or monthly basis, employee suggestions and to vote for their favorite submission. State agencies that already allow online employee input through a similar program could be excluded from these requirements.

The Department of Information Resources (DIR) would adopt rules establishing procedures and required formats for implementing CSHB 1128. The rules would have to require that employee submissions and public votes be moderated to exclude overtly political or offensive material.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2013.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 1128 would harness the creativity and expertise of state employees, who often have the best perspective on how to improve the administration of public programs. The bill would require large agencies to create a method for employees to submit online suggestions or ideas on how to improve the functioning of their agencies.

Fourteen large agencies, including the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, various health and human services agencies, the Parks and Wildlife Department, the Department of Public Safety, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, would be affected. The impacted agencies carry out important work of state government. They accounted for more than \$100 billion of the fiscal 2012-13 state budget.

Setting up and maintaining the web forums would use state resources, but the affected agencies reported to the Legislative Budget Board that additional costs could be absorbed into their existing budgets, and the fiscal note to CSHB 1128 reflects no significant cost to the state.

Each agency would moderate online submissions to remove offensive, partisan, or politically charged material. As part of this process required by the bill, the agency would also have discretion to remove non-constructive complaints or other input that was not germane to improving cost efficiency.

On each Internet site, the public would have the opportunity to vote for their favorite submissions. The public input would not mandate state action but would be a reflection of support for innovative, cost-cutting proposals. The bill would not allow the public to post their own efficiency ideas because the program is designed to gather valuable knowledge from agency employees who see firsthand what does and does not work. It makes sense to solicit feedback from the very workers who would be responsible for implementing solutions.

Efforts at the federal level to gather ideas from government employees to improve programs have been successful. These efforts have helped eliminate waste in drug procurement for uninsured patients and cut travel costs through improved online learning opportunities. CSHB 1128 would provide a similar opportunity at the state level, leaving discretion with each agency to decide which, if any, ideas should be implemented.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The online forums could be used by employees who wanted to complain about their work environment or offer suggestions that were not related to cost-cutting or program improvement. This would be a waste of state resources and could negatively affect morale within the affected agencies.

There is a limit to how many extra mandates can be absorbed into agency budgets. According to the fiscal note, two of the agencies that would be affected by CSHB 1128, the Comptroller of Public Accounts and the Department of Public Safety, estimated that there would be a cost associated with implementing the provisions of the bill.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 1128 should allow the public to contribute their suggestions for improving agency efficiency and effectiveness. The program created by the bill should contain a process for reviewing and implementing the best suggestions from state workers and the public alike.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from the bill as introduced in that it would require that employee submissions and public votes be moderated to exclude overtly political or offensive material.