

- SUBJECT:** Removing limits on judicial donations made by an individual and spouse
- COMMITTEE:** General Investigating and Ethics — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — S. Davis, Moody, Capriglione, Nevárez, Shine, Turner
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Price
- WITNESSES:** For — Glen Maxey, Texas Democratic Party; Bill Fairbrother, Texas Republican County Chairmen's Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Susan Shelton, Texas Democratic Women)
- Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Joanne Richards, Common Ground for Texans; Carol Birch, Public Citizen Texas; Craig McDonald, Texans for Public Justice; Lon Burnam; Hamilton Richards)
- BACKGROUND:** Election Code, secs. 253.155 and 253.157 limit the amount of political contributions that individuals, law firms, law firm members, or a general-purpose committee of a law firm may contribute to judicial candidates and officeholders. Section 253.158(a) states that contributions by an individual's spouse or unmarried child under age 18 are considered to be a contribution by the individual.
- DIGEST:** HB 1957 would amend language in Election Code, sec. 253.158(a) so that a contribution by a spouse no longer would be considered to be a contribution by the individual limited under the Judicial Campaign Fairness Act.
- The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.
- SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 1957 would eliminate an unreasonable marriage penalty that prevents an individual and his or her spouse from making separate contributions to judicial candidates under the limits in the Judicial Campaign Fairness Act. This change would allow both individuals in a marriage to exercise their

First Amendment rights to support judicial candidates the same way another couple could if they were living together but not married.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1957 would remove a restriction on the amount of judicial donations that could be made collectively by an individual and the individual's spouse. These limits were designed to maintain the independence of the judiciary by reducing the influence of campaign money in judicial races.