

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 2222
By: Creighton
Texas Ports, Select
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Port of Houston Authority was created by the Texas Legislature and Harris County voters over a century ago to serve as the local partner with the federal government to maintain and grow the Houston Ship Channel and facilitate commerce for the benefit of the region and state. The Port Commission is appointed by Harris County Commissioners Court, the mayors and city councils of Houston and Pasadena (as the next largest municipality in the county), and a mayors and councils group representing the other cities of Harris County.

The Port Commission serves another governmental role, as the Board of Pilot Commissioners for Harris County Ports. The Pilot Board meets each month, working with the governor to license Houston Pilots. Moreover, given that each state has primary jurisdiction over international pilots, the Pilot Board, with the assistance of a second committee of expert mariners, investigates and takes appropriate action following ship channel accidents and other incidents. Finally, the Pilot Board oversees the tariffs and fees charged by the Houston Pilots.

Interested parties have indicated that the two roles of the Port Commission performs may distract from the first and foremost mission: being the primary steward of the Houston Ship Channel.

S.B. 2222 separates the Board of Pilot Commissioners from the Port Commission.

As proposed, S.B. 2222 amends current law relating to the board of pilot commissioners for Harris County ports.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 5007.209(b), Special District Local Laws Code, to delete existing text requiring the port commissioner training program to provide the person required to complete the program with information regarding the duties of the port commission of the Port of Houston Authority of Harris County, Texas (Authority) as the board of pilot commissioners for Harris County ports (board) under Chapter 66 (Houston Pilots Licensing and Regulatory Act), Transportation Code, and to make nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 66.002, Transportation Code, by adding Subdivision (4-a) to define "pilot commissioner."

SECTION 3. Amends Section 66.011, Transportation Code, as follows:

Sec. 66.011. BOARD. Deletes existing text providing that the board is composed of the port commissioners of the Authority. Provides that the board is composed of seven pilot commissioners appointed as follows:

- (1) two pilot commissioners appointed by a majority of the city council of the City of Houston;

(2) two pilot commissioners appointed by a majority of the Harris County Commissioners Court;

(3) one pilot commissioner appointed by the city council of the City of Pasadena, who are required to reside in the city of Pasadena;

(4) one pilot commissioner appointed by a majority of the Harris County Mayors' and Councils' Association, who is required to be a resident of a municipality in Harris County that is located adjacent to the Houston Ship Channel and has a population of less than 100,000; and

(5) the chair of the pilot commission (commission), appointed as described by Section 66.0116.

SECTION 4. Amends Subchapter B, Chapter 66, Transportation Code, by adding Sections 66.0115 and 66.0116, as follows:

Sec. 66.0115. QUALIFICATIONS; VACANCY. (a) Requires each pilot commissioner, except as otherwise provided by Sections 66.011 and 66.0116, to be a property taxpayer and a qualified voter in Harris County.

(b) Provides that a person is ineligible for appointment to the commission if the person has previously served the equivalent of at least 12 full years on the commission.

(c) Requires the appointing entity, not later than the 45th day after the date on which a term expires or on which a vacancy on the board begins, to appoint a new pilot commissioner. Provides that if the appointing entity fails to make the appointment before the 45th day, the office is considered an open position and the person serving in that position is ineligible for reappointment to fill the position, and:

(1) if the appointing entity is the city council of the City of Houston, the city council of the City of Pasadena, or the Harris County Mayors' and Councils' Association, the Harris County Commissioners Court is required to appoint a pilot commissioner to fill the position; or

(2) if the appointing entity is the Harris County Commissioners Court, the city council of the City of Houston is required to appoint a pilot commissioner to fill the position.

(d) Provides that if a second appointing entity under Subsection (c)(1) or (2) fails to make an appointment before the 90th day after the date on which the term expires or the vacancy begins:

(1) the office is considered an open position and the person serving in that position is ineligible for reappointment to fill the position; and

(2) the governor is required to appoint a pilot commissioner to fill the position with the advice and consent of the senate.

(e) Provides that if a vacancy occurs through death, resignation, or other reason, the vacancy is required to be filled in the manner provided for making the original appointment and in accordance with Subsections (c) and (d).

(f) Authorizes the governor to appoint a pilot commissioner under Subsection (d) only if the appointing entity under Subsection (c) fails to make an appointment within the period described by this section and requires any subsequent appointment to be made by the appropriate appointing entity.

Sec. 66.0116. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR; TERM. (a) Requires the City of Houston mayor and city council and the Harris County Commissioners Court to jointly appoint the chair of the commission in January of odd-numbered years. Provides that the term of the chair expires on February 1 of each odd-numbered year.

(b) Requires the governor, if the mayor, city council, and commissioners court do not make an appointment within the period specified by this section, to appoint the chair of the commission with the advice and consent of the senate. Authorizes the governor to appoint the chair only if the original appointing entities fail to make an appointment within the period described by this section and requires any subsequent appointment to be made by the appointing entities.

(c) Requires the person appointed as the chair of the commission to comply with the qualifications described by Section 61.160 (Qualifications; Compensation; Authority), Water Code.

(d) Requires the City of Houston mayor and city council, the Harris County Commissioners Court, and the Harris County judge, on the second Monday of January in each odd-numbered year, to hold a joint meeting to appoint the chair of the commission at the headquarters of the authority.

(e) Provides that in the meeting held under Subsection (d) each city council member and the mayor are required to have one vote and each county commissioner and the county judge are required to have the mixed-fraction number of votes equal to the sum of the number of city council members plus the mayor divided by the sum of the number of county commissioners plus the county judge.

(f) Requires the presence of individuals with a majority of the total potential votes to establish a quorum at the meeting. Provides that a separate quorum from each group, representing the city and the county, is not required. Requires the chair to be appointed by at least a majority of the total potential votes, in any combination.

(g) Provides that in the event of a tie, the city council, mayor, county commissioners, and county judge have three calendar days to deliberate, convene a meeting, and revote. Authorizes the extension of the period to allow for compliance with Chapter 551 (Open Meetings), Government Code, as it applies to the notice requirement for an open meeting. Provides that if a second vote results in a tie:

(1) the office of the chair of the pilot commission is considered an open position and the person serving as the chair is not eligible for reappointment to fill the position; and

(2) the governor is required to appoint the chair as provided by Subsection (b).

SECTION 5. Amends Section 66.014, Transportation Code, as follows:

Sec. 66.014. TERM OF OFFICE. Provides that pilot commissioners other than the chair serve staggered terms of two years that expire on February 1, rather than providing that a board member serves a term of office that coincides with the member's term as a port commissioner.

SECTION 6. Provides that of the two pilot commissioners of the board appointed under Sections 66.011(1) and (2), Transportation Code, as amended by this Act, one serves a term expiring in an even-numbered year and one serves a term expiring in an odd-numbered year. Provides that the pilot commissioner of the board appointed under Section 66.011(3), Transportation Code, as amended by this Act, serves a term expiring in an odd-numbered year. Provides that the pilot

commissioner of the board appointed under Section 66.011(4), Transportation Code, as amended by this Act, serves a term expiring in an even-numbered year.

SECTION 7. Effective date: September 1, 2019.