

TEXAS NEIGHBORHOODS TOGETHER

SUPPORT

Recorded Votes

Recommendation

Each house of the state legislature should reform its rules to require the disclosure of each lawmaker's vote at every stage of the legislative process including:

- Amendments
- Second reading
- Third reading, or final passage
- Passage of any bill returned from the other house with changes
- Conference committee reports
- Joint resolutions that go to the voters as constitutional amendments

For legislators to be accountable to those who elect them, an easily obtainable record of the vote of every member of the Texas Legislature on every bill that comes before the House and Senate must be available.

Background

Texas is one of only nine states that does not routinely require recorded votes. Under current Texas Senate and House rules, a recorded vote only occurs when a legislator, supported by at least two colleagues, requests a record of the vote. Typically, this happens when an issue is especially contentious; otherwise the vast majority of decisions are cast by simple voice vote. A request for a recorded vote has occurred on only about half of all votes of the Legislature, leaving citizens in the dark about how their elected officials handled many critically important issues.

State legislators tout “accountability” of government at every opportunity, yet they are surprisingly unwilling to apply this concept to themselves. Many legislators are reluctant to require recorded votes because they fear it would be disruptive, time-consuming, and costly to implement. Yet states where recorded votes are routine do not report huge extra costs or inconvenience. Texas voters have the right to track their elected officials' decisions, especially in these times when partisanship has divided our legislatures and our citizenry sharply.

Impact

The public's business and neighborhood interests will be served when citizens are able to know how their elected representatives have voted. Voting records are more likely to reflect the interests of neighborhoods when lawmakers know they must be made public.