

TEX PARTE BLOG

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Amendment could restore funding for indigent legal services; House to hear committee version of bill Thursday

Supporters of indigent civil legal services say they expect to see a Texas representative file an amendment on a general appropriations bill adding state funding for indigent civil legal aid and indigent defense. The appropriations bill, Senate Bill 2, passed the Senate on June 3, and the House on Thursday is scheduled to hear a House committee version of the bill. Representatives must pre-file all amendments by Wednesday at 5 p.m. The Senate's version called for \$17.5 million over the biennium to pay for indigent civil aid and \$7.6 million for indigent defense. The money would come from the state's general revenue fund. But the House Appropriations Committee's substitute bill, approved Saturday, removed the funding. [Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan Hecht](#) and Betty Balli-Torres, executive director of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, both say they expect a representative to add the funding back via amendment on the House floor. "If it goes in as planned, we'll be in both versions of the bill, and that should be it," Hecht says. Aaron Gregg, spokesperson for Appropriations Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, confirms that he has heard someone will file an S.B. 2 amendment adding back the funding for civil aid and indigent defense. He declines comment on who may file the amendment. Last biennium, the Legislature appropriated \$20 million for indigent civil legal aid. Although slightly less, the \$17.5 million the Legislature may approve now should still be enough to cover basic legal services for the poor, says Hecht, the Supreme Court's liaison to the Texas Access to Justice Commission. "We're hurting, period, and I think we're going to be hurting more as the year progresses, because some of the federal money is going to get cut again. But, it's hard times all over. And everyone's got to shoulder their share of the burden," Hecht says.

-- *Angela Morris*