

Association of Texas Professional Educators

305 E. Huntland Dr., Suite 300, Austin, TX 78752
(800) 777-ATPE • (512) 467-0071 • www.atpe.org

Supporting Your Freedom to TeachSM

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Media contact: Adam Rondeau
arondeau@atpe.org

Compromise reached on bill to protect educator info

Members of the House reached a compromise on a bill that would provide extra security for sensitive personal information of Texas educators that is maintained by school districts.

House Bill 2491, by Rep. Diane Patrick (R-Arlington), was amended this afternoon to include provisions that would allow districts to release the birth year of employees and enables the public to determine whether criminal background checks on educators have turned up sex offenders and individuals with convictions for other dangerous criminal offenses.

"This bill is a win-win for school employees and the public," said Jennifer Canaday, senior lobbyist for the Association of Texas Professional Educators. "School employees will enjoy a greater level of privacy and be less exposed to the risk of identity theft, and parents will have a tool they don't currently have to gain peace-of-mind that their children are safe at school."

Patrick's bill would make the personal information confidential by default and provide protection to categories of information related to today's technology, such as personal e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers.

A separate law enacted in 2007 requires districts to review the criminal histories of their employees and applicants for employment. The same law prohibits individuals convicted of certain violent or sexually oriented crimes from working in school settings.

The new amendments to Patrick's bill will give parents the ability to ensure that school districts have followed the law and have terminated the employment of any dangerous criminals discovered through the state's criminal history database.

"I believe this bill as amended strikes the appropriate balance between protecting the highly sensitive personal information of school district employees and protecting the safety of students in our public schools and the public's right to information," Patrick said following the passage of the bill.

The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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The 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators is the largest educators' group in Texas and the largest nonunion educators' group nationwide. Its membership consists of classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, college students and retired educators. ATPE is committed to advocating for better benefits for all educators, promoting a collaborative work environment and the right of educators to choose the association they feel represents their interests, and providing the best education possible for all Texas school children.