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Texas/Southwest

Legislature

Media urging veto on records bill

Measure would allow some criminal histories to be sealed

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Associated Press

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AUSTIN – Media groups have called on Gov. Rick Perry to veto a bill that allows criminal records to be sealed in some deferred adjudication cases.

The Texas Association of Broadcasters said Thursday it joined the Radio Television News Directors Association and the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas in asking the governor to veto the bill, sponsored in the Legislature by Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas.

The broadcasters association said the bill would allow individuals who complete deferred adjudication for some crimes – both misdemeanors and felonies – to ask a court to have their criminal records sealed. Only law enforcement, prosecutors and school districts would have access.

The bill excludes anyone convicted or placed on deferred adjudication for several violent crimes, such as murder, kidnapping and sex offenses.

Mr. West did not immediately return a message left at his law office. Perry spokesman Gene Acuna said the bill was under review.

Mr. Perry can sign or veto the bill or let it become law without his signature.

The media critics said the bill would prevent employers from learning about the criminal history of potential workers. By having the records sealed, an applicant could lie on a job application that asks him to disclose his criminal history, the broadcasters association said.

"Employers have a right to know about the past behavior of potential workers," said Paul Watler, a Dallas attorney and member of the broadcasters association's Open Government Task Force.

"The public should retain the right to obtain arrest records for public officials and citizens who exhibit a pattern of criminal behavior," Mr. Watler said.

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