



**Testimony on
Texas Open Meetings Act**

**Provided by Julie Range
Policy Manager of Commission Shift
Before the House Select Government Oversight Committee
September 25, 2026**

Esteemed Chairman Vasut and Committee Members,

My name is Julie Range, and I am the Policy Manager of Commission Shift. Thank you for offering this public forum to gather input on our state laws and ensure they meet our citizens' needs.

Commission Shift is focused on improving accountability at the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees an oil and gas industry that spans every corner of our great state. While I recognize that the charge for this hearing concerns the authority of subdivisions to hold meetings outside their territory, I want to take a moment to address the challenges of public access to decision-makers based in Austin at the Railroad Commission and other agencies that serve a statewide constituency.

The public is greatly affected by decisions made in Austin. Railroad Commissioners grant flaring exception permits that affect neighbors' health and the night sky. They authorize waste pits and injection permits that sometimes pollute nearby water sources. They have allowed leaking wells, both inactive and orphaned, to flow unabated for months on landowners' property, and such wells are often never fully remediated. They are currently considering whether to grant a carbon sequestration permit beneath an entire community before the applicant has acquired the rights to all the property tracts that will be affected.



The affected public deserves a forum and an opportunity to bring their concerns to the Commission's top decision-makers.

Yet last week, two of the three Commissioners voted to adopt a new public engagement and participation policy that removes public input from the open meeting agenda unless a Commissioner requests it. And they approved this new public participation policy without allowing public participation or giving the public a chance to review the proposed policy in advance.

We are greatly concerned that the public is no longer guaranteed a forum to address top decision-makers. This is wrong. Commission Shift has long urged Railroad Commissioners to increase accessibility by allowing remote public input at open meetings. For many individuals, the hurdles of taking time off work, traveling for hours, and paying travel and lodging costs are too great a barrier to attend an open meeting to share their concerns. The Railroad Commission should follow the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's lead and allow remote public input at open meetings.

Furthermore, we ask the RRC to allow verbal comments from people who register to speak on agenda items. Current policy makes it optional for the Commissioners to hear from parties or the public on agenda items, and many Texans have traveled to Austin to speak about a case that directly affects them, only to be denied the chance to speak at all.

Please protect our freedom of speech and our ability to hold elected state officials accountable, and require Commissioners not only to hear from their statewide constituents at open meetings, but also to expand their constituents' options to address them. Thank you.