# Read the Trial Transcript — for $50 or Less

Requires a prosecutor to release the transcript copy the office already holds — free electronically, and never more than $50 if paper is all that exists.

**90TH LEGISLATURE • PROPOSAL**
Adds Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56A.0515
Status: draft — ready for an author

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**
Support victims through the criminal justice system • Give victims access to evidence when appropriate

**CHAMPION SOUGHT**
Author / co-author / endorser / testifier / adviser — whichever role your group can take

**THE ASK** We ask victims' advocacy organisations to **champion, endorse, testify for, or advise on** this bill — and members of the 90th Legislature to consider authoring it. No organisation is a supporter until it commits.

## 1 — THE PROBLEM VICTIMS FACE TODAY

Any Texan may apply for a trial transcript — the barrier is price, not standing. Texas sets no statewide per-page rate, and even the discounted copy rate leaves a typical 300-page transcript at roughly $500. One father paid $1,800 for his daughter's first-trial transcript after a hung jury. An indigent defendant can get the record free; the family cannot.

## 2 — WHAT THIS BILL DOES

- **The prosecutor releases a copy the office already holds** — on written request, to the victim, a guardian, or a deceased victim's close relative, expressly including a stepparent who married the victim's parent while the victim was a minor. No designated representative may stand in for family. One copy per person; the victim assistance coordinator confirms eligibility.
- **Covers existing transcripts only:** the trial including the punishment phase, an appeal, and revocation or parole-related hearings the office holds. **Electronic copies are free;** paper duplication is capped at $50.
- **Deliberately creates nothing.** No one must prepare or pay for a transcript that does not exist — and the existing right to order one from the reporter at full price is expressly preserved.

## 3 — HOW IT HELPS VICTIMS

| BEFORE | AFTER |
|---|---|
| A family pays roughly $500 for a copy — or $1,800 for the full record — or goes without. | The family gets the copy already on file, free electronically, and prepares for a retrial or parole hearing from the actual record. |

> *"A transcript is a working tool, not a souvenir."*
>
> — Lawrence Baitland, father of Cayley Mandadi, murdered October 29, 2017. He spent a year matching a defence expert's testimony against the evidence; at retrial the defence did not call him.

## 4 — BALANCE & SAFEGUARDS

Creating a transcript is skilled work, properly paid by the page — and this bill touches none of it. Reporters and clerks take on no duty; no reporter's fee is reduced. Sealed and court-protected portions are excluded and may be redacted.

## 5 — HOW HARD WILL THIS BE TO PASS?

●●○○○ **Low to moderate**

The model has run in Connecticut since 1997, the cost is minimal, and no reporter loses a dollar. Likely stall point: reporters reading any transcript bill as a fee cut — answered by briefing them early on the no-duty design.

## 6 — RISKS & MITIGATIONS

| RISK / OBJECTION | MITIGATION IN THE BILL OR MESSAGE |
|---|---|
| "This erodes court reporters' pay in a shortage" | No fee is capped, no duty imposed on any reporter. Creation was paid in full by whoever ordered it; this bill governs only a copy the State already holds. |
| The prosecutor's office holds no transcript | Left deliberately — no creation duty. The family keeps today's route, ordering from the reporter at full price, expressly preserved. |
| Sealed or protected material could be released | Sealed, in-camera, and court-protected portions are excluded; the prosecutor may redact them. |

## 7 — WHO IS LIKELY WITH US — AND AGAINST US

### POTENTIAL ALLIES

**Texas Crime Victims United** — survivor-run; families are its constituency. To approach.

**Texas Association Against Sexual Assault / Texas Council on Family Violence** — statewide victim coalitions. Ask: endorse, testify.

**MADD — Texas; Texas District & County Attorneys Association** — the latter conditional on the duty staying limited to transcripts the office holds.

### LIKELY OPPONENTS

**Court reporters / their association** — fees are earned pay, in a documented reporter shortage.

**Counties / defence bar** — mandate concerns (no county duty exists) and sealed-material concerns.

*Best counter:* anyone may already buy this transcript — the bill changes the price for one defined family only.

## 8 — POTENTIAL AUTHORS FROM BILL SCORING

| CANDIDATE | SCORE* | WHY THEY FIT |
|---|---|---|
| **Rep. Greg Bonnen** — House, HD 24 | 60 | First approach, House author: the advocates' own representative; his budget role answers the fiscal question early. |
| **Sen. Joan Huffman** — Senate, SD 17 | 71 | Senate sponsor: carried the most victims' bills in the Senate, including a 2025 expansion of this chapter. |

* Score = the advocates' prior bill-scoring rating (89th Legislature backtest). Re-verify rosters in January; results are unofficial until the canvass.

**COST**
No significant fiscal note expected — electronic copies the State already holds; paper capped at $50, paid by the requester.

**EVIDENCE IT CAN WORK**
Connecticut has required this of prosecutors since 1997; Indiana and Oregon use similar existing-copy laws. Texas's own 2026 court study flagged unregulated transcript pricing as an access-to-justice concern.

**NEXT STEP**
A 20-minute briefing, then a yes or no. Contact: Lawrence Baitland.