



# Paul Bettencourt

## *An Open Letter to the Citizens of Senate District 7*

COMMITTEES:

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS - VICE-CHAIR  
EDUCATION  
FINANCE  
HIGHER EDUCATION



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**Dear Friends and Neighbors,**

It is my privilege to represent you in the Texas Senate. The interim since the 84th Texas Legislature adjourned last session has been busy, as the Lieutenant Governor assigned the Senate nearly 100 interim public policy charges to study prior to the upcoming session. One of them was, of course, property tax reform and relief. I wanted to update you on what we accomplished in the last session as well as during the interim, and give you an overview of some of the priorities we will be addressing in the upcoming session.

During my first legislative session in 2014, I served as chief Senate sponsor on 25 bills which gained legislative approval, earning me the distinction of "Freshman of the Year" by Capitol Inside. This legislation included passage of the Andrea Sloan "Right to Try" bill, allowing terminally ill Texas patients access to drugs still in the FDA's approval pipeline. In fact, Houston physician Ebrahim S. Delpassand stated before the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs that he is using the state's "Right to Try" Act to successfully treat about 80 patients. I also added an amendment to SB 1760 requiring a 60% supermajority within a taxing jurisdiction to increase property taxes over the effective rate. This amendment was recently credited with stopping a \$100 million tax increase in Dallas ISD. Finally, my bill, SB 1004, allowed students in Harris County to take dual credit courses from any of the four community college systems inside Harris County, and removed the three course limit that was in place. This resulted in a 14% increase in student dual credit enrollment from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016 semester in all community colleges across Harris County.

In the Fall of 2015, I was tapped by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick to chair the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform & Relief for the interim session. We launched a statewide tour of Texas to study the property tax process, including the appraisal system, and examine options to reduce the tax burden on property owners. We held eight hearings on college campuses, in Austin, San Antonio, Lubbock, Harlingen, Arlington, Plano, and two in Houston, for a total of nearly 50 hours of public testimony. We heard from 321 witnesses and met nearly 2,150 attendees. I recently filed Senate Bill 2, the Property Tax Reform & Relief Act of 2017, which will address many of the issues we discussed on the road, and will be one of my top priorities this session. Additionally, I have already filed Senate Bill 7 to stamp out the dramatic increase in inappropriate student-educator misconduct. I will be filing additional bills on ballot integrity, pension reform, and other issues to offer conservative solutions for Texas challenges.

I am excited to be serving with a great group of Senate colleagues, and I look forward to a successful legislative session and continuing to represent the constituents of Senate District 7.

Sincerely,

*Paul Bettencourt*

Paul Bettencourt



## 60% SUPERMAJORITY TO RAISE TAXES UNDER SB 1760

During the 84th Legislative Session, I amended SB 1760 by Senator Creighton (R-Conroe) to require a 60% supermajority voting threshold for a local taxing jurisdiction to adopt a tax rate in excess of its effective tax rate. This means that for the first time, a simple majority is no longer enough to raise your taxes.

This amendment has already given relief to hard-pressed Texas taxpayers. In August 2016 the law protected Dallas ISD taxpayers from a \$100 million tax increase. Dallas ISD trustees had a simple majority, 5-4 vote in favor of a proposed 13-cent tax rate hike, but failed to get the 6-3 supermajority vote necessary to call for a tax ratification election. As Dallas taxpayers already had an estimated 12.2% appraised value increase, the proposed 13-cent tax hike would have resulted in blockbuster property tax bills to Dallas ISD taxpayers.

## SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PROPERTY TAX REFORM AND RELIEF

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick appointed me Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform & Relief in late 2015 and charged the committee to study the property tax process, including the appraisal system, and recommend ways to promote transparency, simplicity, and accountability by all taxing entities as well as examine and develop options to further reduce the tax burden on property owners.

The committee launched a statewide tour of Texas to discuss property tax reform and relief and heard almost 50 hours of testimony in eight hearings in seven cities with 321 witnesses and 2,150 attendees. What we found was shocking. From taxpayers winding up in handcuffs just for asking questions, to open collusion between a chief appraiser and appraisal review board members, to protest hearings scheduled on Sunday,

*Statewide, between 2005 and 2015, both city and county property tax levies increased between 2.5 to 3 times faster than median household income.*

July 3, the stories about the abuse and mistreatment of taxpayers were numerous. Taxpayers testified about the “guilty until proven” innocent atmosphere they encountered

when protesting appraised values and the adversarial relationship with appraisal review boards.

Right here in Harris County, homeowners have suffered under an astonishing 36% average taxable value increase in just three years, and in some hearings around the state, committee members had to debate with local officials whether a 10% increase on a tax bill was really a tax increase if the tax rate remained the same. What this means is that, when all taxing jurisdictions are included, an average Harris County resident could have seen their tax bill increase by roughly \$1,000. What needs to happen is simple: As appraised values go up, property tax rates need to come down.

## EARLY SELECT COMMITTEE SUCCESSES

The Select Committee’s statewide hearings and discussions have already resolved several property tax issues:

- Removal of unanimous, 3-0 vote requirement by the Harris County ARB for land value reductions. Testimony provided by the Comptroller’s staff to the Select Committee indicated that no statutory grounds exist for an ARB to require unanimous votes;
- The Fort Bend CAD dropped its arbitration strike list after Fort Bend County Chief Appraiser Glenn Whitehead publicly testified about the list regarding the potential eligibility of property tax arbitrators in the county during the Select Committee’s Houston hearing;
- Tarrant CAD ARB dropped its Sunday, July 3 hearings after questions from Select Committee members;
- Successfully recommended a solution to a Tarrant CAD and taxpayer lawsuit over public information release;
- Credited by Tarrant County Tax Assessor Collector Ron Wright at the Plano hearing for the fact that one-third of Tarrant County’s taxing units have cut rates for the first time;
- Collin County Judge Keith Self stated that the county had adopted the effective rate to keep its tax rate in check, noting that taxable value in Collin County grew almost 12% this year; and
- Resolved dozens of individual taxpayers issues by pulling various Chief Appraisers and staff together with taxpayers to resolve complaints.



I have introduced Senate Bill 2, the Texas Property Tax Reform and Relief Act of 2017 to bring much needed reform and relief to taxpayers.

## EDUCATOR MISCONDUCT

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick stated that one of his top 10 legislative priorities was to end inappropriate educator-student relationships and stop the practice of “passing the trash.” Last session, I filed SB 1222 (which was later added to HB 2205) to give the Texas Education Agency the power to subpoena relevant documents to ensure this practice was ended; however, it was testified that some school districts simply quashed the subpoenas rather than protecting the

students in their charge. This is unacceptable as educators under investigation can be hired by other school districts.

I filed Senate Bill 7 in November 2016 to stamp out inappropriate educator-student relationships by establishing appropriate reporting measures and penalties to ensure the safety of Texas students in both public and private schools. Senate Bill 7 will hopefully be voted on and passed in the next legislative session.

## STATE OFFICES OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Texans deserve someone in government that is tasked with proactively investigating waste, losses to fraud, or worse in all levels of government. Interim testimony before the Senate Committee on Education indicated that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) was one of the largest state agencies that lacked statutory authority to create an Office of Inspector General (OIG). Nearly a dozen states have free-standing or combination OIGs that are widely credited with rooting out abuses of taxpayer money. In his testimony, TEA Commissioner Mike Morath agreed and stated if it was given such authority, the TEA would be able to leverage existing resources in broader ways. I plan to file legislation that will give the TEA such statutory authority.

## SCHOOL CHOICE

Last session, I introduced SB 642, which became the substitute for SB 4 and was the first school choice bill to pass the Senate. While it did not pass in the Texas House, this legislation would have created a \$100 million school choice tax credit scholarship pilot program to help defray educational costs so parents can choose the best academic option for their children, in both private and public schools. SB 642 aimed to allow corporations to invest in their future workforce by receiving a franchise tax credit from their state tax bill when they contribute to nonprofit agencies that award K-12 scholarships to students with financial and academic need.

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick has listed school choice, and educational savings accounts, as one of his top priorities for the upcoming session, noting the broad support for the idea that every parent has the option to send their child to the school they believe is best for them. I look forward to working with Lt. Governor Patrick and Senate Education Committee Chair Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) and my fellow senators to pass common sense legislation like this again.

## DUAL CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES

I authored and passed SB 1004, which was sponsored by House Representative Senfronia Thompson of Houston, to allow public school students in Harris County to take dual credit courses from any of the four community college systems inside Harris County.



The impact was immediate. SB 1004 resulted in a 14% baseline increase in dual credit enrollment from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016 semester in Harris County across all community colleges. The law also facilitated a surge in dual credit enrollment at Houston community colleges from 19,517 to more than 22,000 students in just one year. Data from Lone Star College and national groups like Jobs for the Future and ACT, Inc. shows tremendous success with the dual credit program and early college high schools in Texas. I look forward to working to expand the dual credit program in the upcoming legislative session to other parts of Texas.

## FIGHTING FOR LIFE

In terminal illness situations, time is the great predator. Last session, I passed the "Right to Try" Act (SB 694/HB 21) to cut through the red tape and ensure that terminally ill patients and their doctors have quicker access to safe, but experimental drugs and treatments that could prolong their lives. This legislation is already making a major difference to terminally ill patients in Texas. In a statement to the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Houston physician Ebrahim S. Delpassand said he is using the state's "Right to Try" Act and successfully treating about 80 patients. Due to the passage of this bill, terminally ill patients are no longer subjected to a federal agency's unnecessary waiting period for permission to try an experimental drug or treatment that may extend their lives.

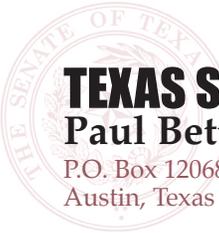


## Government Resources Online

[www.senate.state.tx.us](http://www.senate.state.tx.us)  
 Texas Senate  
[www.house.state.tx.us](http://www.house.state.tx.us)  
 Texas House of Representatives  
[www.sos.state.tx.us](http://www.sos.state.tx.us)  
 Secretary of State  
[www.elections.state.tx.us](http://www.elections.state.tx.us)  
 Governor's Assist. Hotline  
[www.consumerprotection.state.tx.us](http://www.consumerprotection.state.tx.us)  
 Consumer Protection Hotline  
[www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us](http://www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us)  
 Child Support Hotline  
[www.childsupport.state.tx.us](http://www.childsupport.state.tx.us)  
 Child Information Service  
[www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us](http://www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us)  
 Cancer Information Service  
[www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us](http://www.cancerinformation.state.tx.us)  
 Social Security Administration  
[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)  
 Elections Division  
[www.elections.state.tx.us](http://www.elections.state.tx.us)  
 Governor's Assist. Hotline  
[www.governorsassist.state.tx.us](http://www.governorsassist.state.tx.us)  
 Social Security Administration  
[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)  
 Crime Victim Clearinghouse  
[www.cvc.state.tx.us](http://www.cvc.state.tx.us)  
 Immunization Hotline  
[www.immunization.state.tx.us](http://www.immunization.state.tx.us)  
 Medicaid Hotline  
[www.medicare.state.tx.us](http://www.medicare.state.tx.us)  
 WIC Hotline  
[www.wic.state.tx.us](http://www.wic.state.tx.us)  
 Nursing Home Complaints  
[www.nhcomplaints.state.tx.us](http://www.nhcomplaints.state.tx.us)  
 Rehabilitative Services  
[www.rehab.state.tx.us](http://www.rehab.state.tx.us)  
 SSI/Food Stamp Hotline  
[www.ssi.state.tx.us](http://www.ssi.state.tx.us)  
 Injured Worker Hotline  
[www.injuredworker.state.tx.us](http://www.injuredworker.state.tx.us)  
 Child Care Information  
[www.childcare.state.tx.us](http://www.childcare.state.tx.us)  
 Unemployment Hotline  
[www.unemployment.state.tx.us](http://www.unemployment.state.tx.us)

## Helpful Phone Numbers for District 7 from State Senator Paul Bettencourt

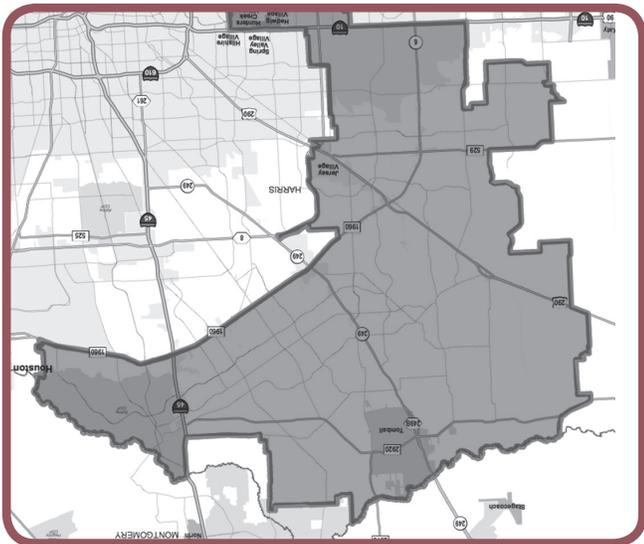
2 - 1 - 1  
 (800) 4-CANCER  
 Cancer Information Service  
 Child Support Hotline  
 (800) 252-8014  
 Consumer Protection Hotline  
 (800) 621-0508  
 Governor's Assist. Hotline  
 (800) 843-5789  
 Elections Division  
 (800) 252-VOTE  
 Social Security Administration  
 (800) 772-1213  
 (800) 252-9690  
 Crime Victim Clearinghouse  
 (800) 848-4284  
 (800) 252-9152  
 Immunization Hotline  
 (800) 252-8263  
 WIC Hotline  
 (800) 942-3678  
 Nursing Home Complaints  
 (800) 458-9858  
 Rehabilitative Services  
 (800) 792-1109  
 SSI/Food Stamp Hotline  
 (877) 541-7905  
 Injured Worker Hotline  
 (800) 252-7031  
 Child Care Information  
 (800) 862-5252  
 Unemployment Hotline  
 (800) 558-8321



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If you are interested in having Senator Bettencourt speak to your group or organization, please contact his Capitol Office at (512) 463-0107. He is available to provide legislative updates or speak on specific issues, like his favorite - property taxes.

For additional online government services visit: [texasonline.state.tx.us](http://www.texasonline.state.tx.us)