

Texas Senate
Select Committee on
Property Tax Reform & Relief

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Sen. Paul Bettencourt, Chair

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Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief Takes Blockbuster Testimony at Hearing
Committee hears testimony from frustrated taxpayers about adversarial relationship with appraisal boards

HOUSTON – Frustrated property owners in Harris County and surrounding areas who have seen rapidly increasing taxes on their homes and businesses turned out in large numbers to the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief’s hearing today at Houston Community College. Senators Lois Kolkhorst (R-Sugar Land) and Joan Huffman (R-Houston) have joined the panel for the day. Committee members have heard from frustrated taxpayers about the adversarial relationship between appraisal review boards and taxpayers, with Sen. Huffman noting, **“We have created an adversarial system that serves no one.”** One taxpayer testified that he was detained when asking why his work van with 275,000 miles, which Kelly Blue Book valued at \$38, had its taxable value almost double in just one year.

“The manner in which these taxpayers were treated is appalling,” said Chairman Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston). **“We cannot have an adversarial situation where a taxpayer is at the counter and winds up in handcuffs. This is what occurred at HCAD just this week. Taxpayers deserve a fair hearing in an environment that is not adversarial.”**

Comptroller’s office data shows that between 2005 and 2015, in Harris County, county tax levies increased 82 percent and city tax levies increased 71 percent, while median income increased only 29 percent. This trend is similar all around Texas. As noted by Senator Van Taylor (R-Plano), **“The purpose of government is to protect our rights, not to tax us out of our home.”**

Additional testimony was heard from small business owners highlighting that in the current economic conditions, many businesses are hanging on by a thread. Property taxes that increase at this pace can make or break the entire year for these companies. Sen. Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) noted, **“You were basically forced to spend \$40,000 extra (on litigation) because of the current appraisal system?”**

The committee got underway this morning with invited testimony from Harris County Chief Appraiser Roland Altinger, Fort Bend Chief Appraiser Glen Whitehead, and Waller County Chief Appraiser Chris Barzilla.

“Taxpayers simply cannot continue to withstand tax bills that increase more than three times faster than their income,” Chairman Bettencourt said. Sen. Kolkhorst added, **“The number of citizens that came to share stories of frustration and mistreatment through the appraisal process is appreciated, and I find it appalling. We have a great deal of work to do in restoring public confidence. This process must change.”**

Sen. Bettencourt is the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief. The committee’s next hearing will be held in Plano on Monday, Oct. 3, at 10:00 a.m. in the Living Legends Conference Center at Collin College Spring Creek Campus. A live broadcast of the hearings is available on the [Senate website](#).

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