

Texas Senate
Select Committee on Property Tax
Reform and Relief



Senator Paul Bettencourt, Chair
512-463-0107

For Immediate Release:
Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Contact: VA Stephens
512-463-0107

Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform & Relief Takes Dramatic Testimony on Tax Hikes
Average Residential Home Increase in Harris County was 28% in just a single year

Houston – The Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief met today at the University of Houston to take testimony regarding ever-increasing property taxes and burdensome appraisal process in Texas. Chairman Paul Bettencourt (SD-7), committee members Senator Brandon Creighton (SD-4), Van Taylor (SD-8), Kelly Hancock (SD-9), Carlos Uresti (SD-19), Charles Perry (SD-28) attended, as well as Senator Sylvia Garcia (SD-6), Konni Burton (SD-10), and Larry Taylor (SD-11), representing almost a third of Texas’ Senate.

“Today we heard testimony documenting a 28% taxable value increase on the average family home in Harris County,” said Chairman Bettencourt. **“This means an average homeowner has faced a roughly \$1,000 increase on their tax bill, or a guaranteed 10% increase for the next three years if they have a homestead exemption. Taxpayers simply cannot sustain these types of increases.”**

Comptroller data shows that, statewide, between 2005 and 2014, property taxes rose 2.5 times faster than median household income. In Harris County, county tax levies increased 79%, city tax levies increased 65%, and median household income increased only 29%. As noted by Senator Van Taylor, **“Forty-two cents of every dollar goes to government. We are on pace to pass on a county where we all work for the government and have to beg for our money back. I refuse to accept that future for my daughters.”** Since 2012, Harris County property tax levies increased 43%, and City of Houston tax levies increased 29%.

Commercial valuations increased almost 20% across Texas in 2016. Dow Chemical and Amazon testified on the impact of local property taxes when selecting locations. Dow chose Louisiana for their new billion dollar facility and Amazon chose North Texas over Harris County for their new million square foot fulfillment center, because Harris County “has some of the highest overall tax rates in the state...and does not grant a Freeport exemption.”

“To put it into perspective just how difficult it is for taxpayers to have a say in their local government, Harris County taxpayers must spend their own money to gather almost 150,000 signatures in just 90 days to petition for a rollback election,” continued Senator Bettencourt. **“This is equivalent to filling Reliant Stadium twice, and having every single person sign the petition, it is an impossibility.”**

The committee heard from local officials. Particularly noteworthy were comments from Harris County Tax Assessor Mike Sullivan, when he called for a reappraisal of flood properties impacted by the April storms. Any kind of property tax valuation reappraisal would be welcome relief for the several thousand homeowners of properties impacted by these devastating storms. Additionally, Galveston Tax Assessor Cheryl Johnson discussed the growth of local government by stating, **“if they need more than 5% let them go to the voters and tell them what they need.”**

Harris County Chief Appraiser Sands Stiefer and Fort Bend County Chief Appraiser Glen Whitehead also gave testimony on increasing property valuations, unresponsive ARB panels, arbitration, and excessive litigation.

###

Members

Brandon Creighton
Eddie Lucio, Jr.
Van Taylor

Kelly Hancock
Charles Perry
Carlos Uresti