



Serving the counties of District 2: Fannin, Delta, Hunt, Hopkins, Rains, Rockwall, Kaufman, Van Zandt, and part of Dallas County

Driver Reform: Keeping Texas Motorists Behind The Wheel

Government exists to serve the people. When government claims a need to regulate certain activities or aspects of our lives, it is imperative that it do so in the most non-intrusive way. The Department of Public Safety (DPS), who administers Texas' driver licensing program, has lost sight of that principle.

The vast majority of adults in Texas - over 20 million - hold a Texas driver license and enjoy the freedoms it affords them. Freedoms such as associating with your chosen friends, supporting causes, and earning a living are all made possible by the ability to travel in a motor vehicle.

Also inherent in driving, however, is the hassle of long waits, countless departments, and the bottomless paperwork required to be a licensed driver. We have worked hard this session to present good legislation that will begin to deregulate Texas' difficult and complex driver licensing laws:



Driver Regulatory Reform

For many Texans, renewing a driver license is on par with paying taxes and standing in a never-ending line at the post office. According to findings from the Texas Sunset Commission, the average wait time for people at certain Department of Public Safety (DPS) driver license office locations was about 70 minutes.

To ease the burden on Texas drivers, we are crafting legislation that would extend renewal periods for a Class C driver license from six to eight years. This would still comport with federal ID requirements while lessening the trips, fees, and time Texas motorists spend renewing their licenses. In addition, we are introducing legislation to eliminate the state vehicle inspection program which has not been proven to be effective in reducing fatality or injury rates.

Moving Driver Licensing Program

The Texas driver license program is managed by DPS, and is by far the most well-known program administered by the agency. Originally the purpose of locating the program under the auspices of DPS was because driver licenses essentially serve as security documents. The extensive training staff is required to undergo in order to issue new licenses and the fact that DPS has authority to access federal and state fingerprint-based background checks seemed to make it a good fit for issuing these documents.

Despite the dedicated staff however, the program constantly experiences high-profile problems with customer service. For example, the 2018 DPS Sunset Report to the 86th Legislature cites examples of months-long wait times to take a simple driving skills test at driver license offices. Further, it shows the department's failure to meet its key performance metric: completing 82 percent of driver license and ID card applications within 45 minutes¹. Significantly, DPS has failed to meet this performance goal since 2014 - the year the goal was established.





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Driver Reform: Keeping Texas Motorists Behind The Wheel *(continued)*

In 2017, callers waited on hold for an average of 14 minutes, and only about 20 percent of the 24,400 daily calls were answered². These long wait times have persisted despite the Legislature investing more than \$300 million in the driver license program over the last few years. All of these problems speak of a more serious, underlying incongruence with DPS's primary mission to combat crime.

Most states issue driver licenses through their motor vehicle department. Only eight states use their public safety department for this function. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) has an entire division dedicated to consumer relations and focuses heavily on satisfaction with its service.

To focus priorities, we are working on legislation to move the driver license program from DPS management to DMV. This makes sense on multiple levels. By empowering each agency to maximize their strengths, Texas motorists will be served more effectively and efficiently.

Texas Driver Responsibility Program (DRP) Reform

I have written extensively in the past about the harmful effects of the Texas Driver Responsibility Program (DRP). First passed by the Texas Legislature over 12 years ago, the DRP was created to help increase revenue for a \$9.9 billion budget shortfall. The program essentially penalizes drivers with surcharges for committing driving-related offenses. If you do not pay, your driver license can be suspended.

According to the Senate Research Center, over 1.2 million people have had their licenses suspended for failure to pay assessments. This often causes people who want to work to pay off their debts to be unable to do so, and people who currently have jobs to not be able to keep them. People become caught in a cycle of poverty and debt from which they cannot escape.

I have listened to constituents and stakeholders on this issue over the years, and have filed S.B. 87 and S.B. 577, both of which repeal the program and offer different alternatives for replacing the revenue it generates to the state.

Notes

¹ Texas Sunset Commission Staff Report with Commission Decisions 2018-19

² Id.

