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Senator Bettencourt Says It is Time to Beef up State Offices of Inspector General
Texas taxpayers need “watchdogs” to investigate waste, losses to fraud, or worse in Texas government

AUSTIN – Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) today called for the creation of more state offices of Inspector General to proactively investigate waste, losses to fraud, or worse in Texas government at the state and local level.

“Nearly a dozen states have free or combination offices of Inspector General that are widely credited with rooting out waste, fraud, or worse,” Sen. Bettencourt said. **“It is time to consider that for Texas government.”**

Currently, the following Texas agencies already have an Office of Inspector General within their own offices: Health and Human Services, Texas Juvenile Justice Department, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

“The Texas Education Agency is one of the largest state agencies that doesn’t have a statutory basis for an Office of Inspector General,” Sen. Bettencourt continued. **“Given recent public disclosure and testimony on a variety of issues in education, I think TEA must be given statutory authority to better investigate local education agencies across the State.”**

According to recent news articles, Houston ISD’s chief auditor was suspended for alleged misconduct shortly after he questioned trustee travel and a \$1.9 billion over-budget bond issue. The board of trustees reinstated the auditor after a five-month suspension; however, the Office of Ethics & Compliance was transferred to another department. Additionally, the Senate Education Committee heard testimony concerning the Harris County Department of Education’s use of taxpayer funds to subsidize business contracts from Hawaii to Maine that offer no educational benefit for Harris County students. Lastly, committee testimony indicated that Dallas County Schools had spent up to \$50 million to purchase a license and implement a camera system called “Stop Arm,” resulting in a downgrade on their credit rating.

“A recent letter from Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Senate Finance Committee Chair Jane Nelson encouraged state agencies to implement zero-based budgeting,” Sen. Bettencourt added. **“If implemented correctly, zero-based budgeting would create headroom for more offices of Inspector General to be created.”**

Sen. Bettencourt’s office will continue to look for abuses of taxpayer’s money around the state and study options for filing legislation on this issue in the upcoming 85th Legislative Session.

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