

Texas Senate  
Select Committee on Property Tax  
Reform and Relief



**Senator Paul Bettencourt, Chair**

**For Immediate Release:**  
Tuesday, November 29, 2016

**Contact Information:**  
Lauri Saathoff | (512) 463-0107  
Lauri.Saathoff@senate.texas.gov

**Senator Bettencourt Responds to Overwhelming Cry for Property Tax Reform**

*Files SB 2, the Texas Property Tax Reform and Relief Act of 2017; issues Senate Select Committee interim report*

AUSTIN – After conducting eight blockbuster hearings in seven cities and taking almost 50 hours of testimony that overwhelmingly called for property tax relief, Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) today filed Senate Bill 2, the Texas Property Tax Reform and Relief Act of 2017, with co-authors Sens. Brandon Creighton, Kelly Hancock and Van Taylor, and released the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief’s interim report. The Select Committee was charged by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick to study the property tax process, including the appraisal system, and to examine and develop options to reduce the tax burden on property owners.

**“Texas taxpayers have been facing property tax bills that are increasing 2.5 to 3 times faster than median household income,”** said Senator Bettencourt, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief. **“Throughout Texas, in hearing after hearing, the Select Committee heard the same message loud and clear: Texans are asking for and deserve property tax relief. Whether it was homeowners testifying that they are unable to keep up with their property tax bills, small business owners seeing their hard earned profits go out the window, or even big businesses testifying that they are locating new plants and taking jobs out of Texas due to high property taxes, they are all saying that property taxes are rising too fast in Texas.”**

Average home property tax appraisals have risen 22-24% over two years in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, 20% in San Antonio over two years, and 12% a year in Austin for three straight years. In Harris County, average home property tax bills are up 36% in just three years.

**“From a taxpayer winding up in handcuffs just for asking questions, to open collusion between a chief appraiser and appraisal review board chairman in a hearing, to protest hearings scheduled on July 3, the stories about what has actually been happening to taxpayers at appraisal districts across the state demand immediate changes in how taxpayers are treated,”** Senator Bettencourt continued.

The Select Committee’s interim report contains several examples of poor practices around the state that have already been stopped due to the Select Committee’s direct questioning of officials involved in the appraisal process. Senate Bill 2 contains substantial changes to appraisal district oversight so the best practices can be adhered to in every one of the county appraisal districts in Texas.

**“I would like to thank Senate Select Committee members Creighton, Hancock, Lucio, Perry, Van Taylor, and Uresti, as well as a half dozen other Senators who joined the Select Committee at our hearings in various cities, plus Lt. Governor Dan Patrick for participating in these hearings. Fifty hours of public testimony has never been taken before in this manner, but the need for property tax relief is clear to Texas taxpayers that see their property tax bills rising faster than their paychecks year after year.”**

Senate Bill 2 and the full interim committee report can be viewed online at: [www.senate.texas.gov/ptaxrr](http://www.senate.texas.gov/ptaxrr).

**Members**

Brandon Creighton  
Eddie Lucio, Jr.  
Van Taylor

Kelly Hancock  
Charles Perry  
Carlos Uresti

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON PROPERTY TAX REFORM AND RELIEF INTERIM REPORT SUMMARY**

### **50 HOURS OF TESTIMONY FROM EIGHT HEARINGS OVER 11 MONTHS**

On Nov. 5, 2015, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick announced the Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief, comprised of Senators Paul Bettencourt (as chair), Brandon Creighton, Kelly Hancock, Eddie Lucio, Charles Perry, Van Taylor and Carlos Uresti. Patrick charged the committee with finding ways to improve the property tax process and reducing the property tax burden on property owners. The Select Committee:

- Held eight hearings across the state over 11 months, and
- Heard nearly 50 hours of invited and public testimony from 321 witnesses.
- Every one of the seven out-of-town hearings was live-streamed on the Senate website.

### **TAXPAYER ANGER AT A COMPLEX, OPAQUE AND UNACCOUNTABLE SYSTEM**

A major theme in testimony before the Select Committee from taxpayers was that their property tax bills were rising faster than their ability to pay. This was clearly demonstrated when city and county tax levies were compared to household median income from 2005 to 2015. Statewide over that period:

- County tax levies increased 82%,
- City tax levies increased 71%, while
- Household median income only increased 32%.

Many witnesses protested their value to the Appraisal Review Board (ARB); however, many noted that their taxes still went up. They also testified it is difficult to determine who is responsible for property tax increases.

- Local officials frequently blame the central appraisal district (CAD) for rising values.
- CAD staff usually note they are required to appraise at market value and taxing units set tax rates.
- The ‘Truth in Taxation’ procedures are perceived by the public to be an oxymoron.

The Select Committee also took testimony from taxpayers who no longer had any faith that the property tax system operated in a fair and impartial way. Public perception of mistrust in the system stems from property owners’ individual experiences with CADs and ARBs.

- Taxpayers testified they felt the ARB and CAD were biased against them.
- Testimony was taken at several hearings that ARB members were poorly trained .
- Taxpayers testified that they felt ARBs, CADs and taxing units could violate the Tax Code without consequences.
- Local elections officials and taxpayers testified about how even when the Property Tax Code requires voters’ approval, the elections were held in ways designed to minimize voter turnout.

### **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The testimony the Select Committee took revealed that many property owners see protesting their value as the only way to control their property tax bill, because they have very little ability to control their tax rates. There is a need for proposals that will make the property tax system transparent, accountable and consistent.

1. The rollback rate should be reduced from 8% to 4%, and automatic tax ratification elections held on the uniform election date in November should be required when a city, county, or special district exceeds the rollback rate.
2. Truth in Taxation calculations should be simplified and be more reflective of the actual changes in the tax burden.
3. The Property Tax Calendar should be revised to consolidate deadlines and accommodate ratification elections.
4. An advisory board should be created to assist the comptroller with providing oversight over the property tax system, issue binding rulings interpreting the Property Tax Code, and be able to enforce those rulings.
5. Access to arbitration should be expanded as an alternative to district court for property owners.
6. Specialized ARB panels should be created to handle complex property value protests.
7. ARBs should make decisions by majority vote and not be allowed to hold hearings on Sunday.
8. Local governments should be required to send the comptroller information concerning their property values, and tax rates and tax levies, including their rollback and effective tax rate calculations.
9. Limited disaster reappraisal should occur for properties located in a declared disaster area.
10. The ability of a taxing unit to challenge the values of an entire class of properties should be repealed.
11. The training, professionalism and independence of the ARB must be improved, including requiring additional training for ARB members and having the comptroller pay ARB members using local funds.
12. The comptroller should have the authority to ensure appraisal manuals they issue are followed by CADs.

State of Texas  
Texas Senate



Senator Paul Bettencourt  
DISTRICT 7

Paul.Bettencourt@senate.texas.gov

**Senate Bill 2**  
***The Property Tax Reform & Relief Act of 2017***

After taking over 50 hours of public testimony during hearings across the State of Texas, Senator Bettencourt drafted SB 2, The Property Tax Reform & Relief Act of 2017. SB 2 touches on almost all aspects of the Texas Property Tax system, with the goals of simplification, clarification and transparency of the property tax and appraisal system.

Highlights of the bill include:

- Lowering the rollback tax rate from the current 8% to 4%
- Requiring automatic tax ratification elections if the taxing unit adopts a tax rate that exceeds the rollback rate, thus removing the onerous petition requirement in current statute
- Standardizing tax ratification elections across the state by requiring them to be held on general election dates
- Creating a Property Tax Administration Advisory Board in the Comptroller's office to oversee the entire property tax process
- Statutorily setting the deadlines for all property tax protests to be filed in Texas to May 15, thereby eliminating confusion by owners of multiple classification of property owners
- Requiring all appraisal districts to use the appraisal manuals issued by the Texas Comptroller, which will result in more transparent, accountable and consistent appraisals statewide
- Establishing specialized ARB panels in counties with a population of 120,000 or more that can hear more complex taxpayer protests
- Clarifying that a majority vote by ARB is binding for decisions, thus eliminating the requirement of some ARB panels for a unanimous vote
- Eliminating Sunday ARB hearings and evening hearings that begin after 7pm or before 5pm
- Mandating that all members of each Appraisal District Board of Directors must be elected officials within their respective counties, thus directly answerable to the citizens
- Increasing the value of properties that have the option of going to binding arbitration to \$5 million, thereby providing taxpayers an alternative to costly litigation
- Raising the exemption from filing income producing business personal from \$500 in value to \$2500 to cut compliance cost for taxpayers and appraisal districts
- Prohibiting local governments from being able to challenge the value of an entire class of properties

CAPITOL OFFICE  
P.O. BOX 12068  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711-0107  
(512) 463-0107  
FAX: (512) 463-8810

COMMITTEES:  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON PROPERTY TAX REFORM & RELIEF – CHAIR  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS – VICE-CHAIR  
EDUCATION  
FINANCE  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
DETERMINE A SUFFICIENT BALANCE OF THE ECONOMIC STABILIZATION FUND

DISTRICT OFFICE  
11451 KATY FREEWAY, SUITE 209  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77079  
(713) 464-0282  
FAX: (713) 461-0108