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CORRECTION

EL PASO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

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COUNTY OF EL PASO COMMISSIONERS COURT STATEMENT ON TAX ASSESSOR/COLLECTOR RESPONSE TO HOUSE BILL 718

El Paso County Commissioners Court fully understands—and shares—the frustration auto dealers recently brought to them concerning the disruptions following the July 1, 2025 implementation of House Bill 718. Despite the Legislature providing a two-year runway for this transition, insufficient preparation, response, and leadership within the Tax Assessor/Collector's Office have resulted in avoidable backlogs and uncertainty for businesses and their customers. We recognize the real-world consequences for dealers. We take these impacts seriously. While the County has provided resources and support, responsibility for planning, staffing, training, and execution rests with the elected Tax Assessor/Collector. The following statement details the assistance we have offered, the recommendations that went unimplemented, and the immediate steps we expect to restore timely, accurate service to the dealer community.

The County has collaborated with Tax Assessor/Collector Ruben Gonzalez for several years to provide support on staffing and operational matters. During this time, the County has conducted efficiency reviews, held numerous meetings to recommend strategies for improving efficiency and customer service, and approved additional staffing.

The 88th Texas Legislature enacted House Bill 718 in 2023, requiring licensed motor vehicle dealers to issue metal license plates to buyers at the time of sale and to process title and registration transactions electronically through the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) Webdealer system. These submissions are subsequently reviewed by the Tax Assessor/Collector's Office. House Bill 718 took effect on July 1, 2025. The timeline allowed for two years of preparation for Tax Offices to avoid issues like what El Paso is experiencing now.

In preparation for this transition, many other counties and motor vehicle dealers provided early training and began using the Webdealer system well before the July 1 effective date. Unfortunately, Mr. Gonzalez did not take these steps in advance, nor did he require dealers in El Paso County to train and test the system prior to the mandate taking effect. Additionally, he did not adequately reassign staff to support the division most impacted by the new workload.

It should also be noted that the Tax Assessor/Collector did not implement key recommendations made by

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the County in a 2022 efficiency report that were specifically designed to improve the office's overall effectiveness and customer service. These unaddressed issues, combined with a lack of preparation for HB 718, have contributed to the current backlogs and operational strain.

Further, Mr. Gonzalez did not request the reclassification of three positions into this operational unit until late August, several weeks after the law had gone into effect and backlogs had already begun to grow. While the County approved these reclassifications promptly, Mr. Gonzalez has declined the County's offer to provide temporary employees, who could have been trained and ready to immediately assist in addressing the backlog.

The County has provided Tax Assessor/Collector Ruben Gonzalez several short-term and long-term strategies to ensure he has the tools and resources necessary to serve the public effectively, including cross-training employees, using overtime for extra time daily and for weekends, hiring temporary employees, and waiving any hiring waiting periods for vacant positions to address the backlog in dealer transactions. To improve accuracy and reduce errors, the County has also directed Mr. Gonzalez to:

- Identify and notify dealers of all application errors in a timely manner,
- Provide regular, ongoing training to dealers,
- Issue weekly reports to dealers on the most common errors being made.

This approach will allow dealers to correct problems quickly and improve the quality of future submissions.

To ensure transparency and accountability, Commissioners Court has asked the Human Resources Department to provide weekly updates on Mr. Gonzalez's progress in reducing the backlog.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the Tax Assessor/Collector is an elected official overseeing an office of 80 employees. While the County remains committed to providing resources, sharing best practices, and supporting operational improvements, Mr. Gonzalez is ultimately responsible for the management and performance of the Tax Assessor/Collector's Office and for ensuring timely quality service to the public.

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