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OPINION

SB 2 THE RESCUE? LOCAL TEXAS GOVERNMENTS LOBBY TO KILL PROPERTY TAX RELIEF BILL



BY BRETT WILLIAMS
Guest Contributor

While some lawmakers in Austin are pushing the envelope on providing property tax relief to Texas residents and businesses, local municipalities are fighting tooth and nail to keep money in their pockets and keep with the status quo.

Filed in November 2016 by Republican Texas State Senator Paul Bettencourt, Senate Bill (SB) 2, or The Texas Property Tax Reform and Relief Act of 2017, would require cities and counties to ask for voter approval for any property tax hike greater than 4 percent — the previous threshold was 8 percent — and would not affect school district taxes.

SB 2 provides much-needed relief to Texas business owners watching their property taxes increase year after year with little recourse. However, instead of advocating for a bill that would benefit all residents and businesses, local governments are lobbying state legislatures to vote down SB 2.

The truth of the matter is that cities like Houston, Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio benefit from Texas' burdensome property tax code. While businesses,

particularly commercial property owners, have watched their property valuations skyrocket over the past few years, municipalities are cashing in on the record high taxes being collected on Texas properties.

Houston commercial property valuations increased 12 percent in 2015, while some areas in the Houston – Gulf Coast region experienced a staggering 100 percent increase in commercial property values in just three years. In San Antonio, commercial properties have seen an increase of 15.9 percent in 2016 alone.

With no end in sight for these increasing statewide property valuations, SB 2 is a step in the right direction to ensure that business owners in Texas get a fair shake. Sharp increases in valuations over the past five years continue to harm

our state's economic growth and puts jobs at risk.

Local municipalities have launched an assault against Texas taxpayers and are actively lobbying to kill SB 2 during the 2017 legislative session. The Texas Municipal League and Texas Association of Counties

are working diligently to keep Texans hard-earned money in the coffers of local governments, instead of giving them an avenue to fight increasing property taxes.

It's time for our municipal leaders to end the money grab and put money back in the hands of hardworking Texans. Sen. Bettencourt said it best:

"From a homeowner who cannot keep up with their increasing property tax bills, to small businesses seeing their hard earned profits disappear, and big businesses moving jobs out of Texas,



one thing is clear: Texans want and deserve property tax relief now."

As Texans, we pride ourselves on providing a business-friendly environment for entrepreneurs to pursue their dreams. However, rising property taxes have become a nightmare for small business owners across the state, hampering their ability to grow their business, hire more people, and in the worst cases, keep their business operating.

Texas BOMA applauds the efforts of State Senator Paul Bettencourt, R Houston (Dist. 7), and the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform and Relief for identifying ways to bring transparency and accountability to Texas' taxing entities. We urge state leaders to make true appraisal district reform, as well as mandatory tax rate rollbacks, a priority this legislative session. But above all, do not allow municipalities to take our hard-earned money.

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