



**Martha Castex-Tatum**  
City of Houston Vice Mayor Pro-Tem  
City Council District K

May 3, 2023

The Honorable Terry Canales  
Chair, House Committee on Transportation  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

Dear Chairman Canales and Members of the House Committee on Transportation:

I am Martha Castex-Tatum, Vice Mayor Pro-Tem of the City of Houston and Council Member for District K, which encompasses over 95 civic clubs and HOAs, and approximately 206,000 residents. I write in support of House Bill 1863 by Representative Shawn Thierry.

As you know, bandit signs litter our communities, generate waste in drainage and waterway systems, impair the view of drivers, and create blight on city streets. Moreover, bandit signs are often linked to fraudulent and predatory activity, particularly in minority or economically distressed neighborhoods. For example, the sign “We Buy Diabetic Strips” is a gateway into what has become an underground business of people suffering from diabetes selling their medical supplies for cash, instead of using as intended for their health. Or the sign that reads, “Earn \$4000 cash per month” is also problematic. As I previously testified last session, I called the number listed on the sign to find out how one would earn \$4000 a month, and I was asked to provide my bank account number for direct deposits to be made to me.

For the past five years, I have been advocating for solutions to combat this issue, whether it be allocating resources to my district hot teams to remove the signs or working with our Department of Neighborhoods to identify repeat offenders. Unfortunately, the efforts seem futile as many repeat offenders view the current civil penalties associated with planting the signs so low that it has become a cost of doing business, which minimizes the deterrent effect of issuing citations.

For these reasons, I implore this committee to support Representative Thierry’s amendments to the Texas Transportation Code Section 393.007 outlined in House Bill 1863. These changes include maintaining the first offense fine at \$1,000 but adds penalties of \$2,500 for a second violation and \$5,000 for third and subsequent violations. Additionally, it will expand the standards for the violation, by adding that a person whose commercial advertisement is placed on a sign may be liable for a civil penalty. This addition is critical; cities are currently subsidizing the free advertisement of businesses from these illegal signs.

COMMITTEES: Economic Development, Chair | Budget & Fiscal Affairs | Ethics, Election & Council Governance | Housing & Community Affairs | Regulations & Neighborhoods Affairs | Transportation, Technology, & Infrastructure

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and I am hopeful that you will join me in helping to protect our residents and neighborhoods.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha Castex-Tatum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vice Mayor Pro Tem  
Council Member District K