



City of Houston Testimony Against Senate Bill 1209

Senate State Affairs Committee
Sgt Tom Griffin, Houston Police Department

April 3, 2019

As written, SB 1209 will prevent the City of Houston and Houston Police Department from licensing and regulating wrecker drivers. Created in 1945, and in the interest of consumer and public safety, HPD's Auto Dealers Detail licenses a variety of automotive related trades including repair shops, salvage yards, storage lots, and tow truck drivers.

The primary objective of the HPD Auto Dealers Detail is to regulate, inspect, and license automotive businesses and salespersons, oversee the towing and storage industry, dispose of vehicles abandoned in storage facilities, and to administer agreements with storage lots and towing companies that service the police department. Another goal of the unit is to ensure that the automotive industry complies with the laws that govern their operations and to ensure consumer protection.

- The City of Houston currently has 891 licensed incident management and private property wrecker drivers
 - Around 50 storage lots
- Our background requirements are more stringent than those of the state
 - This stems from concern for public safety and welfare, given that citizens broken down on the side of the road are very vulnerable and we want to ensure safety of their person and their property when the vehicle is towed away
- Also, our equipment requirements are more stringent for incident management wreckers
 - They are required to have a broom, shovel, bucket, absorbent, and flares, which are all required to do the job properly
- We also administer a freeway management program called Tow and Go, which allows wrecker drivers to tow without the presence of a law enforcement officer, so this would affect public safety
- What might be good for a small town with few tows might not be good for Houston or other large cities that perform thousands of tows per year
- The flipping of wrecked cars to body shops is a huge problem. The state is taking steps but this would remove the ability to combat criminal activity at the local level

- Some examples of applicants for COH wrecker licenses include people with multiple DWIs, robbery, rape, aggravated assault, domestic violence, felony theft
 - Disqualification of a COH wrecker license for these crimes potentially keeps people safer
- Cities should not be forced to do business with folks such as this. It is different than plumbers or electricians, as consumers can choose with whom they do business. Forcing us to issue licenses to wrecker drivers means that consumers are therefore forced to do business with them too