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National Moving Month Event Highlights Consumer Protection

State Rep. Celia Israel and Rep. Jason Isaac Join Consumer Advocates, Industry Experts & State Regulators to Educate Texans on Consumer Rights

#MoveSafeTX

AUSTIN, TEXAS—Illegal moving companies are operating statewide, taking a financial and emotional toll on Texans who find themselves faced with losing everything they own or paying a ransom to release their belongings.

At a press conference Monday afternoon on the South Steps of the Texas State Capitol, government agencies, moving industry experts, and consumer advocates cautioned Texans to do their homework before hiring a moving company. Leaders with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association, American Moving & Storage Association, Texas Association of Realtors and Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin encouraged consumers to take note of their rights and responsibilities. State Representative Celia Israel (District 50-Austin), State Representative Jason Isaac (District 45-Dripping Springs) and a representative with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) were also present to explain state and federal laws protecting the public against unlicensed movers.

“May marks the beginning of the busiest moving season of the year; a time that can be riddled with illegal and unethical, fly-by-night operators preying on unsuspecting Texans,” said Southwest Movers Association Executive Director John D. Esparza, the state association representing licensed movers. “At a time of record growth for our state, it is important to educate new as well as native Texans on the moving standards they should expect.”

More than 35 million Americans move annually. Texas welcomes 1,600 new residents daily, and the state ranks fourth as the busiest for inbound moves. Unfortunately, since 2012, Texas’ largest cities have consistently found their way into the annual top 10 cities nationwide for consumer moving complaints.

That ranking is changing. While moving complaints nationally are on the rise, in Texas, those numbers are improving thanks to laws passed stiffening fines and penalties. That includes jail time for repeat offenses committed by illegal operators. TxDMV’s enforcement investigators have also taken on an expanded role in assisting the federal government with interstate complaints, and putting unlicensed movers on notice that any attempts to operate in Texas will not be tolerated by the state.

“TxDMV is determined to make Texas one of safest states in which consumers hire a moving company,” said Whitney Brewster, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles’ Executive Director. “Unlicensed movers are rogue operators who are not legitimate moving companies. We ask consumers to visit Truck Stop on www.TxDmv.gov to verify if a mover is licensed in Texas.”

There are more than 7,000 moving companies nationwide and more than 800 licensed movers in Texas. In 2014, TxDMV had 362 complaints received against movers, 115 of those were for unlicensed movers. This year, TxDMV has received 169 complaints, 66 of those were for unlicensed movers.

“For many of us, it’s difficult to put a price tag on some of the personal items we have in our home or office. That’s why it is so important to do your research before hiring any business to move your belongings,” said Carrie A. Hurt, President and CEO for

BBB serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin. “While there are many moving companies that are trustworthy, it only takes picking the wrong one to put you in a bad situation.”

Last year, BBB received nearly 9,000 complaints nationwide on movers. Many of those complaints alleged pricing issues, uncooperative employees and lost or damaged property. BBB has business reviews on over 700 moving companies in their 79-county service area. All BBB Accredited Businesses abide by a strict set of eight standards for trust that range from making sure the business is advertising honestly, to safeguarding the privacy of their customers.

With so many things on the move “to-do list,” people often don’t spend the time investigating who they are about to hire. Equipping Texans with accessible tools and educating them on their rights has moved Texas from the third worst state in the country for moving scams to sixth in 2014.

Don’t Make a Move Without Us, a campaign launched by TxDMV, is part of that toolbox as is FMCSA’s *Protect Your Move* campaign, the first partnership between federal, state and local officials, and the moving industry.

“People move to Texas every day and the moving industry is an important component of our successful economy,” said State Representative Jason Isaac. “The coalition here today provides useful tools to help educate the new residents of our state about the industry.”

American Moving and Storage Association and Southwest Movers Association have also created certification programs to help fight back against moving company imposters, certifying elite moving companies committed to honest and ethical business practices, and designating them as either Pinnacle Movers or ProMovers.

“Hiring a professional mover is a smart decision that saves time and effort while providing the best protection for your household goods. Consumers should choose a moving company they can trust, and that company must be licensed,” said Scott Michael, president and CEO of the American Moving & Storage Association in Alexandria, Va., the industry’s national trade group. “We want consumers to be confident they’ve chosen a mover committed to honest and ethical business practices—a certified ProMover.”

National Moving Month also kicks off the busy summer real estate season in Texas. At a pivotal time when many Texans are making critical decisions about their new home, the Texas Association of Realtors and Southwest Movers Association have partnered to launch *Before You Make a Move*, a campaign to educate Texans on hiring a professional when moving and buying or selling a home.

“Buying or selling a home can be overwhelming. Texans need a trusted professional on their side during that process,” said John Gormley, Texas Association of Realtors Vice President of Communications and Marketing. “A Texas Realtor can help families navigate the complicated buying and selling process and recommend reputable partners at all stages of that process, including moving.”

State Representative Celia Israel, owner of Mission Resources – a consulting firm focusing on public affairs and real estate, applauded participants and their role in educating consumers. “As a Texas Realtor, I identify with what you do,” said Israel. “We both own our own businesses, comply with government regulations, and drive the Texas economy. I’m grateful for your involvement in making our state government work for all of us, and I look forward to what our future holds.”

Moving fraud is preventable and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA), Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin, and the Texas Association of Realtors (TAR) offered all consumers important steps to take before moving as well as helpful tools to use during and after a move.

“Laws and investigations help consumers after they have a problem, but the only one who can make sure illegal moving companies don’t have any business is you,” Brewster said.

Consumer Awareness Tips

Texas law requires:

- A mover to be actively licensed with TxDMV and USDOT.
- A valid TxDMV or USDOT number must be displayed on the moving truck.

A mover must give consumers:

- A written proposal or estimate that shows either a guaranteed flat price (binding amount) or a “not to exceed” maximum amount for the move.

- A written and signed contract before the move begins.
- Standard liability of 60 cents per pound per item. (Note: It is unlikely standard liability will cover the cost of your item. Some movers offer the option to purchase an increased liability amount for goods or you can purchase insurance that will cover the cost of your possessions.)
- A brochure that outlines your Rights & Responsibilities under Texas law.
- Another copy of the contract upon completion of the move. This contract should include the total charge for the move; an itemized list of what the charges are for; and the method used to calculate the charges. If you decide to alter the original contract, the moving company must write an amendment that outlines any additional charges and services. You and the moving company representative must sign and date the amended contract.

Always remember:

- Hire a licensed mover with a valid TxDMV and USDOT number.
- Check the company's license status at TxDMV's Truck Stop at www.TxDMV.gov. For out of state moves, visit FMCSA's www.protectyourmove.gov.
- Never accept a verbal quote or agreement. Get everything in writing, signed and dated.
- Use reputable, online sources when looking for a mover: www.mytexasmover.com, www.bbb.org, www.movers.org, when looking for a professional moving company. Your Texas Realtor can also provide recommendations for reputable moving companies in the area.
- ProMovers (AMSA certification) and Pinnacle Movers (SMA Certification) are elite groups of movers held to high standards of service, conduct and ethics within the industry. Visit www.promover.org or www.mytexasmover.com.
- BBB Accredited Businesses abide by BBB's eight Standards for Trust, which includes advertising honestly, honoring promises, safeguarding privacy and telling the truth. For a list of BBB accredited movers in your area, visit checkbbb.org.

If you have a problem:

- Call your local police if a mover attempts to hold your items hostage for additional payment not in your contract or threatens to drive off with your belongings.
- Always file a complaint with both the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles and Better Business Bureau.

For additional tips and information, visit:

- Better Business Bureau serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin, www.bbb.org/central-texas
- Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, www.TxDMV.gov
- Southwest Movers Association, www.mytexasmover.com
- American Moving & Storage Association, www.moving.org
- Texas Association of Realtors, www.texasrealestate.com