

December 11, 2012

The Honorable David Dewhurst  
Joint-Chair, Legislative Budget Board  
Lieutenant Governor  
State Capitol, Room 2E.13  
Austin, TX 78701

The Honorable Joe Straus  
Joint-Chair, Legislative Budget Board  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 2W.13  
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst and Speaker Straus,

Beginning in 2005 Williamson County voluntarily became an active participant and supporter of the Low-Income Vehicle Repair, Assistance, Retrofit and Accelerated Vehicle Retirement Program (LIRAP). Although our county staff devoted to this program is limited during this period of significant budget reductions to LIRAP, we continue to provide financial assistance for vehicle repairs and replacement to the county's citizens to help meet county and regional clean air goals. Also, Williamson County has conducted a successful counterfeit inspection certificate program under the related Local Initiative Project (LIP); unfortunately that program is winding down due to budgetary limitations.

I am writing on behalf of the citizens of Williamson County to request that the Texas Legislative Budget Board (LBB) amend the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 budget to increase funding for LIRAP and LIP per the Agency Discretionary Transfer Provisions in Article 9, Sec. 14.01 of House Bill 1, passed by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature.

LIRAP and LIP are two components of this region's clean air program to help reduce automobile emissions, a primary component of ground level ozone precursor compounds. LIRAP assists owners of high emitting to repair or replace them by providing financial incentives for older vehicles or when vehicles cannot comply with emission standards of the annual vehicle inspection. Williamson County has used the LIP program to assist with an awareness and enforcement program to reduce the exploitation of counterfeit, fictitious and improper State inspection certificates, a largely unrecognized but significant challenge to removing high emission vehicles from state roadways. In short, the LIRAP and LIP programs help reduce illegal operation of motor vehicles which is both a safety and health concern.

The revenues for LIRAP and LIP are derived through the county's inspection and maintenance (I&M) program; again, Williamson County voluntarily began participating in the I&M program as a part of local and regional air quality improvement efforts. The reduction of these dedicated funds for the last biennium greatly reduced the ability of Williamson County to deliver the LIRAP and LIP programs. Without additional funding for the 2013-2014 biennium it is likely that Williamson County will be forced to suspend operations and consider ending our voluntary participation in the I&M program. This will mean a setback to the LIRAP and LIP programs, cause the county and the region to lose ground in clean air efforts – both on emissions and

fraudulent inspections. The extra fees collected from Williamson County citizens for annual vehicle inspections are dedicated for these programs and cannot be used for other purposes.

Therefore, on behalf of the Williamson County Commissioners Court, I respectfully request the LBB reprioritize funding and transfer and commit funds within TCEQ per the provisions of House Bill 1 and restore, as far as possible, all dedicated funding to the LIRAP and LIP programs. Given the significant cuts to these programs during the last biennium, every dollar commitment for the next biennium is critical to the continuance of the program, to the ability to maintain staffing with institutional memory, and to the willingness of the county to continue its voluntary participation. Williamson County continues its commitment to assist TCEQ and our region in efforts to maintain air quality standards in Central Texas.

Thank you for your service to the State of Texas and for your leadership on transportation issues. Should you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me, or Commissioner Ron Morrison at 512/846-1190.

Sincerely,

Dan A. Gattis  
County Judge

Cc: The Honorable Tommy Williams, Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
The Honorable Jim Pitts, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations  
The Honorable Harvey Hildebran, Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
The Honorable Sam Biscoe, Judge, Travis County  
The Honorable Charles Schwertner, Senator-elect, District 5, Texas Senate  
The Honorable Marsha Farney, Representative-elect, District 20, Texas House of Representatives  
The Honorable Larry Gonzales, Representative, District 52, Texas House of Representatives  
The Honorable Tony Dale, Representative-elect, District 136, Texas House of Representatives

Zak Covar, Executive Director, TCEQ