



ANNETTE RAMIREZ

Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar

December 18, 2025

Christina Adkins
Texas Secretary of State, Elections Division
P.O. Box 12060
Austin, TX 78711-2060

Via email at CAdkins@sos.texas.gov

RE: Response to Administrative Complaint

Dear Ms. Adkins:

This letter constitutes the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar's Office's ("HCTO") response, pursuant to Section 31.018 of the Texas Election Code, to Senator Bettencourt's November 18, 2025, administrative complaint. Senator Bettencourt alleges that Harris County voters have registered to vote at two commercial post office box locations in violation of Section 15.051 of the Texas Election Code ("Section 15.051"). HCTO is committed to complying with Chapter 15 of the Texas Election Code ("Chapter 15"), including preventing the prohibited use of commercial post office boxes as residential addresses, and has taken all steps required by Chapter 15. There is no basis to find that HCTO has violated any provision of the Texas Election Code and the Secretary of State should not take any action against HCTO in connection with this complaint.

I. Senator Bettencourt's allegations do not rise to an actionable complaint.

A. Senator Bettencourt is not a proper complainant.

As a threshold matter, HCTO seeks clarification from the Secretary of State about whether Senator Bettencourt is a proper complainant in this matter. Under Texas Election Code Section 31.107, an administrative election complaint must be filed "by a person who participated in the relevant election" in one of several capacities.¹ Senator Bettencourt has not participated in any election relevant to either of the addresses cited in his complaint—1302 Waugh and 11152 Westheimer. The Waugh address is located in Senate District 15 and the Westheimer address is in Senate District 17. Senator Bettencourt is the state senator for Senate District 7. He has not participated as a candidate in any county-wide election nor any election involving Senate Districts 15 or 17 since September 2021 (when Senate

¹ Texas Election Code §31.017(a)(1) (emphasis added).



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Bill 1111, which prohibits the use of commercial post office boxes as a voter's residence address, was enacted)² or September 2023 (when Senate Bill 1933 was enacted).³ Senator Bettencourt does not claim that he participated in any relevant election. It does not appear that Senator Bettencourt is a proper complainant under Senate Bill 1933.

However, regardless of whether or not Senator Bettencourt is a proper complainant, HCTO is responding to the substance of his complaint because we share Senator Bettencourt's and Secretary Nelson's commitment to properly maintaining Harris County's voter rolls. Nevertheless, HCTO would like clarification regarding the administrative complaint process given that Senate Bill 1933 uniquely applies to Harris County.

B. The allegations in the complaint are limited.

Senator Bettencourt alleges that a number of voters were registered to vote at two commercial post office box locations, the Waugh and Westheimer addresses, in violation of the Texas Election Code in violation of Section 15.051.⁴ His complaint, and the Secretary of State's Section 31.018 notice of complaint, do not allege violations of any other Election Code provisions.

As a remedy, he asks for HCTO's "timely compliance with the election code." He does not specifically ask the Secretary of State to take any action or cite specific sections of the Texas Election Code, though he does reference three different senate bills which he presumably intended as additional remedies: (1) Senate Bill 1113 which "allows the Secretary of State to withhold . . . funds under Chapter 19 . . . if the voter registrar fails to timely remove voters who should be cancelled."⁵ (2) Senate Bill 510, which permits the Secretary of State to withhold certain election funding from a registrar for failure to timely

² Collectively, Texas Election Code Sections 1.015(b), (f) and Sections 15.051-15.054 are referred to as Senate Bill 1111.

³ Similarly, Senator Bettencourt has not participated in a relevant election as (a) a state or county chair of a political party, (b) a presiding or alternate presiding judge, or (c) the head of a specific purpose political committee that supports or opposes a measure. Texas Election Code §31.017(a)(1)(A-E).

⁴ To protect public safety and to ease voting difficulties for military servicemembers, some voters, such as members of the armed forces and their spouses, victims of domestic violence, judges and their spouses, and police officers and their spouses, are permitted to use post office boxes on their voter registrations. Texas Election Code §§15.053 and 15.054. Senate Bill 1111 provides safeguards to ensure enfranchisement for voters with unusual circumstances.

⁵ *Senator Bettencourt's complaint* at paragraph 4.



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perform any Election Code duty involving, among other things not relevant to this matter, “the approval, change, or cancellation of a voter registration”⁶ and (3) Senate Bill 1933, which permits the Secretary of State to order administrative oversight of Harris County’s voter registration activities if the Secretary of State has good cause to believe that “a recurring pattern of problems” with voter registration has occurred in Harris County.⁷

C. The complaint does not allege any violations of law by HCTO.

Section 15.051 requires a voter registrar to deliver a written confirmation notice to a voter requesting confirmation of the voter’s current residence “if the registrar has reason to believe that . . . the voter’s residence address is a commercial post office box.”⁸ The complaint, however, does not allege (1) that HCTO had a reason to believe that the two cited addresses were commercial post office boxes where voters may be registered⁹ or (2) that a specific recurring pattern of problems with voter registration exists in Harris County. Senator Bettencourt has not alleged (or provided evidence of) any facts that would permit the Secretary of State to withhold funds and/or exercise administrative oversight over Harris County’s voter registration functions. Although he mentions that the Secretary of State can withhold Chapter 19 funds “if the voter registrar fails to timely remove voters who should be cancelled,” nothing in Chapter 15 or Chapter 16 of the Election Code requires, or even permits, HCTO to immediately remove voters who are registered at commercial post office boxes from the County’s voter roll.

II. HCTO has taken timely, appropriate action.

After receipt of Senator Bettencourt’s complaint, HCTO reviewed the Waugh and Westheimer addresses to determine if they were addresses that contained commercial post

⁶ Texas Election Code §12.007(a)(1). Senate Bill 1113 and Senate Bill 510 are codified at Texas Election Code §12.007.

⁷ Texas Election Code §31.017(a)(3).

⁸ Texas Election Code §15.051(a).

⁹ Senator Bettencourt does generally allege that “years ago” he “cited UPS stores in Harris County that had individuals registered at PO Boxes” in press releases and in his floor debate. *Senator Bettencourt’s complaint* at paragraph 3. However, to the extent he cited either of the addresses contained in his administrative complaint, those comments were made when it was still legal for voters to use commercial post office boxes as voter registration addresses.



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office boxes with no residential living space (such as apartments over the commercial property). Once the office determined that the addresses were commercial post office boxes that contained no residential space, it reviewed its voter records to see if any voters were registered at either location. Neither address had previously been flagged in the voter registration system as a commercial post office box location. There were 60 voters registered at the Waugh address, but 5 of those voters had already been placed on suspense. At the Westheimer address there were 65 registered voters and 11 of those were already on suspense.¹⁰

After reviewing the voter information related to those addresses, HCTO mailed Secretary of State-prescribed Form 21-5 *Notice to Confirm Voter Registration Address by Providing Documentation* to each active voter, as required by Chapter 15.¹¹ Those confirmation notices were mailed on November 26, 2025.¹² HCTO then marked each address in its voter registration database so that if any voter registers at either address in the future, that voter's registration will be immediately flagged and HCTO will send confirmation notices as required by Chapter 15.

In summary, once HCTO had reason to believe that a voter was registered to vote at one of the identified addresses, it took swift action to comply with Chapter 15.

III. The Secretary of State has no basis to withhold Chapter 19 funds or engage in oversight of the HCTO.

The Secretary of State should not withhold any Chapter 19 funds or take any oversight action of Harris County's voter registration activity because HCTO has not violated any

¹⁰ The majority of these voters were registered through the Texas Department of Public Safety, which requires proof of residency to obtain a driver's license or identification card. Generally, post office boxes are not valid addresses for DPS. *See* Tex. Transp. Code §§ 521.142, 521.1425, and 521.1427.

¹¹ Confirmation letters were not sent to those voters who were already on the suspense list.

¹² In response to the Secretary of State's press release related to this matter, the Houston Chronicle identified one other address, 5090 Richmond, which it claimed was a commercial post office box that voters had used to register. HCTO followed the same process with that address that it followed with the addresses identified by Senator Bettencourt and mailed confirmation notices to active voters using the post office box address on December 1, 2025. That address was also flagged as a commercial post office box. If any voter registers at that address in the future, that voter's registration will be immediately flagged and HCTO will send confirmation notices as required by Chapter 15.



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applicable statute nor has there been any recurring pattern of problems related to voter registration.

A. HCTO has not violated Section 15.051 (Senate Bill 1111).

HCTO did not violate Section 15.051. A voter registrar is required to take action with respect to a voter registered at a commercial post office box after the voter registrar has a reason to believe that the address the voter is using is, in fact, a commercial post office box. Section 15.051 does “not alter the actions of a voter registrar upon receiving and reviewing a voter registration application.”¹³ Instead, it “create[s] a new address confirmation process for voters registered at certain addresses,” which HCTO is following.¹⁴ HCTO had no reason to believe that voters may be registered at the two addresses cited by Senator Bettencourt until it received Senator Bettencourt’s complaint. HCTO then immediately complied with Section 15.051 and sent confirmation notices to voters registered at the identified addresses. As your office has made clear, HCTO is not required to proactively search for commercial post office box addresses and run those addresses against its voter roll.¹⁵

B. Section 12.007 (Senate Bills 1113 and 510) is not applicable to this complaint nor has there been any violation.

Senate Bill 1113 does not apply to Senator Bettencourt’s complaint. Senate Bill 1113 explicitly applies to duties imposed under Chapter 16 of the Texas Election Code. No allegation has been made that HCTO may be in violation of any section of Chapter 16, which outlines list maintenance responsibilities and the process for cancelling registrations.

The recently-passed Senate Bill 510 expanded Senate Bill 1113 to permit the Secretary of State to withhold funds if a registrar fails to timely perform any duty imposed under the

¹³ Secretary of State Election Advisory No. 2021-10.

¹⁴ Secretary of State Election Advisory No. 2021-10.

¹⁵ Secretary of State Election Advisory No. 2021-10 at Frequently Asked Questions, Q7. (“**Q7: Are voter registrars required to review their list of registered voters to determine if voters are registered at a commercial address for the purpose of sending a Notice to Confirm Voter Registration Address by Providing Documentation?**

A7: No. There is no requirement to proactively search for these addresses. However, if a voter’s registration is challenged on such grounds or the voter registrar becomes aware of registration at a possible commercial post office box, they must send the Notice to Confirm Voter Registration Address by Providing Documentation to these voters.”).



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Election Code requiring the “approval, change, or cancellation” of a voter’s registration. Senator Benttencourt’s allegations only involve alleged violations of Chapter 15, which does not involve the approval, change, or cancellation of a voter’s registration. Neither Senate Bill 1113 nor Senate Bill 510 apply to the allegations contained in this complaint.

However, to the extent that the complaint alleges that HCTO failed to immediately cancel or change voter registrations at commercial post office boxes, that is not a violation of law because (1) Chapter 16 does not provide a mechanism for the immediate cancellation of a voter’s registration and (2) Section 15.051 prescribes the notice process that a registrar must engage in before any change to a voter’s registration can be made. Section 15.051 requires a registrar, once that voter registrar has a reason to believe that a voter is using a commercial post office box as a residence address, to send the voter a confirmation notice, on a form prescribed by the Secretary of State, and to give the voter 30 days to provide proof of residence or claim exemption from the requirement to provide such proof.¹⁶ If the voter provides proof, s/he remains on the voter roll. If the voter does not respond to the confirmation request or fails to provide proof of residence, the voter registrar places the voter on the suspense list. The voter remains on the suspense list until November 30 following the second general election for state or county office that occurs after the voter is placed on suspense.¹⁷ If the voter does not provide satisfactory proof of residence by that deadline, *then* the voter registrar must cancel the registration and remove the voter from the voter roll. HCTO is following this process. It has sent confirmation notices to the active voters registered at the identified addresses and, after thirty days, it will place any voters who have not provided satisfactory proof of residence, or claimed an exemption from providing such proof, on the suspense list.

C. The allegations do not support any Secretary of State Action under Section 31.017 (Senate Bill 1933).

Texas Election Code Section 31.107(a)(3) allows the Secretary of State to order oversight only if it has “good cause to believe that a recurring pattern of problems with ... voter registration.” Even taking Senator Bettencourt’s complaint as true, he fails to identify a “recurring” problem with voter registration. The complaint does not identify any “problem” with voter registration or establish a recurring pattern. Instead, the process is working as it

¹⁶ Texas Election Code §§ 15.051-15.053.

¹⁷ Tex. Election Code §16.032.



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is designed to work. Accordingly, there is no basis of administrative oversight of the HCTO here.

IV. HCTO has put additional protections in place.

Finally, because HCTO takes its voter roll maintenance duties seriously, now that it has reason to believe that the identified addresses are commercial post office boxes which voters have used as residential addresses, HCTO has placed flags on the identified addresses so that any person who, in the future, registers at either location will receive a confirmation notice and will be placed on suspense if the person does not adequately respond. This flagging system should operate to prevent people from using the identified commercial post office boxes as residential addresses if they are not permitted to do so.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to Senator Bettencourt's complaint. HCTO understands the importance of proper voter roll maintenance and has taken additional steps to flag the identified addresses to help prohibit future unauthorized use. We hope that this letter addresses your questions and trust that you will close your file on this complaint.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annette Ramirez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Annette" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Ramirez".

Annette Ramirez

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