



DRIVING TOWARDS EFFICIENCY: BUILDING UNIFORM CITATIONS IN TEXAS

WHAT IS A UNIFORM CITATION?

A citation is defined as any “summons, ticket, or other official document that is issued to a person by a peace officer that requires the person to respond or appear” in court.¹ In Texas’ 89th Regular Legislative Session, HB 2136 was introduced to create a *uniform citation* form for jurisdictions across the state to use. The Office of Court Administration (OCA) would be tasked with creating this form, in consultation with various sizes of law enforcement agencies, judges, prosecutors, court clerks, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), and research experts on citation design.

RESEARCH SUPPORTING UNIFORM REMINDERS

Uniform citations are an empirically-backed initiative to improve court appearance rates. For example, moving pertinent court date information to the top of one’s citation and bolding the consequences for missing one’s court date are shown to have a significant impact on failure to appear (FTA) rates.² In one high-volume municipal jurisdiction, where more than 320,000 citations are issued annually, **researchers attributed a 13% reduction in a court’s FTA rates to a redesign of their citation.**³ This alteration, supplemented by text message reminders, was estimated to have prevented over 30,000 warrants from being issued as a result of failing to appear/respond to a citation.⁴ **With over 1,000 Texas law enforcement agencies issuing 4.5 million fine-only misdemeanor citations every year, and those citations being processed by 1,750 local trial courts (i.e., 800 justice courts and 950 municipal courts), the need to establish a uniform citation is clear.**⁵

The benefits of increased appearance rates would reverberate throughout the justice system and within Texas communities. The practice of issuing citations rather than making an arrest, especially on fine-only and low-level charges, is crucial to smooth functioning within our criminal justice system. Being able to rely on citations in these instances depends on people coming to court without having to issue an arrest warrant. **Adopting a well-tested, clear citation form will improve the functioning of Texas courts and allow law enforcement to spend more time addressing more serious and violent crimes.** By decreasing arrests, it will also relieve pressure on jail overcrowding and reduce backlogs that local courts may be facing.⁶

RECOMMENDATION

Missed court dates create court backlogs and strain local courts’ resources. Researchers estimate that **each** missed court date - from rescheduling hearings, issuing warrants, locating individuals, and more - can cost courts almost \$1,500.⁷ To alleviate these administrative burdens and improve compliance, Texas Appleseed recommends that the state of Texas introduce and enact legislation to create a model citation for all law enforcement agencies in our state to use. Because a citation serves as an initial summons,⁸ we also recommend that courts standardize any *subsequent* summons forms used in addition to the original citation. These empirically-backed approaches will:

- ✓ **Reduce FTA rates in local courts across the state;**
- ✓ **Equip law enforcement with an effective tool to manage low-level charges;**
- ✓ **Free up law enforcement’s time to focus on more serious and violent crimes;**
- ✓ **Save taxpayer dollars that would otherwise be associated with issuing and pursuing warrants and pretrial detention.**

AFTER

TEXAS CITATION			
Agency: _____		Case # _____	
County of _____			
Act by this date to avoid a warrant, suspended license & increased fines. <i>See back for instructions</i>		MUST ATTEND COURT ON: Month Day Year at Time ☐ PM ☐ Can pay before instead of going to court	
☐ Court Name Street address City TX Zipcode (123) 456-7890 www.courtwebsite.com ☐ Court Name Street address City TX Zipcode (123) 456-7890 www.courtwebsite.com ☐ Court Name Street address City TX Zipcode (123) 456-7890 www.courtwebsite.com ☐ Court Name Street address City TX Zipcode (123) 456-7890 www.courtwebsite.com		PAY ONLINE www.pay4scorits.org Questions: 785-365-7070	
Last Name		First Name	
Middle Name			
Street Address			
City		State	
Zip code			
Date of Birth		Sex	
Weight		Height	
Cell Phone Number		() - - - - -	
DL State		DL Number	
Commercial DL?			
Yen Year		Make	
Model		Type	
Colors			
Vehicle License Number		State	
Expires		Correct?	
Time of Offense		Offense Date	
Citation Date		/ /	
Location Offense		(Address or Block Number) (Street) (City/Country)	
Speed Violations		☐ MPH in MPH Racer Ugly #	
☐ No Liability Insurance		☐	
Other Violations			
Other Violations			

Issuing Officer: _____		Badge No. _____	
Asst. Officer: _____		No. _____	
Agency: _____		Agency No. _____	

Acknowledge that the person (offender) promises to appear on or before the date set out or with the designated court.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Step 1 Which box is checked on court of citation:
APPEAR IN COURT OR RESPOND TO CITATION?

Step 2 Follow instructions based on the box checked on the court.

When APPEAR IN COURT is checked on the front

► **Your next step:** Go to court on the date, time and location on court.
Appearing in court is your only option. You can plead guilty or not guilty.
"IMPORTANT: Missing court may result in a warrant for your arrest.
Don't let that happen—go to court! The judge will explain next steps."

► **Heinly Tip:** Do the court date in your calendar, set a reminder, start planning now.

► **Juveniles:** if you were under 15 years old at the time of the offense, you must bring a parent or guardian with you to court.

When RESPOND TO CITATION is checked on the front

Citations can take up to 14 days to show up on the court system.
(see checking for first appearance and then completion of steps A, B, or C on back of front)

► **Your next step:** Choose one of the options below and respond to the court.
"IMPORTANT: Not responding by the due date on the court can result in a
"Failure to appear" charge, a guilty finding, a hold on your car registration,
and additional fines if up to \$500." **Do not** ignore the citation.

Choose one of the options below to avoid these penalties.

— **Option A: Pay or Ask for a Reduction (Guilty Finding)**
Ask for a reduction at <https://www.txcourts.gov/courtservices>.
Pay online, call or in person. If you cannot pay in full, contact the court (see
back of front) to request information to request a lay payment arrangement.

Note: Pay on my own and pay in installments options do not affect your insurance.

— **Option B: Request Traffic School** You must point points on your driving record, you
can request traffic school. You will be the citation as an additional traffic school fee and
additional traffic school. (See back of front for more details on how to use if you are eligible.

— **Option C: Dispute the Citation (Plead Not Guilty)** You can dispute the
citation in person by requesting a court date for a trial (no credit) or by mail (trial
by written declaration), which will allow you to pay the fine in full (amount reduced
if citation is dismissed). Contact the court for more details (suit for information).

— **Option D: Correctable (Fix-It)** When "Correctable" is checked on court, you
must correct the citation. You will need to pay the fine in full (amount reduced
if citation is correctable). The court will dismiss the violation when you submit
evidence and pay a small fee. You will need to pay the fine in full (amount reduced
if citation is correctable). For insurance issues, you must show proof to the DMV.

CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION (MUST BE RETURNED TO COURT)				
Section(s) Violated	Conflicting of Person Signature of Person	Serial No.	Agency	Date

If "booked required" is checked on court, call six-o-six-zero to schedule this appointment
before the court date. You will not be arrested and attend your court date on your own.

MORE INFORMATION

► **To contest the citation, see front of citation for court website and phone number.**
The court will send notice explaining next steps.

0000 or translations and general
information about the process.
Visit: XXXXXXXXXX0000000

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TAB AREA

[BACK](#)

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¹ Texas State Legislature Online. House Bill 2136, 88(R): History. Retrieved from <http://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=89R&Bill=HB2136>.

² Fishbane, A., Ouss, A., & Shah, A. K. (2020). Behavioral nudges reduce failure to appear for court. *Science*, 370(6517), eabb6591.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ According to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), there are 1,084 law enforcement agencies in the state that are non-exempt from reporting racial profiling data and are therefore viewed as being the agencies most likely to be engaged in a traffic stop. Retrieved from <https://www.tcole.texas.gov/content/racial-profiling-reports>; Texas Judicial Branch. Overview of the judicial branch: Texas court structure. Retrieved from <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1454621/overview.pdf>.

⁶ Office of Court Administration (2023). Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary. Retrieved from <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1459429/ar-statistical-fy23.pdf>.

⁷ Fishbane, A., McAuliffe, S., & Li, Y. (2025). Improving Court Appearance: The essential guide to court reminder programs. Ideas42. Retrieved from https://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/i42-1530_RemindersRpt_Final.pdf?utm_source=Safety+%26+Justice+%7C+ideas42&utm_campaign=91d2b65bf4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2025_05_15_05_38&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-91d2b65bf4-194774856&mc_cid=91d2b65bf4&mc_eid=43bdfb180c.

⁸ Texas Constitution and Statutes. Code of Criminal Procedure. Chapter 14. Arrest Without Warrant, Art. 14.06, (b). <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/?tab=1&code=CR&chapter=CR.14&artSec=14.06>; Texas Constitution and Statutes. Transportation Code. Chapter 543. Arrest and Prosecution of Violators, § 543.003. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/?tab=1&code=TN&chapter=TN.543&artSec=543.003>.