



Governmental Collectors Association of Texas

June 2021 Newsletter

GCAT BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

The 2021 Texas legislative session has ended, for the most part; despite setbacks by the COVID-19 pandemic and February's winter storm leaving millions of Texans without power for days. Texas Governor Gregg Abbott has said that this year's session is "one of the most conservative sessions Texas has ever seen." Gov. Abbott has until June 20 to sign or veto all bills that were passed, over 3,000 in total.

Jim Lehman and GCAT Board members have been closely monitoring those bills that would have an impact on collections and compliance.

Here are the bills that will most likely have an impact on your business practices.

SB 1373 – Uncollectable Fines and Fees Bill – Allows jurisdictions to declare criminal court assessments uncollectable if the defendant is deceased, serving life in prison, or the case has been unpaid for 15 years. This bill also requires the court to inquire about financial ability on the record. ***It is important to note that the un-collectability portion of this bill is permissive, meaning it is NOT mandatory.*** Courts and jurisdictions are not required to declare cases uncollectable only if they choose to do so.

HB 569 – Jail Credits Bill – This bill gives defendants credit for time served (\$150/day) for "fine only" **Class C misdemeanor** convictions any time the defendant is confined in jail or prison while serving a sentence for another offense if that confinement occurred after the commission of the misdemeanor. It also requires notice to defendants before issuing a warrant that they may be entitled to credits for other misdemeanor convictions. This bill effectively eliminates inmate trust collections for most justice and municipal court offenses.

HB 385 – Ability to Pay Probation Bill – This is a comprehensive bill that requires the court to make a determination of financial ability on defendants placed on probation including deferred adjudication either before or immediately following placement. It requires the court to provide alternatives for defendants determined to lack the ability to pay; allows defendants to request alternatives to payment or a reduction or elimination of payments previously order by filing a statement indicating a change in their financial situation; and allows for the defendants to use a combination of payment and community service credits to comply with court orders. All or any part of the defendant's fines and fees may be waived by the court with the exception of restitution.

HB 4191 – FTA/OmniBase Bill which would have neutralized the FTA/OmniBase program and **HB 1177** – relating to the imposition of court costs and other fees on certain indigent defendants, died in committee. A big **THANK YOU** goes out to those GCAT members who took the time to reach out to your local Senate Committee members. Your voices were heard and your pushback helped stall HB 4191. However, lawmakers are expected to come back for at least one special session, with a list of priorities being developed by Gov. Abbott. Let us hope that HB 4191 and HB 1177 are not included in the session. We will keep you all updated.



**21st Annual GCAT Conference
Courtyard in Allen, Texas**

GCAT CONFERENCE UPDATES

The GCAT conference September 14-17, 2021 is right around the corner! If you have not made your hotel reservations or submitted your conference registration, please do so by August 23, 2021. Please visit our webpage <http://govcat.net/events-hotel.html> for more information.

The conference agenda is being finalized. If you know of a speaker, whom you think would be make an excellent addition to our conference or a topic of interest you think would be beneficial to our organization, please reach out to me at andrea.weilacher@dentoncounty.gov.

Five scholarships are still available. The scholarship will cover your GCAT 2021 Conference Registration fee only. The criteria is a 150-200 word description of how attending the 2021 GCAT conference will benefit you, your city or county and your county must not have been awarded a scholarship within the last five years. Email all essays to Andrea Weilacher at andrea.weilacher@dentoncounty.gov and Tanya Skinner at tskinner@brazoscountytexas.gov.

AWARD NOMINEES

If you would like to nominate an outstanding individual or Collections department for a GCAT award, please submit a paragraph of 100 words or less explaining why your nominee should receive the award in the category you specify. The nominees must be a member of GCAT in good standing. Your nomination must include:

- Your name, title, city/county/court represented
- Nominees name, title, city/county/court represented
- Awards category

Email Stephanie McCormick smccormich@burnetcountytexas.org or Israel Osio israel.osio@traviscountytexas.gov no later than 3:00pm on July 23, 2021. Winners will be announced at the annual conference in September.



Most Innovative Program

Awarded to the organization selected as having most improved collections by developing and implementing innovative procedures, systems, or techniques in the past year.

Collector of the Year

Awarded to the collector selected as having had the greatest impact on collections and the collections effort for their city or county in the past year.

Collections Program of the Year

Awarded to the program showing the most dramatic increase in revenue for their city or county in the past year.

Excellence in Service Award

Awarded to the individuals or programs selected for unselfishly providing assistance to others embodying the elements of dedication, commitment, and service, to the association and its membership.

Becky Sirmans Award

Awarded to the individuals or programs selected for finding a way to succeed in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and challenges embodying the spirit to never give up.

Honorary Membership

Honorary membership is an honor reserved for those non-member individuals that the association believes have gone above and beyond the call of duty in assisting the association in achieving its mission and vision.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As you all know, GCAT would not be in its 21st year if it were not for the members and the leadership of the GCAT Board of Directors. Yearly elections will be held in September and GCAT is looking to fill a few board positions. It has been said by past board members, that being a part of the board and this organization is a rewarding experience. The friendships and comradery are genuine.

Are you interested in a position on the Board of Directors? Are you wondering what all it entails? Will you have to travel? Will it cost anything extra to be a board member? All that is required is you participating in a handful of conference calls throughout the year and helping host the annual GCAT conference. The GCAT conference fee is also waived for board members among other benefits.

GCAT needs 11 board directors, which includes six board members, four officers and one past president. You must be a board member in good standing before you are eligible to run for an officer position. Now, more than ever, in these uncertain times and changes in the laws, GCAT needs your help and support to keep it going stronger and better than ever. If you would like more one on one information, you may reach out to Andrea, Tanya, Stephanie or Roy. These board members have all held various positions, for multiple terms throughout the years and will gladly fill you in on the details.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Norwegian slang, "Texas" means "crazy".

There are approximately 11.7 million cattle and calves living in Texas.

Athens Texas claims to be the official birthplace of the American hamburger.

Honorary Texas Rangers include Chuck Norris, John Wayne, Will Rogers and former President George H.W. Bush.

The official sport of Texas is Rodeo.

It is illegal to let a camel run loose on the beaches of Galveston.

Everyone in the town of Dish Texas in Denton County received free basic cable and DVRs for ten years from DISH Network in exchange for renaming their town to DISH from Clark.

