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Organizations Call for Driver Responsibility Program Amnesty for Hurricane Harvey Victims

Austin, TX – Today, six statewide organizations, along with individuals and organizations directly engaged in Hurricane Harvey relief efforts, filed a formal petition asking the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to issue a one-time Driver Responsibility Program (DRP) fee amnesty in Texas' disaster area counties.

“Even though DPS waived the \$11 license replacement fee, people are still having a lot of trouble replacing their licenses. DPS should be doing more to help,” said Ja’Corey Odu, founder of Austin-based Guardian’s Gate, a youth program recently engaged in relief for victims in the Beaumont area. “This is a time when Texans are coming together to help one another, and DPS should waive any fees that block victims from replacing their IDs and licenses. Proper identification is just too important.”

“People who couldn’t pay their DRP fees before certainly can’t pay them now, and these fees block them from getting much needed licenses,” said Emily Gerrick, Staff Attorney for the Texas Fair Defense Project. “Without licenses, people will face barriers to every aspect of their recovery.”

The Driver Responsibility Program levies civil penalties on certain traffic violations that must be paid in addition to the criminal penalties. The fees must be paid in each of three consecutive years or an individual’s driver’s license will be suspended.

“We estimate that about 1.4 million people have lost their driver’s license because they can’t pay these fees or don’t understand that they have to pay these fees over and over for three years, on top of their traffic fines,” said Kathy Mitchell, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. “Texas should simply forgive the fees for victims of Hurricane Harvey and expedite getting replacement licenses and IDs back into the hands of those who have to rebuild their lives.”

The six organizations requesting this emergency DRP amnesty are Restore Justice USA (a project of Empower Texans), ACLU of Texas, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, Texas Appleseed, Just Liberty, and the Texas Fair Defense Project.

For interviews, please contact Kathy Mitchell, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition at 512-695-4670.