



Call to End Houston Ticket Court Pre-Trials by Councilman and Attorney Bar

Houston City Council Member Ronald C. Green joins Houston traffic ticket attorneys and public in calling for the elimination of pre-trial conferences at the City of Houston Municipal Courts.

([PRWEB](#)) March 1, 2005 -- Houston traffic ticket lawyer, Kameron Searle, welcomes Houston City Council Member, Ronald C. Green, to the growing ranks of those who want the City of Houston to eliminate the controversial and unduly burdensome pre-trial conference dockets at the City of Houston Municipal Courts. Searle, a past President of the Harris County Municipal Justice Bar Association (a bar association composed primarily of traffic ticket defense attorneys in Harris County), says their organization voiced strong opposition to the implementation of the pre-trial conference dockets at the City of Houston Municipal Courts long before they were implemented.

The City added the pre-trial conference dockets at a time when most other courts, including the City of Dallas and most Justice of the Peace Courts in Harris County, had eliminated them. Originally, someone who received a traffic ticket in Houston only had to go to court twice if they wanted a trial to contest their traffic ticket: an Arraignment docket and a Trial docket. Five months ago the City of Houston Municipal Courts added the additional pre-trial conference docket to the list of settings a defendant would have to attend.

The purpose for the pre-trial conference dockets stated by the City of Houston Municipal Courts was to reduce the size of trial dockets and dispose of cases more quickly. According to Searle, "the real purpose of the pre-trial dockets was to try and generate additional revenue for the City of Houston by making it so costly and inconvenient for the public that they would just pay the City and get it over with." Since pre-trials began, tens of thousands of Houstonians desiring to contest a traffic ticket at trial have been required to go to three different dockets on three different days: Arraignment, Pre-Trial, and Trial.

"These citizens of Houston had to miss work a minimum three different times and make three different trips to the courthouse downtown to contest a single traffic ticket," says attorney Searle. "Many of these people are middle class or working poor and missing work is something they cannot afford to do on three different occasions. So rather than lose the income or worse lose their jobs, the City is trying to pressure them into just paying their tickets."

If paying the ticket was the only penalty associated with a traffic ticket, this might be a viable option. But, paying a ticket can have many hidden and potentially harmful penalties in addition to paying the fines and court costs. These penalties for traffic ticket convictions can include much higher insurance rates, drivers license suspensions, loss of driving privileges, points and very expensive surcharges imposed by the State of Texas. Pressuring people into paying traffic tickets is not justice.

The pre-trial conferences were planned and instituted completely without the advice of the Harris County Municipal Justice Bar Association (HCMJBA) whose members have many decades of legal experience in the City of Houston Municipal Courts. To send a message about the mismanagement of the City of Houston Municipal Courts in recent years and to show its opposition to the pre-trial conference dockets, the HCMJBA's membership voted unanimously on September 10, 2004 to stop meeting with the Presiding Judge of the City of Houston Municipal Courts. The HCMJBA's members began communicating directly with the Mayor, individual members of Houston City Council, the press and the public.



In a press release issued by City of Houston Council Member Ronald C. Green on February 24, 2005, Green called for the elimination of pre-trial conferences at the City of Houston Municipal Courts. Green is the chairman of the Houston Municipal Courts Task Force Committee. According to Council Member Green's press release, "Pre-Trial was implemented five months ago and has received serious criticism from both the public and the Defense Bar."

Council Member Green's press release sets out his specific reasons for proposing the elimination of pre-trial conferences. Green stated, "The Pre-Trial Conference has been marginally successful in providing significant case load reduction and timely disposition of cases in the Municipal Courts. A stand alone Pre-Trial setting inconveniences the users of the court, by forcing them to make an additional appearance."

Pre-trial conference dockets continue at the City of Houston Municipal Courts. Council Member Ronald C. Green will discuss alternative solutions at the March 18, 2005 Municipal Courts Committee meeting. Citizens wishing to voice their opposition to the City's unnecessary pretrial conference dockets at the City of Houston Municipal Courts may call Council Member Green's office and speak to Chris Brown at 713-247-2106 or Eldridge Peugh at 713-247-2012.

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