



*For Immediate Release*

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## **DALLAS COUNTY+DESOTO TEAM UP TO BREAK A VICIOUS CYCLE**

### **Occupational License Pilot Program Will Keep Drivers Driving Despite Infractions**

Most Dallas County and DeSoto residents depend on their vehicles to get to and from work, and quite a few actually drive for a living, but except for the usual traffic headaches the majority do not encounter any real problems. However, there are some drivers who get themselves into serious trouble and can't figure out how to get out of it. They fall into a vicious cycle of accumulating unpaid traffic citations followed by the issuance of arrest warrants, serving jail time, and having their licenses suspended. Their economic survival and that of their families depends on their maintaining a valid Texas Driver's License so they can keep working, but they often become overwhelmed and can't maintain that employment lifeline. It also frustrates the judges who hear these cases because they can offer the option of an Occupational Driver's License, but that is often rejected by the offenders who believe it's just too difficult to obtain. Today Dallas County Justice of the Peace (Pct 4-2) Sasha Moreno and the City of DeSoto announced the creation of a pilot program that they believe will change all that.

On Friday morning, Dallas County Justice of the Peace Sasha Moreno (Pct 4-2) traveled to DeSoto's Municipal Court to join DeSoto Presiding Judge Scott Kurth for the launch of the Dallas County/DeSoto Occupational Driver's License Pilot Program. The new program will empower the court in DeSoto to assist offenders with the application process for an Occupational License and then remotely "zoom" them into Justice Moreno's Court Room in Grand Prairie for their formal hearing.

"Our dialogue with DeSoto allowed us to address this challenge from several vantage points and come up with a pragmatic plan that will provide all those who qualify with an equal opportunity for a fair and just outcome," observed Justice of the Peace Moreno. "One of the biggest challenges in our line of work is to reduce recidivism, and hopefully this program will do that by keeping the offender working, supporting their families, and keeping their lives together."

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Under this program, DeSoto's Municipal Court will provide qualified candidates with basic assistance securing the necessary forms, completing and filing the paperwork required by the Justice of the Peace Court, and then coordinating their virtual "Zoom" hearing seeking issuance of the Occupational Driver's License from the Municipal Courtroom in DeSoto with the Justice of the Peace Courtroom in Grand Prairie.

Justice Moreno's counterpart in DeSoto, Judge Scott Kurth, is both thankful for the partnership that generated this program and eager to address this challenge head-on.

"It was disheartening to see so many people dig themselves and their families into a hole that they rarely got out of, and it didn't need to be the case," lamented Judge Kurth "I began to discuss the problem and possible solutions with DeSoto City Council Member Candice Quarles, DeSoto City Attorney Joseph Gorfida, and Justice of the Peace Sasha Moreno and the commonsense program that we are unveiling today, which is both inexpensive and uses existing technology, is the result of these very candid and fruitful discussions."

Also present at Friday's rollout event were DeSoto Deputy City Manager Isom Cameron, DeSoto Mayor Pro Tem Kenzie Moore who participated on behalf of Mayor McCowan, and DeSoto City Councilmember Candice Quarles who was one of the earliest in-house supporters of the pilot program.

"Because different branches of government were able to come together and bring our unique perspectives to the table, we were able to jumpstart a process that will begin to change lives ASAP and keep our families together," stated Councilmember Quarles. "Rather than flexing the long arm of the law, this partnership allows us to extend a helping hand from government and the court system to the people who need it most."

DeSoto's Mayor Pro Tem Kenzie Moore, who attended Friday's rollout on behalf of Mayor Curtistene S. McCowan, concurred with his fellow councilmember and summed up the new pilot program this way, "This cooperative effort is indeed government at its best, and it is what justice looks like. We need to do more of it to make sure that our residents benefit from the broader perspective that will help to ensure success."

The new Dallas County/City of DeSoto Occupational Driver's License Pilot Program will go into effect immediately and if it works as well as this group believes it will in Desoto, it could soon be expanded to other cities within the jurisdiction of Justice Moreno's Precinct 4-2 court.

View the press conference on DeSoto's Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/desototx/videos/2875684602754347>

To view an example of a filing document for an occupational license visit Judge Moreno's website:

[https://www.dallascounty.org/Assets/uploads/docs/jpcourts/4-2/OccupationalDriverLicense\\_Petition\\_2017.pdf](https://www.dallascounty.org/Assets/uploads/docs/jpcourts/4-2/OccupationalDriverLicense_Petition_2017.pdf)

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