

May 8, 2025

Federation of Tax Administrators  
444 North Capitol Street NW, Ste. 348  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Nomination Committee:

I am pleased and honored to nominate Phillip Ashley for the Federation of Tax Administrators' Harley T. Duncan Award for Leadership and Service.

In nearly 24 years with the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Phillip has demonstrated his leadership and service to the people of our state and beyond. He rose from an entry-level job with our Fiscal Management Division to top agency leadership positions, first as Associate Deputy Comptroller for Fiscal Matters and now as Associate Deputy Comptroller for Tax. This is a tribute to Phillip's ability to guide, direct and inspire agency employees and colleagues in addressing important policy issues that directly affect taxpayers and the state's bottom line. He has shared the benefit of his knowledge and experience with industry peers in state and national tax policy associations.

Phillip's comprehensive background has enhanced his ability to work with experts across the revenue and tax spectrum and to direct important initiatives to ensure fairness and excellent customer service to millions of taxpayers.

As he moved through increasingly responsible positions in Fiscal Management, culminating as division director, Phillip learned firsthand the nuts and bolts of how state government operates and the full life cycle of state revenue, from tax policy to tax collection to development of a state budget and fund accounting.

When I took office as Comptroller in 2015, I chose Phillip for my leadership team, naming him Associate Deputy Comptroller for Fiscal Matters. In this position, he oversaw a range of divisions including Fiscal Management, Revenue Estimating, Property Tax Assistance, Treasury Operations, Unclaimed Property, Educational Opportunities and Investment (which includes 529 plans and the Texas Achieving a Better Life Experience savings program for people with disabilities) and the Texas Treasury Safekeeping Trust Company, which manages the state's massive Rainy Day Fund.

In other states, these functions are typically handled by state treasurers, but Texas has consolidated the duties into the Comptroller's office. Because Phillip's portfolio included oversight of these treasury functions, he has been very involved in both the National Association of State Treasurers and the National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers.

In fall 2021, I asked Phillip to become Associate Deputy Comptroller for Tax, overseeing Audit, Enforcement, Tax Policy, Criminal Investigations, Hearings and Tax Litigation, Account Maintenance, Revenue Accounting, Revenue Processing and Taxpayer Services, which includes call center operations. He is my designee on the Federation of Tax Administrators and the Board of the Multistate Tax Commission (MTC); he serves on the MTC Executive Committee and has been the commission's treasurer since 2021.



Phillip has directed important initiatives as Associate Deputy Comptroller for Tax, including two that demonstrate his emphasis on easing the reporting process for taxpayers by focusing on customer service and ensuring that employees have the tools they need to be successful.

## **Customer Service**

Phillip played a key role in establishing and overseeing the Tax Customer Experience Improvement Task Force, which has conducted an extensive review of processes over 18 months with the aim of simplifying life for taxpayers.

This specialized team, which includes staff from eight Comptroller's office divisions, collaborates with other agencies such as the Texas Secretary of State's office. Certain information about business ownership and tax status of taxpayers on our agency's website comes from the Secretary of State or is related to that office's registrations, and changes were made to better reflect franchise tax account status and ensure the most current public information is displayed on our website.

The task force takes a holistic approach to align agency goals and ensure projects maximize improvements to all customers — among them, more than 850,000 who pay sales taxes and 3 million who pay franchise taxes. Its accomplishments so far include:

- Revising taxpayer forms and notices to make them simpler and easier to read by removing government jargon, improving form instructions and adding QR codes to high-volume mailed taxpayer notices.
- Reorganizing the agency's website to put the most sought-out information front and center; ensuring web content aligns with mailed notices; and creating new web resources including FAQs and "Why did I receive this notice?" instructions to help taxpayers resolve issues with their accounts.
- Improving call routing and automated messaging to assist taxpayers and shorten call wait times.

A glimpse of the results may be seen in the following comparison of calls to Taxpayer Services in January 2024 and January 2025, after the changes. While numerous factors impact these numbers, we are confident the task force's work played a significant role in these improvements:

- Telephone hold time for customers fell by 29 percent.
- Call volume decreased by 20 percent, indicating customers are better able to complete their business online without having to call.
- The number of "abandoned" calls, in which customers hang up while on hold, decreased by 45 percent.

## **Criminal Investigations – Tools for Success**

Phillip is currently overseeing a retooling of the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), which enforces the criminal provisions of the state's tax laws administered by the Comptroller's office. With 40 full-time peace officers around the state, CID makes arrests and conducts long-term, complex criminal investigations that are referred to state and federal prosecutors.

In the last two years, Phillip and his team successfully made the case to the Texas Legislature to correct significant pay inequities between Comptroller peace officers and more highly paid peace officers employed by other state agencies. In another important change, the agency was able to provide leased



vehicles to all Comptroller's officers, who previously had to use their personal vehicles to conduct state work — a major impediment to attracting and retaining staff.

The benefits can be seen in CID's productivity, including:

- Filing 392 felony cases in fiscal 2024, resulting in 138 felony indictments with additional cases pending prosecution. Court-ordered restitution, fines and penalties (including delinquent taxes and tax liabilities discovered as the result of criminal investigations) reached nearly \$624,000.
- In the first eight months of fiscal 2025, filing 209 felony cases, resulting so far in 90 felony indictments. Court-ordered restitution, fines and penalties have reached almost \$830,224.

This legislative session, Phillip and his team are working to obtain state funds to hire up to 10 additional officers and better equip CID's officers with safety equipment and specialized equipment for testing hazardous substances, which is important in motor fuels cases.

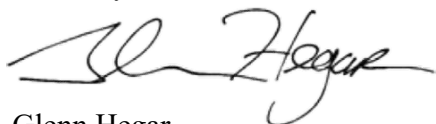
Among his many other accomplishments, Phillip while leading the Fiscal Management Division helped oversee the compilation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR), which presents a picture of the state's financial condition and demonstrates its accountability for citizens, taxpayers, customers, investors and creditors. The Texas ACFR repeatedly has received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada.

Phillip's credentials play a big part in his successful leadership: He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration and a Master of Business Administration from Baylor University, and he is a licensed CPA and Certified Government Financial Manager, a 2006 graduate of the [Texas Fiscal Officers' Academy](#) and former president of the [Texas State Agency Business Administrators' Association](#).

Equally important, Phillip focuses on teamwork to get the job done and graciously gives credit to others for accomplishments. As he said when he learned we were nominating him for this honor, "All of the things we do around here are a team effort, and the team deserves all the credit – I'm proud to be part of a team that is making a difference."

That is just one more reason I'm proud to nominate Phillip Ashley. I hope you will consider him for this important award, as I believe he has demonstrated the leadership, character and track record to deserve it.

Sincerely,



Glenn Hegar  
Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

