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About those taxing waits

By **TBO.com**

I would like to apologize personally for any extended wait you may have experienced if you visited a Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office recently. For the past 10 years, 95 percent or more of our customers have rated our service either good or excellent, and our wait times have historically averaged below 15 minutes.

But two new developments threaten our commitment to customer service excellence, and I want to let you know what I'm doing about it.

Two major legal changes were made in 2010 related to driver's license services. Both had a significant impact on tax collector offices.

First, Florida adopted antiterrorism driver's license changes mandated by the federal government. Commonly referred to as the Real ID Act, these changes came about as a direct result of 9/11 and are designed to control fraud and illegal immigration. These changes require you to produce a lot more documents either to get or renew a driver license. The result has been a longer transaction and a longer wait time.

Second, the Florida Legislature passed a law requiring the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to close all state-operated driver's license offices by 2015. As a result, the Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office will assume responsibility for all driver's license services in Hillsborough. We anticipate serving an additional 275,000 customers in our branch offices each year once all state offices have closed.

Some of the state offices in Hillsborough already have closed, and tax collector branches are feeling the impact. While our wait time and customer service statistics are still better than local, state and national benchmarks, they're unacceptable to me.

The tax collector office's top priority is customer service. To handle these changes, my staff and I are expanding or relocating our branch offices and hiring additional employees to accommodate the increased number of transactions. We are also expediting the cross-training of our staff in driver's license services to ensure we handle these transactions without a significant budget increase.

I assure you, my staff and I will continue to work diligently to ensure you receive the positive experience you've come to expect from our office.

I welcome any comments or suggestions you might have. Please contact us at (813) 635-5200, or you can complete an online survey at www.hillstax.org.

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