

# Abilene bail bond companies not sticking county with over-valued real estate, like elsewhere in state

By Denise Blaz

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A local official says Abilene runs a tight ship with bail bond companies to ensure the county doesn't end up with the inflated-value real estate bondsmen can use as collateral to secure their businesses.

Although legal, the practice becomes a problem when the companies bail on paying bond forfeitures, meaning the county can lose out on thousands of dollars when they confiscate the real estate, which has been too-generously appraised.

The practice, widespread in Texas, has become commonplace, according to a Dallas Morning News article published Sunday.

In Abilene, though, bail companies are known to pay their bond forfeitures to the county, court records show.

Since 2007, only one local bail bond company has gone through the civil court system and has been prohibited from issuing bonds.

Eight out-of-county bond companies have been suspended from issuing bail bonds in Taylor County.

"I think Taylor County is a unique place where all the individual departments talk to each other," said Larry Bevill, Taylor County clerk and Taylor County bail bond board chairman.

"It would be extremely rare for a bond company to get into that amount of trouble," he said. "We have procedures in place here at Taylor County to communicate even when a bond forfeiture has not even reached final judgment yet."

Bevill explained that bail bond companies have more than 280 days to pay their clients' bond amount if they don't appear in court. If their client is found in another county, the civil court filings against the bondsman are dropped.

The bondsman has multiple chances to settle their debt with the county, he said. A judge can even choose to forgive the bail bond companies' entire amount.

A 30 percent settlement is often offered to give bail bond companies an opportunity to pay up.

According to the Texas Occupations Code, bondsmen have the right to issue bonds five to 10 times the value of real estate placed in trust with a bail bond board.

In Taylor County, the bail bond board requires a minimum of \$50,000 to be placed as collateral by the bail bond company, either in the form of cash or real estate.

Bob Olson, local owner of two bail bond companies, said out of the 14 licensed bondsmen in Taylor County, "some have property up, some don't."

Olson said it's legal for a private appraiser to assess the property value of real estate being offered as collateral.

"What the law reads is we can use whatever number is greater," he said. "Either the tax rolls, or we can have a private appraiser come out. If I have a piece of property that's valued at \$40,000 and I have it appraised for \$100,000, the appraisal district changes their numbers to match."

In business for the last 17 years, Olson said he could not recall a local bail bond company that was subjected to any suspensions or revocations.

"Taylor County bondsmen are pretty reputable," he said. "We don't have a lot of problems in Taylor County. I own two business, and, knock on wood, we pay very few. I watch these people very close. I don't let them out on a kiss and a promise. I usually have them have a co-signer, or have them put money down."