

Guest editorial

By Doug Everett, Commissioner, Georgia Public Service Commission

In response to the recent article, "Rogue Movers Keep Rolling," (AJC, Sunday September 7, 2008) I would like to point out some inaccuracies and relay some facts the writer omitted.

First, the article incorrectly states that the Public Service Commission does not verify insurance for licensed movers. The fact is that all licensed Georgia movers must present and maintain insurance coverage. The PSC strictly monitors and enforces this regulation.

The article also reports that movers must complete a safety training class prior to issuance of a license. Motor carrier safety falls under the purview of the Georgia Department of Public Safety not the PSC.

Let me also provide some insight into the PSC's regulatory challenges. In 2001 the PSC had a transportation division staffed with approximately sixty employees. Under the leadership of then Governor Roy Barnes, the state legislature approved legislation that transferred the entire Transportation Division to the new Department of Motor Vehicle Safety. There were approximately 20 employees then who handled household goods movers as well as limousines. When the Governor Sonny Perdue and the legislature returned regulation of household goods movers to the Commission in 2005, we gained exactly one person to handle the job. Today we have a staff one tenth the previous size yet we are expected to provide the public with the same level of service. Is it really any wonder that rogue movers keep rolling?

This one employee and a staff attorney recently spent an entire day conducting a field audit of one illegal mover, pouring over paperwork and documents at the mover's office. This mover purported to hold a certificate from the Commission. This one investigation consumed the entire day of our one employee as well as a staff attorney who handles not only Transportation issues but also issues for our Utility Facilities Protection and Pipeline Safety Units.

Once the Commission finds out that a mover is operating illegally, the Commission will issue an order telling the mover to cease and desist and provide documentation to become Commission certified. If they ignore this order, the Commission will institute proceedings to bring in the mover and fine them. However, many illegal movers will simply stop operating under one name and set up shop under another name elsewhere, operating only with a cell phone and a mail box. Chasing down these illegal scofflaws again requires considerable Commission time and resources.

The story correctly points out that until 2007 the Commission had no authority over movers who operated solely within the boundaries of a municipality. Many illegal movers used this exemption to hide from Commission authority. What the story fails to mention is that the Commission initiated legislation (House Bill 316) to correct this

deficiency and pushed for its successful passage during the 2007 session of the General Assembly.

We have also attempted to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Public Safety to assist us in tracking down unlicensed movers but to date those negotiations have been unsuccessful. We will continue those efforts in order to find and put rogue movers out of business.

Most of the household goods movers in the state are reputable firms but there are some disreputable movers. The public needs to know that if they are planning a move they need to call the PSC at 404-656-4501 or check our web site, www.psc.state.ga.us, to find out if the mover is licensed by the Commission.

I assure you that the Public Service Commission will continue to do all it can within its current budget and resource limitation to pursue illegal movers.

Doug Everett
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