

# News Release

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**Texans for Public Justice \*\* 609 W. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite E, \*\* Austin, TX 78701**

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**Special Sessions Yield Continual Continuances:**

## **32 Lawmakers Used Perk To Claim 431 Court Delays**

- **Defendants Account for Most Delays, With One Case Stalled 5 Times**
- **Rep. Alonzo Filed 241 Continuances in Two Years**

**Austin**--Thirty-two lawmakers invoked a special legislative perk to delay Texas court cases 431 times in the two years from September 2003 through September 2005, a new Texans For Public Justice study found. The study, "Continual Perks Slow Texas Courts," analyzed the 431 "legislative continuances" that Texas lawmakers reported under a recent continuance-disclosure reform.

Texas lawmakers who are attorneys in cases in state courts can delay proceedings in these cases from a month before a legislative session begins until a month after it ends. The seven special legislative sessions that Governor Rick Perry has convened in the past three years greatly expanded the normal legislative-continuance season. These special sessions helped to create more than two years worth of court blackout days during the two-and-a-half-year period starting in January 2003 (the new report does not analyze continuances that invoke the latest special session convened on April 17, 2006).

"Endless special sessions have created an open-season for legislative court delays that would have been hard to foresee when lawmakers created this perk for themselves in 1929," said TPJ researcher Omaid Khan. "The new disclosure law reveals that a few legislators are invoking this perk far more than we ever imagined."

Rep. Roberto Alonzo (D-Dallas) filed an extraordinary 241 legislative continuances in this two-year period, accounting for 56 percent of all continuances. Rep. Phil King (R-Weatherford) came next, filing 53 continuances (12 percent). In both criminal and civil cases, lawmakers filed the vast majority of their continuances on behalf of defendants—many of whom may have had an interest in postponing a civil or criminal judgment against them.

Some lawmakers filed one continuance after another in the same case. Rep. Alonzo claimed the record, filing five delays in a six-month period in the *State of Texas v. Omar Hernandez*. Rep. King filed 11 continuances in five related cases involving a group of pawn-shop executives fighting over stock options.

At least six lawmakers claimed continuances in cases that named themselves or apparent family members as defendants. Reps. Craig Eiland (D-Galveston) and Robert Puente (D-San Antonio) claimed continuances in lawsuits that named them personally. Reps. Alonzo, Harold Dutton (D-Houston), Trey

Martinez Fischer (D-San Antonio), and Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio) claimed continuances in cases naming apparent family members as defendants.

[Link to full report](#)

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**Texans for Public Justice** is a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that tracks the role of money in Texas politics.