

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**NOTICE OF PENALTIES INCURRED AND DUE
FOR VIOLATIONS OF LAWS AND RULES**

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: TV-230252
PENALTY AMOUNT: \$200

Mendez Movers LLC
503 S 3rd Ave.
Yakima, WA 98902

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes Mendez Movers LLC (Mendez Movers or Company) violated Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 480-15-555, Criminal Background Checks for Prospective Employees.

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 81.04.405 allows penalties of \$100 for each violation. In the case of an ongoing violation, every day's continuance is considered a separate and distinct violation.

On April 17, 2023, Commission Motor Carrier Investigator Sandra Yeomans completed a follow-up safety investigation of Mendez Movers and documented the following violations:

- **Two violations of WAC 480-15-555 – Failure to complete a criminal background check for every person the carrier intends to hire.** Mendez Movers failed to conduct a criminal background check prior to hiring employees Pablo Gil and Jose Mata.

The Commission considered the following factors in determining the appropriate penalties for these violations:

1. **How serious or harmful the violations are to the public.** The violations noted are serious and potentially harmful to the public. Household goods moving companies that fail to conduct criminal background checks on their employees put their customers, their customers' belongings, and the traveling public at risk. These violations present significant safety concerns.
2. **Whether the violations were intentional.** Considerations include:
 - Whether the Company ignored Commission staff's (Staff) previous technical assistance; and
 - Whether there is clear evidence through documentation or other means that shows the Company knew of and failed to correct the violation.

On November 7, 2018, the Commission received the Company's application for household goods moving authority. In the application, Noe Mendez, owner of Mendez Movers, acknowledged the Company's responsibility to understand and comply with applicable motor carrier safety laws and regulations.

On June 12, 2019, Noe Mendez attended household goods training provided by Staff and acknowledged receiving training pertaining to motor carrier safety regulations.

On January 10, 2022, Staff completed a routine safety investigation of Mendez Movers and provided technical assistance to the Company. The Company knew or should have known about these requirements.

3. **Whether the Company self-reported the violations.** Mendez Movers did not self-report these violations.
4. **Whether the Company was cooperative and responsive.** The Company was cooperative throughout the safety investigation and corrected violations identified by Staff.
5. **Whether the Company promptly corrected the violations and remedied the impacts.** Mendez Movers provided Staff with evidence that it corrected the violations of WAC 480-15-555. The Company conducted criminal background checks for both employees.
6. **The number of violations.** Staff identified 10 violation types with a total of 14 individual occurrences during its follow-up safety investigation of Mendez Movers. Of those violations, Staff identified one violation type with two individual occurrences that warrant penalties in accordance with the Commission's Enforcement Policy.
7. **The number of customers affected.** Mendez Movers reported traveling 34,337 miles in 2022. These safety violations presented a public safety risk.
8. **The likelihood of recurrence.** Staff provided technical assistance with specific remedies to help the Company assess how well its safety management controls support safe operations and how to begin improving its safety performance. Mendez Movers was cooperative during the safety investigation, made corrections, and expressed a desire to come into compliance with applicable safety regulations. Staff believes the likelihood of recurrence is low.
9. **The Company's past performance regarding compliance, violations, and penalties.** On January 21, 2022, the Commission issued a Notice of Intent to Cancel the Company's household goods moving permit in Docket TV-220034, following a safety investigation that resulted in a proposed unsatisfactory safety rating for Mendez Movers. On January 28, 2022, the Commission penalized Mendez Movers \$8,300 for safety violations of WAC 480-15-560 and WAC 480-15-570 in Docket TV-220035.

On February 25, 2022, the Commission entered Order 01 in consolidated Dockets TV-220034 and TV-220035, which approved the Company's safety management plan, upgraded the Company's safety rating to conditional, assessed a reduced penalty of \$4,300, and suspended a \$2,300 portion of the reduced penalty for a period of two years before being waived, subject to conditions. The Company paid the \$2,000 non-suspended portion of the penalty in full.

10. **The Company's existing compliance program.** Noe Mendez is responsible for the Company's safety compliance program.

11. **The size of the Company.** Mendez Movers employs four drivers and operates three commercial motor vehicles. The Company reported \$560,000 in gross revenue for 2022.

The Commission's Enforcement Policy provides that some Commission requirements are so fundamental to safe operations that the Commission will issue mandatory penalties for each occurrence of a first-time violation.¹ The Commission generally will assess penalties by violation category, rather than per occurrence, for first-time violations of those critical regulations that do not meet the requirements for mandatory penalties. The Commission will assess penalties for any equipment violation meeting the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's "out-of-service" criteria and for repeat violations of critical regulations, including each occurrence of a repeat violation.

The Commission has considered these factors and determined that it should penalize Mendez Movers \$200 (Penalty Assessment), calculated as follows:

- Two violations of WAC 480-15-555 – Failure to complete a criminal background check for every person the carrier intends to hire. The Commission assesses a penalty of \$100 for each occurrence of this critical violation, for a total of \$200.

This information, if proven at a hearing and not rebutted or explained, is sufficient to support the Penalty Assessment.

Your penalty is due and payable now. If you believe any or all the violations did not occur, you may deny committing the violation(s) and contest the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. Alternatively, if there is a reason for any or all the violations that you believe should excuse you from the penalty, you may ask for mitigation (reduction) of the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. The Commission will grant a request for hearing only if material issues of law or fact require consideration of evidence and resolution in a hearing. Any request to contest the violation(s) or for mitigation of the penalty must include a written statement of the reasons supporting that request. Failure to provide such a statement will result in denial of the request. *See* RCW 81.04.405.

If you properly present your request for a hearing and the Commission grants that request, the Commission will review the evidence supporting your dispute of the violation(s) or application for mitigation in a Brief Adjudicative Proceeding before an administrative law judge. The administrative law judge will consider the evidence and will notify you of their decision.

You must act within 15 days after receiving this notice to do one of the following:

- Pay the amount due.

¹ Docket A-120061 – Enforcement Policy of the Washington Utilities & Transportation Commission – Section V.

- Contest the occurrence of the violation(s).
- Admit the violations but request mitigation of the penalty amount.

Please indicate your selection on the enclosed form and submit it electronically through the Commission's web portal at <https://efiling.utc.wa.gov/Form> **within FIFTEEN (15) days** after you receive this Penalty Assessment.² If you are unable to use the web portal, you may submit it via email to records@utc.wa.gov. If you are unable to submit the form electronically, you may send a paper copy to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, PO Box 47250, Olympia, Washington 98504-7250.

If you wish to make a payment online, please use this link: [Make a Payment Now \(wa.gov\)](#).³

If you do not act within 15 days, the Commission may take additional enforcement action, including but not necessarily limited to suspending or revoking your certificate to provide regulated service, assessing additional penalties, or referring this matter to the Office of the Attorney General for collection.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective April 27, 2023.

/s/ Rayne Pearson
RAYNE PEARSON
Director, Administrative Law Division

² <https://efiling.utc.wa.gov/Form>.

³ <https://www.utc.wa.gov/documents-and-proceedings/online-payments/make-payment-now>

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT TV-230252

PLEASE NOTE: You must complete and sign this document and send it to the Commission within 15 days after you receive the Penalty Assessment. Use additional paper if needed.

I have read and understand RCW 9A.72.020 (printed below), which states that making false statements under oath is a class B felony. I am over the age of 18, am competent to testify to the matters set forth below and I have personal knowledge of those matters. I hereby make, under oath, the following statements.

- [] 1. **Payment of penalty.** I admit that the violations occurred.
 - [] Enclose \$200 in payment of the penalty.
 - OR [] Attest that I have paid the penalty in full through the Commission’s payment portal.

- [] 2. **Contest the violation(s).** I believe that the alleged violation(s) did not occur for the reasons I describe below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your contest here, your request will be denied**):
 - [] a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.
 - OR [] b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.

- [] 3. **Application for mitigation.** I admit the violations, but I believe that the penalty should be reduced for the reasons set out below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your application here, your request will be denied**):
 - [] a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.
 - OR [] b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing, including information I have presented on any attachments, is true and correct.

Dated: _____ [month/day/year], at _____ [city, state]

Name of Respondent (company) – please print

Signature of Applicant

RCW 9A.72.020 "Perjury in the first degree."

- (1) A person is guilty of perjury in the first degree if in any official proceeding he or she makes a materially false statement which he or she knows to be false under an oath required or authorized by law.
- (2) Knowledge of the materiality of the statement is not an element of this crime, and the actor's mistaken belief that his or her statement was not material is not a defense to a prosecution under this section.
- (3) Perjury in the first degree is a class B felony.