

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN OUR COMMUNITY

FACT SHEET

1. **FUNDED** Support sexual assault counselor training through a one-time \$50,000 appropriation.
 2. **PENDING BUDGET AMMENDMENT PROCESS** Add five full time positions to the Victim Services Division of the Austin Police Department to better meet the needs of sexual assault survivors through an annual appropriation of \$425,359.
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1. Counselor Training:

This item was introduced to the 2017 budget concept menu by Council Member Greg Casar and co-sponsored by Council Member Alison Alter.

This item would create a one-time allocation of \$50,000 to the APD budget to train local counselors within both the non-profit and private sectors to provide trauma counseling in exchange for their agreement to take on an appropriate number of pro-bono sexual assault clients who need these services.

In the last year, APD has acted to process sexual assault forensic evidence and to notify victims about sexual assault kit (SAK) testing results. However, the inadequate handling of evidence up to this point has resulted in months, years, and even decades of silence regarding a victim's sexual assault case. Therefore, many victims who have not had the opportunity to learn the outcome of the evidence need trauma-informed counseling services upon being contacted by APD with news of their results.

With the \$50,000 funding, the city can train between 25-50 counselors who can be added to APD's Victim Services referral list within a 12-month period.

Trainers would be certified by the Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing International Association (EMDRIA) (the estimated number of trained counselors is derived from the known range of \$1000 - \$1,500 for providing EMDRIA certified training¹). This approach has the added benefit of building community capacity beyond any one-time allocation to a specific city department or community-based organization.

Additional Victims' Services Counselors:

This item was introduced to the 2017 budget concept menu by Council Member Ann Kitchen.

This item would create an annual appropriation of \$363,600 to support the addition of five victims' services counselors for APD, in an effort to restore the 2006 cuts to this department.

Over the last 15 years, APD Victims Services has lost a total of 10 counselors. To date, only two full-time counselors and three temporary counselor positions have been added to the Division's state grants. Half (5) of the counselor positions have not been restored.² Operating with reduced staff has negatively impacted crime victims and law enforcement officers. With fewer positions, Victim Services has been forced to prioritize outreach to specific victim populations and high intensity cases. Currently, there are only three victims' services counselors assigned to work sex crimes, despite the fact that there are an average of 25-30 reported sexual assaults occurring in Austin every month.³

Value of APD Victims Services:

APD victim counselors are required to hold a master's degree in the mental health field AND have at least two years' experience in crisis and trauma. New counselor training takes approximately 2 months and includes two weeks with the Crisis Team.

The counselors work in tandem with sworn personnel, responding 24/7 to incidents involving homicide, robbery, domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and related criminal acts. On average, they provide over 22,500 direct services hours annually.⁴ Direct services hours include crisis intervention, counseling, and advocacy for the duration of the criminal justice process. Counselors provide information about crime victim rights and assistance with crime victim compensation. They also follow up with information and referrals to help victims, survivors and their families recover more quickly and completely from the effects of victimization.

Because sworn personnel training and continuing education does not typically incorporate the tools and skills needed to accomplish the services listed above, officers heavily rely on APD counselors. Crime victims immediately recognize APD counselors as their link to the criminal justice system, shelters, civil legal services, and counseling.

The most recent annual survey of law enforcement indicates that the biggest complaint with the Victim Services Division is the shortage of available counselors on the Crisis Response Team.⁵ The connection between counselor and victim, combined with the proficiency of the counselors in providing assistance for both primary and secondary victims, frees up time for sworn personnel to complete investigative duties and responsibilities within their specialty area.

The addition of each new victim counselor will provide direct services to between 350 – 400 victims, depending on area of assignment.⁶

If five new counselors were added to the division, three would be assigned to work sexual assault cases and two would be assigned to the Crisis Response Team.

As noted by the Austin Commission for Women in their recent recommendation to council, when our systems fail to serve victims of sexual assault with dignity and respect, we contribute to a culture where violence against women is tolerated. Austin has many dedicated individuals and organizations who are fiercely committed to improving our systems' responses to sexual assault, but we must all collectively do better by our beloved city and its residents.⁷

¹ Based on the training rates of Rick Levinson, Austin-based EMDRIA-Approved Basic Training Provider since 2005; <http://www.ricklevinson.com/fees-for-training.html>

² Information interview with Victims Services Manager of the Austin Police Department, Kachina A. Clark; August 2017.

³ As reported by Austin Police Department and Travis County Sheriff's Office for A Safe Place? Austin is no exception to the country's rape epidemic by Sarah Marlof, SEPT. 25, 2015

⁴ Information interview with Victims Services Manager of the Austin Police Department, Kachina A. Clark; August 2017.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Recommendation #20170809-003b by the Austin Commission for Women