



LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20180326-5a: Staff Position to Coordinate Homelessness Engagement and Education

Date: March 26, 2018

Subject: Staff Position to Coordinate Homelessness Engagement and Education

Motioned By:

Seconded By:

Recommendation

Hire and permanently fund a position within the Austin Public Library to coordinate the Austin Public Library's homelessness outreach and education programs to all patrons, including library staff; and also to liaise with members of the city, state and local organizations assisting people experiencing homelessness.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that the Austin City Council hire and permanently fund a position, preferably a licensed social worker, to coordinate the library's education, training, and engagement efforts supporting people experiencing homelessness.

Rationale:

Libraries have long played a role in assisting PEH. The American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights provides that "[a] person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." "Library Bill of Rights," American Library Association, June 30, 2006. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> (Accessed March 25, 2018)

The San Francisco Public Library was the first to hire a social worker in 2009; soon, other libraries in large urban areas followed suit, including at least two others in Texas – Dallas and Georgetown. These social workers have been instrumental in connecting those experiencing homelessness with vital city, health, and state services while also coordinating library staff training and patron education programs;

Leadership at the city level has identified resolving/mitigating homelessness as a major city-wide priority;

Austin Public Library has already piloted grant-funded programs to test approaches to programming to assist this population; currently a temporary graduate school intern provides navigation assistance at one public library branch with a large patron population who experience homelessness; using practicum students is a stop-gap solution and does not allow for building relationships with patrons, library staff, or city or local officials;

Austin Public Library staff have requested that a coordinator position be created to help the library increase its capacity to assist those experiencing homelessness; currently staff working on this project are juggling their main duties as well as trying to coordinate a collaborative effort to assist this population;

Austin Public Library staff desire training to create a library environment where all patrons, either housed or experiencing homelessness, will feel welcome to use their local library branch;

The Austin Public Library has served the needs of Austin's citizens experiencing homelessness for decades, and as Austin's population continues to grow, the library will need to evolve its approach to those experiencing homelessness. Public libraries are a primary source of information and refuge for persons experiencing homelessness. Libraries in large urban areas across the United States have proven that a dedicated and trained staff person can ensure that librarians and library staff around the City have the training, support and resources they need to serve these patrons and can support the work of the City of Austin in its mission to reduce homelessness.

In his remarks on the opening of the new Central Branch of the Austin Public Library, Mayor Steve Adler said that the library is a “cathedral of the future . . . nothing less than a holy place for. . . imagination and collaboration.” Our libraries can also be bridges to healing and hope.

Through grant-funded initiatives like My Library Keeps Me Healthy, Austin Public Library has gained valuable insight into how to approach programming and education to those experiencing homelessness; by funding a full-time library position dedicated to working on this issue, Austin Public Library staff will be able to ensure they are able to provide a welcoming, compassionate, attentive, and safe environment for all patrons of the Austin Public Library.

Vote

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Absent:

Attest: