



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN RECOMMENDATION 20200417-03C

Date: April 17, 2020

Subject: COVID-19 Responses for Women and Girls

Motioned By: Chair Rebecca Austen

Seconded By: Sarah Tober

Recommendation to Council

WHEREAS, the Commission for Women (“Commission”) of the City of Austin (“City”) serves as an advisory body to the City Council (“Council”) and City Manager concerning the needs and problems of women in the Austin area and shall recommend programs designed to alleviate any inequities that may confront women in social, economic and vocational pursuits; and

WHEREAS, the City has been responsive to the needs of the community regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, and Council passed Resolution No. 20200326-091 on March 26, 2020 to provide programs and resources to address the impact of the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the effects of the pandemic have amplified adverse impacts on women and girls due to shelter-in-place, job losses, school closures and other circumstances, including:

- Increased health and safety risks for women and children experiencing abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, sex trafficking and homelessness, with heightened risks for women and children of color, LGBTQ+, disabled, immigrant/refugee status, and foster care or runaway youth; abusers may become more predatory and violent as they experience economic pressures, isolation and stress; many organizations have reduced or eliminated services, resulting in fewer options for victims; in-person visits by advocates have been restricted or suspended, and virtual contact may not be safe or practical; victims are reluctant to contact law enforcement or medical providers for issues unrelated to COVID-19;
- Increased caregiving responsibilities due to closures of childcare facilities and schools, which disproportionately fall to women; the need for skills, equipment, internet access and time to teach children, often while working; caregiving for elderly, sick or disabled family members who are more vulnerable due to COVID-19;
- Loss of income and benefits due to pay cuts, layoffs and business closures, with greater impact for single mothers who are the sole providers for families (concentrated in lower

income and communities of color), and for women-owned businesses whose reduction or closure impacts employees and those who use the businesses' products or services;

- Increased physical and mental health risks for women and children as medical providers place priority on the needs of COVID patients; higher anxiety and depression due to isolation, stress, loss of income and caregiving burdens; gaps in ongoing care including contraception, well-woman exams, OBGYN, breastfeeding support, pediatric visits and care for chronic conditions; increased risk of maternal mortality, particularly for Black women who already experience maternal mortality at much higher rates; lack of access to abortion, which has been designated a nonessential medical procedure; lack of access to supplies for women, girls and babies including menstrual products, diapers and baby formula, which are costly and may be scarce; loss of health coverage and benefits;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Commission for Women recommends the following actions be taken by the City to support Austin women and families:

- Provide adequate safe shelter options and services that address the specific needs of women and children experiencing abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, sex trafficking and homelessness, in partnership with organizations that provide these programs and services; increase awareness of hotlines and related resources;
- Extend childcare support currently provided to essential workers to include non-essential workers, and include caregiving support for the elderly, sick and disabled;
- Ensure that economic remedies address the needs of single mothers and businesses owned by women and people of color;
- Provide free WIFI, technical support and devices as needed throughout the City to support working and schooling from home, and to ensure that all citizens have access to online resources for their health, safety and livelihoods;
- Provide delivery options for supplies such as menstrual products, diapers and formula, in addition to drive-through and depot solutions; provide dedicated shopping hours and delivery for Women, Infants, Children (WIC) program participants, and ensure availability of the nutritious foods included in the program, so that those supplies are not depleted by other shoppers;
- Advocate for access to abortion and Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) as essential medical procedures;
- Address the disparities experienced by women and children of color, LGBTQ+, disabled, immigrants and refugees, and other disadvantaged or vulnerable populations; provide targeted relief and support for nonprofit and community organizations, many of whom serve these populations directly and are experiencing significant financial and resource challenges; ensure that COVID-19 testing is accessible and performed equitably for these populations.

Date of Approval: April 17, 2020

Record of the vote: Unanimous on an 8-0 vote, with one commissioner absent, and two districts vacant.

Attest: *April E. Shaw*
April Shaw, Staff Liaison