



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Hispanic Quality of Life Commission

Recommendation Number (20210310-5a): Urgent Social Service Response for individuals and families most affected by COVID-19

Whereas, The City of Austin, Travis County, and the State of Texas issued disaster declarations relative to each jurisdiction in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in order to protect public health; and

Whereas, necessary measures taken by the City of Austin to control the spread of COVID-19 in alignment with recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) have resulted in closed schools, limited public interactions, and resulted in an unprecedented number of Austin residents facing unemployment or underemployment; and

Whereas, the mission statement in the City of Austin’s Strategic Direction 2023 highlights the values of economic opportunity and equity, which are emphasized through different outcomes, anchors, indicators and strategies that guide the City’s priorities and governance; and

Whereas, the City of Austin has received significant federal relief funds for use in responding to the public health emergency with respect to COVID-19 relief such as emergency financial assistance to individuals and families directly impacted by the loss of income due to COVID-19 public health emergency, which those individuals and families may use for housing assistance and food assistance; and

Whereas, many City of Austin residents were excluded from federal stimulus relief pertaining to COVID-19 along with expanded unemployment benefits; and

Whereas, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) has announced that testing, prevention, or treatment for COVID-19 will not be used against immigrants in a public charge test; and

Whereas, Travis county evictions filings show a significant upward trend in all five precincts for the time periods of 2016 to 2019 and with evidence showing a strong link between eviction moratoriums being lifted to an increase in COVID-19 cases and COVID-19 deaths; and

Whereas, Travis Court Moratoriums, Travis County and City of Austin Notice to Vacate Prohibitions, CDC Federal moratoriums and CARES Act provide only stop gap frameworks and no direct solution to housing payments for Austin families most in need under COVID-19; and

Whereas, Tenant Stabilizations programs such as RENT Assistance by Housing and Planning Department with the City of Austin have only served 3,530 total households for an average of 2.9

months on assistance and have shown to be inadequately funded in relation to the current need in Austin; and

Whereas, housing and food needs constitute basic social and human rights. And

Whereas, community safety and wellbeing under COVID-19 is directly related to access to resources and social services. Programming and services should prioritize communities most affected by institutional violence and racism; and

Whereas, vaccination for COVID-19 continue to show systemic inequities affecting communities of color in Austin; and

Whereas, urgent responses are need to provide extended relief to individuals/families experiencing grief and hardships brought forth by COVID-19

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HISPANIC/LATINO QUALITY OF LIFE RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMISSION:

The Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission urgently advocates for the City Manager and Council Members to negotiate and execute contracts with service providers that offer direct assistance to members of underserved communities most impacted by COVID-19. These services should address basic human needs via direct assistance and focus on low-income community members in the City of Austin.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: All service providers contracted must show evidence of a high direct investment value per individuals/families. Programing and operations must show low operating overhead and expedited service delivery; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Universal basic income, guaranteed income and/or other form of regular payments should be examined, piloted, and explored with individuals/families in most need due to chronic circumstances.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Direct cash transfers must be considered as form of direct investment to allow individual/family flexibility to financially stabilize due to the impact of COVID-19 and eliminate multi-agency engagement; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Assistance programs should address language, technology, transportation, and other commonly known barriers in Austin to provide quick access and client-centered support. All programs and initiatives should focus on marginalized communities and individuals with the most need under the COVID-19 Pandemic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Direct investments to underinvested communities and reallocation of funds should be an integral part of re-structuring and re-imagining public safety frameworks currently happening within the City of Austin.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Community Hubs should be created and fully funded to serve their communities in cooperation with grassroots organizations working in those neighborhoods.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: In addition to cash transfers, direct relief services should include address:

- Food Access
- Rental or mortgage assistance, such as direct tenant support and education
- Utility Assistance
- Childcare Assistance, such as technology for remote learning, baby formula, diaper and other child-related expenses;
- Medical expenses, such as co-pays, insurance premiums, medication costs and other health related expenses;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: This investment should prioritize Austin Residents who meet all of the following criteria:

- Meet definition of indigent as set forth in this recommendation
- Do not qualify for unemployment insurance benefits;
- Did not qualify for a federal stimulus check; and
- Residents of City of Austin

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the City Manager and Austin City Council should explore all avenues to direct federal, state, and local (public and private) funding to direct investments for individuals/families most affected by COVID-19;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the City Manager and the Austin City Council should reassign, rename, and redirect funding in accordance to the extraordinary and urgent need for social services brought forth by COVID-19; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the City Manager and the Austin City Council should create a scalable direct cash transfers model and direct relief services based on Federal, State, and local assistance models used in other cities. Legal language and evidence-based programming should be replicated as soon possible in accordance to local jurisdiction and emerging needs. This should be studied, piloted, and launched by Summer of 2021 to mitigate the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on Austin residents.

Date of Approval: March 10, 2021

Record of the vote: (Unanimous on a 7-0 vote)

Attest: 
(Staff liaison)