



**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION  
MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING  
February 7, 2022**

**The Public Safety Commission convened a hybrid in person and videoconferencing meeting Monday, February 7, 2022 at City Hall 301 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Austin, Texas.**

**Commissioner Rebecca Gonzalez** called the Board Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Kathleen Hausenfluck  
Nelly Ramirez  
Amanda Lewis  
Rocky Lane  
Cory Hall-Martin

Michael Sierra-Arevalo  
John Kiracofe  
Rebecca Bernhardt  
Rebecca Webber

**Board Members Absent:** Queen Austin

**Staff in Attendance:**

Robin Henderson, Assistant Chief, Austin Police Department  
Teresa Gardner, Assistant Chief, Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services  
Rob Vires, Chief of Staff, Austin Fire Department

**Citizen Communications** - Citizens signed up to speak: none

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – This will occur at the March meeting for both the January and February minutes.

**2. OLD BUSINESS**

**a. TX SB69 from 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session -Vote on Recommendation for Council Action**  
Sponsored by Commissioner Gonzales and Webber 4:02pm-4:06pm

In the recommendation, Chair Gonzales is asking APD to create a policy that requires the reporting of whether use of force was prevented and if it took place. They also asked for a non-retaliation policy to ensure self-reporting. Commissioner Sierra-Arevalo asked for clarity on what was up for a vote. Chair Gonzales explained three points: if there is intervention and use of force still happens, if there is intervention and use of force is prevented, and a training plan for the officer who was

impacted by the intervention, such as further de-escalation. No further questions. Recommendation passed on unanimous vote.

### **3. NEW BUSINESS**

**a. Public Safety Organizations Quarterly Report – Austin Police Department** (sponsors: Commissioner Hausenfluck and Gonzales) *4:07pm-4:50pm*

**Speaker(s):**

-Chief Henderson, Austin Police Department

Chief Henderson, joined by Dr. Jonathan Kringen, presented on the APD quarterly report. Dr. Kringen presented on Citywide Crimes Against Persons between 2020 and 2021. There was an overall negligent reduction in crime. Aggravated assault has had a meaningful increase. For Crimes Against Property, for the same time period, there has been a meaningful increase in theft of car parts. Overall, a small reduction in crimes. Crimes Against Society, for the same time period, shows a reduction in drug violations, possibly due to cite and arrest. However, weapons violations has significantly increased. He explained clearance rates are hard to capture, as a crime committed in one month may be carried forward to a different month. Or they may have cleared an incident, but are still investigating other elements of the incident. The clearance rates are based on what is required to report to DPS by state law. APD may also work on developing their own metrics for the public. Commissioner Sierra-Arevalo asked about showing rates vs. frequency. Dr. Kringen stated that APD needs to do some self-study, but does anticipate that APD will present data as rates and ratios in the near future. Commissioner Bernhardt expressed she was interested in equity in clearance rates, and clearance rates in sexual assault. Dr. Kringen explained that he has concerns in misinformation and being cautious about what numbers are presented. He agreed that measuring equity was important and aware of the challenges and nuances in presenting information in an accurate way. He expects a lot of progress in the next 6-9 months. Commissioner Hausenfluck asked if there were any initiatives that occurred in 2021 that impacted crime classes. Dr. Kringen explained that COVID has had significant impacts on crime – there have been changes in activity. We see an overall reduction, but it's questionable that likelihoods have gone up. COVID has also possibly affected offending patterns. The exploratory initial evidence suggests there is a possible link between some crime categories and staffing levels. Commissioner Ramirez asked about timeline and whether there was a defined project. Dr. Kringen responded that there was not an actual project. The Research and Planning Unit is about 60% understaffed, and currently consists of two people that reports to an entirely different unit. It is not a formal project because there are no resources. Commissioner Lewis asked if challenges (especially around sexual assault reporting) are related to a technology or with who's gathering the data, and expressed a need to discuss relevant data points with the community. It would be helpful to understand by case, and not by yearly stat. Dr. Kringen agreed that a likely metric would be median number of days until a case closes. There are a number of metrics that would be very useful to understand what's actually going on. Technology and data issues are endemic in policing. More than just the technology and the data system, you need talented individuals to break it down. It is very hard to hire IT personnel in Austin, with so much private competition. Dr. Kringen absorbed the Business Technology team under his supervision, to try to address this. Slow response times are directly related to staffing challenges. Currently, there are 1809 authorized positions, with 193 vacancies.

**b. Discussion on 911 Call Center and Forensics Lab under Austin Police Department** (sponsors: Commissioners Bernhardt and Ramirez) *4:51pm-5:17pm*

**Speaker(s):**

- ACM Ray Arellano
- Lt. Kenneth Murphy, APD 911/Communications Center
- Dana Kadavy, Director, APD Forensics Lab
- Kathy Mitchell, Community Advocate, Just Liberty Organization
- Jennifer Laurin, U.T. Law Professor

**Commissioner Bernhardt** wanted to explore why it's problematic to move the 911 Call Center and Forensic Lab back under APD and how these units can be possibly removed again. ACM Arellano stated that in 2021 these units were separated out based on Council decision. Subsequently the State Legislature passed SB1900, replacing them under APD. It is the plan to separate out Forensic Science in the 2023 budget. For operational and administrative purposes, Dr. Kadavy currently reports to the ACM over public safety and to the Police Chief for CEGIS compliance. Commissioner Bernhardt asked how possible it would be to move the Forensics Lab back out next year. ACM Arellano stated it was anticipated. Kathy Mitchell stated that the Forensics Lab should be separated out from APD as it should be independent from the police, to avoid personal, context, and confirmation bias. Lab management can advocate for budget needs more effectively, and to ensure the best quality control methods. Jennifer Laurin stated that the hallmark of a high functioning forensic lab is independence, which is necessary to achieve certain ends (fair analysis, consistent, scientifically rooted culture, adequate and stable budgets). Separating the lab also better serves transparency needs. ACM Arellano stated that it is likely that the 911 Call Center will remain within APD to get more information on cost and technical needs. Commissioner Bernhardt does want to write a recommendation about the Forensic Lab. Kathy Mitchell agreed with the City Manager that moving out the call center would be very expensive and difficult.

**c. Discussion on Processing Emergency & Non-Emergency Calls received by Austin 311**  
(sponsors: Commissioners Kiracofe and Ramirez) 5:17pm -5:37pm

- Lt. Kenneth Murphy, Austin Police Department, 911/Communications Center
- Patty Martinez, Representative from Austin 311

**Commissioner Kiracofe** wanted education on 911 vs 311, especially after an armed robbery that occurred last year that had a slow response time. Lt. Ken Murphy stated that APD, AFD, EMS, TCSO all use the same 911 and computer dispatch systems. APD is the primary answering points for all 911 in city limits, and TCSO is the primary answering points for calls outside of city limits but in Travis County. AFD and EMS do not answer 911 calls. If AFD or EMS are requested, they are conferenced in. 311 is managed by Austin Energy at a different site. They take non-emergency calls for all city departments. Patty Martinez, on behalf of 311, explained these are informational calls and general service calls. These calls are then transferred digitally to the corresponding department. Lt. Murphy stated that pre-COVID, 911 dispatchers were cross-trained to answer these non-emergency requests. Since then, staffing has suffered (46 true vacancies of 180 operators). In May, Lt. Murphy began to employ light duty officers, and in August, admin staff. With this set-up, calls are backed up multiple days. Online reporting has significantly increased, but that also requires staff to transcribe. They have identified a solution – which is allowing people to call in and make a report with an AI, or use an app or use a desktop. This will not require transcription. They are hoping to have this in place in 100 days. This also increases language access (16 languages). 911 operators will call back if necessary. However, more calls and less staff is putting a significant strain

on the unit and call answer times. Commissioner Ramirez asked if moving APD non-emergency calls into 311 has had an impact on them. Patty responded that they have been able to handle the calls, and haven't seen a significant increase.

**4. Future Agenda Items 5:37-5:45pm**

Budget review for all three public safety departments due March 7

Comparison of diversity numbers of staff for public safety departments (gender, ethnicity, background)

Terms of the settlement between sexual assault survivors and the City of Austin

Staffing issues on the civilian side of APD and all divisions

Presentation from Office of Civil Rights on public safety

Sexual Assault evaluation coming back – update

Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce recommendations – revisit, continue conversation on public safety outside of policing

Introduction of new EMS Chief (or update)

**Adjourn @ 5:46 pm**