



**COMMISSION FOR WOMEN RECOMMENDATION 20220302-02d: Public Safety  
Recommendations**

Date: March 2, 2022

Subject: Public Safety

Motioned By: Rebecca Austen

Seconded By: Juliana Gonzales

**Recommendation to Council**

WHEREAS, the Commission for Women (“Commission”) of the City of Austin (“City”) serves as an advisory body that advocates for and inspires the City Council (“Council”) and City Manager to prioritize women’s quality of life, so that Austin becomes the most equitable city in the nation for women and girls; and

WHEREAS, sexual violence is an issue that disproportionately impacts female-identifying individuals, and women and girls are particularly vulnerable to and impacted by sexual violence; and

WHEREAS, survivors of sexual violence face many barriers to accessing resources and safety, including fear of criminal justice systems, the lack of a financial safety net, religious and cultural barriers, fear of deportation, lack of awareness or knowledge of the legal system, lack of adequate childcare services, and lack of low-cost housing options; and

WHEREAS, as proven by both national and state data, sexual assault is still vastly under-reported, under-investigated by law enforcement, and under-prosecuted; and

WHEREAS, sexual assault survivors benefit from and are entitled to wraparound services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, and it is widely understood that access to resources such as counseling, legal services, housing, and basic needs improves outcomes for survivors including healing and recovery, as well as enables them to participate in the investigation and prosecution of their case should they wish to; and

WHEREAS, in the 2021 Mid-Year Recommendations Report, the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force called for resources earmarked for victims/survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking, regardless of law enforcement reporting and/or cooperation; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has made an ongoing commitment to survivors of sexual assault to ensure that their cases are handled appropriately and that they receive the support and resources they need; and

WHEREAS, on January 28, 2022, the City of Austin settled a lawsuit with sexual assault survivors, in which the City publicly committed to ensuring that in the future, survivors of sexual assault who come forward are treated seriously, are communicated with effectively, and will have their claims investigated thoroughly; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has invested significant resources into an independent evaluation of the Austin Police Department's handling of reported sexual assaults over 9 years; and

WHEREAS, the *Austin/Travis County Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team Community Needs Assessment* found that among professionals including law enforcement in the sexual assault response system, training on trauma-informed practices was both the most requested training, and agencies should immediately implement mandatory training on sexual assault dynamics, trauma-informed responses, forensic exams, lab reports, and investigation/prosecution strategies for all personnel investigating and prosecuting sexual assault; and

WHEREAS, the CRASH (Coordinated Response to Abuse for Safe Homes) unit within the Austin Police Department provides a rapid response for victims of domestic violence and stalking; the CRASH unit installs cameras at the City's expense to protect the safety of victims and capture criminal evidence; the supply of cameras is limited and is not sufficient to meet requests from victims; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin Commission for Women has passed recommendations on dedicating resources and systems improvement for survivors of sexual violence, including eliminating the rape kit backlog and addressing the DNA lab closure (20160810-003a), the hiring of the City Manager and Chief of Police 20161219-003a), victim services recommendations (20170809-003b), comprehensive evaluation of sexual assault (20190109-04f), COVID-19 Responses for Women and Girls (20200417-03C), Hotel Safety Net for Survivors (20210203-04b), and the appointment of the APD Chief (20210303-02b),

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Commission for Women recommends for the FY2022-2023 budget:

- Austin Police Department Victim Services receive funding to continue the five full-time positions currently funded by the FY17 and FY18 SAKI (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative) grant, which ends Sept 2022:
  - SARRT Coordinator, housed at Austin Police Department
  - 2 Sexual Assault Victim Advocates/Counselors, housed at SAFE Alliance
  - Sexual Assault Victim Navigator, housed at Travis County District Attorney's Office
  - Forensic Nursing Program Administrative Coordinator, housed at SAFE Alliance

- The City of Austin allocate \$329,300 to implement the Reimagining Public Safety SSVVP Work Group recommendation related to expanding funding for community emergency financial assistance programs.
  - This funding should be contracted to grassroots, community-based organizations rather than administered out of Austin Police Department, so as to increase access for all survivors including those who do not report. Organizations that serve culturally-specific populations and missions, such as organizations focused on serving BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals, should be prioritized.
  - Agencies and community partners will be able to access the funds through Victim Services.
  - The funds can be used to quickly provide healing and safety resources to victims/survivors of violence (similar to Bridge to Safety). Funds could be used for things like housing application fees, one-time rent or deposits, hotel stays, transportation to any shelter in the US where person wants to relocate, security, cell phone, gas cards, bus tickets, ID, childcare, education, employment assistance, translation, legal assistance, medical and dental care, or plane fare. Police reports or criminal justice involvement would not be required to access funds. A certain portion of the funds would be reserved for those most marginalized.
- The City of Austin fund outside civilian trainers with expertise in trauma and trauma-informed investigation for law enforcement officers, to provide such training to police cadets as part of the academy.
- The City of Austin fund 15 cameras at an estimated expense of \$2250 for the APD CRASH unit to support and protect victims of domestic violence and stalking.
- The City of Austin ensure that survivor-centric resources, systems and accountability are in place to address cases of police misconduct where APD employees are perpetrators of sexual violence.
- The City of Austin invest in a data collection system that facilitates the evaluation of our police force’s efficiency and equity in the community, and that will assist the Sexual Assault Resource and Response Team’s obligation to produce data biennially under Texas 87 (R) SB 476.

Date of Approval: March 2, 2022

Record of the vote: Unanimous on a 7-0 vote, with two commissioners absent.

Attest: Jonathan Babiak  
Jonathan Babiak, Staff Liaison