



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION
RECOMMENDATION

Date: May 2, 2022

Subject: Proposal that the Austin City Council pay the Austin EMS Equitably with Public Safety Unions

Motioned by: Rebecca Bernhardt

Seconded by: Rebecca Webber

Recommendation: The Public Safety Commission recommends that the City Council direct the City Manager's Office to prioritize negotiations with the Austin EMS Association and offer substantial additional compensation as part of the union contract, in line with the cost of living in Austin, the compensation of credentialed staff with comparable workloads at Texas EMS agencies, and the compensation of sworn staff of the Austin Police Department and Austin Fire Department.

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has become synonymous with the housing crisis facing the United States and has become the least affordable housing market outside of California, surpassing notoriously expensive cities including Boston, Miami and New York City for cost of housing;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has a long-time commitment to supporting a living wage; yet, the current living wage of \$15.00 per hour was established in 2018 and is outdated. The City of Austin's Living Wage Working Group, which includes representatives from the City's Department of Human Resources, has recommended a living wage of \$22.00 per hour for 2022;

WHEREAS, 26.4 percent of EMS sworn staff are considered low-income. Single parents will not stop being low-income until they reach 11 years of service with EMS if they have one child, 17 years of service if they have two children;

WHEREAS, a great deal is made of the police labor shortage, the Austin EMS labor shortage is more severe. Austin EMS is currently operating at 75.3 percent of authorized sworn capacity. Austin EMS has lost 26 experienced medics to attrition so far during calendar year 2022; in all of calendar year 2019, Austin EMS lost 28 experienced medics to attrition;

WHEREAS, Austin EMS cannot effectively recruit new sworn staff because of substandard wages. Although authorized for 30 medics, the December 2021 EMS Academy was only able to recruit 18 cadets. The March 2022 EMS Academy was able to recruit 17 cadets. At this rate, Austin EMS will be unable to fill its vacancies and Austin EMS will remain structurally understaffed and become increasingly understaffed into the foreseeable future, creating an increasing public safety crisis for city emergency health services;

WHEREAS, Austin EMS has performed valiantly and faced unprecedented risks during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before vaccines were available, EMS staff died of Covid-19 infections nationally at a rate of 14 per 100,000 persons; this was a higher fatality rate than that suffered by fire fighters, police officers, nurses or physicians;

WHEREAS, one of the justifications for compensating police and fire fighters at a higher rate than EMS, that police and fire fighters face substantially higher risks of injury and death on the job, has never been accurate. Historically, EMS workers die at a rate of 12.7 fatalities per 100,000, police at a rate of 14.2 per 100,000 and fire fighters at a rate of 16.5 per 100,000;

WHEREAS Austin paramedics have increased their responsibilities in the last three years through opioid epidemic response; homelessness response; mental health response; advanced clinical practice including whole blood in the field, finger thoracostomies; in addition to COVID-19 response;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin's current proposal to pay entry level paramedics at a rate of \$19.76 per hour is inadequate to meet recruitment goals, support diversification of EMS departmental ranks or support human beings trying to live in the Austin area in 2022;

WHEREAS, entry-level pay for paramedics for the Cy-Fair Fire Department is \$27.27 per hour, although the cost of living is 11 percent higher in the Austin area; Austin EMS pay should be competitive with other EMT-B jobs in the local Austin area. Many companies including Tesla and Amazon are currently hiring EMT-Bs for \$25/hour; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RECOMMENDED BY THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN THAT:

- Austin City Council direct the City Manager's Office to prioritize negotiations with the Austin EMS Association and offer substantial higher compensation, in line with the cost of living in Austin, the compensation of credentialed staff with comparable workloads at EMS agencies for similar municipalities nationwide, and the compensation of sworn staff of the Austin Police Department and Austin Fire Department.

Vote:

For: Commissioners Ramirez, Bernhardt, Lane, Webber, Hausenfluck, Hall-Martin, Sierra-Arevalo,

Against:

Abstain: Commissioner Lewis

Absent: Commissioners John Kiracofe, Queen Enyioha Austin, and Rebecca Gonzales

Attest: *[Staff or board member can sign]*


