



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**FROM:** Jason Alexander, Chief of Staff

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JA", is placed over the "FROM:" line.

**DATE:** November 16, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Staff Response to Resolution No. 20211104-064 – Response to Hate

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a response to [Resolution No. 20211104-064](#) which directed the City Manager to collaborate with local community groups to identify and implement improvements to the City's response to hate. This memorandum further addresses questions posed by the community group ATXKind in an email to the City Manager sent in February 2022. Since early 2022, City staff have met regularly with representatives of ATXKind to collaborate on and address the action items set forth in the resolution.

The resolution calls for the City to strengthen its efforts to protect residents and victims of hate, and to prosecute and curb hate acts in partnership with nonprofit organizations, other governmental organizations, and area education partners. The resolution also calls for the City to research best practices from peer cities and then identify and implement improvements to the City's response to hate including training that educates in how hate manifests, how to effectively respond to incidents of hate, and how social media is used to propagate hate.

An update [memorandum](#) from the City's Equity Office identified the following three overarching themes related to best practices in peer cities:

1. Quick and decisive action from elected officials through resolutions, media statements, and/or allocation of resources for education, sub-departments, and coalitions;
2. Community and City-driven narrative-making that Jewish communities belong here through media statements, advertising, education, or public rallies; and
3. Understanding, prioritizing, and adopting shared language to identify anti-Semitic hate speech.

These best practices are being incorporated in staff's response to the resolution.

### Reporting a Hate Crime or Incident

A key concern expressed by individuals and organizations who are the target of hate crimes and incidents, including ATXKind, is confusion regarding reporting practices. As a starting point, staff worked to clarify and communicate the difference between a hate crime and hate incident, confirmed that all hate crimes and incidences reported to the City should be documented in the Austin Police Department's (APD) [iReport](#) system, and then made process improvements to capture and share information. APD updated the [Understanding Hate Crimes](#) webpage to share information about hate crimes and incidents and outline the reporting process.

For all emergency situations, including those involving a hate crime where a person or property is in imminent danger, individuals should call 9-1-1 for police assistance. For non-emergency situations, two primary options are available: 1) file a police report directly with the Austin Police Department using the online iReport system, or 2) contact Austin 3-1-1 which serves as the single point of contact for all non-emergency concerns for the City of Austin and will result in a follow-up call from an APD representative. The following improvements have been made to reduce confusion among victims of hate crimes and incidences, and capture more complete information:

**Asking More Specific Questions of Callers.** In August 2022, Austin 3-1-1 updated its Ambassador's script to include the question, *"Do you believe the accused selected you based on their bias or prejudice against your race, color, disability, religion, national origin or ancestry, age, gender, or sexual preference?"* Responses to this question are collected in the service request that is sent to APD for review and follow-up.

**Reporting Process.** APD is working with a vendor to make improvements to the reporting process which would improve a resident's experience when they file a police report. APD anticipates launching the new reporting system in late Spring 2023. In the meantime, staff reviewed concerns shared by ATXKind that 3-1-1 service request closure messages were causing confusion by recipients who had reported hate incidents. To address this concern, beginning in early November 2022, Austin 3-1-1 modified the standard auto-generated email message to indicate the service request is closed within the Austin 3-1-1 system, and added the following text to the email responses of APD non-emergency requests; *"If a police report was created, Austin Police Department will provide the report case number."*

As background, Austin 3-1-1 enters non-emergency service requests on behalf of APD, which are electronically sent to appropriate APD units based on the type of incident. The receiving APD unit is responsible for closing the Austin 3-1-1 service request after review and follow up, which may include investigation, filing a police report, and further action from APD. If a police report is created, it is separate and unique from the Austin 3-1-1 Service Request number.

Austin 3-1-1's Service Request number and the subsequent APD Police Report Number are different and managed in different systems. When APD receives a Customer Service Request from Austin 3-1-1, an APD representative returns the call to assist in filing a police report, if appropriate. When APD returns the call, the recipient's caller ID indicates an "unknown number" is calling which may prevent some individuals from answering the call. The APD representative will leave a detailed message indicating the purpose of the call and that a follow up call will be made. The representative further explains that a callback number is not available, and it is important for the caller to answer the follow up call. If the APD representative is unable to reach the caller a second time, the representative leaves a detailed message explaining that the service request will be closed, and the caller must start the process again or file a police report directly using the online iReport system. APD will only close the 3-1-1 Service Request after two unsuccessful attempts to contact the caller.

Under the current process, callers may be frustrated, believing that their call is not being taken seriously or closed without further review. APD shares this frustration and is working diligently to improve the callers' experience. The new reporting system is being designed to streamline the process by populating and filing a police report directly with APD based on information provided by the caller and issue a corresponding police report number for further review by the department.

**Hate Crimes Email Address.** APD established an email address, [APDHateCrimes@austintexas.gov](mailto:APDHateCrimes@austintexas.gov), prior to Council's resolution and staff's work with ATXKind. APD Victim Services unit is responsible for checking and responding to the hate crimes email address. The email address has been advertised by some community groups as a way to file a report but is now primarily intended as an option for people to ask questions, learn more about the process, and get victim services assistance. Since the email account is only checked during regular business

hours and reporting crimes and incidents has been streamlined through the iReport system, staff's next step is to update the auto-reply message to provide information about how to report a hate crime or incident, and how to access victim services resources.

**iReport Improvements.** In 2022, APD and 3-1-1 began encouraging residents to use the online iReport system if they wished to report non-emergency crimes and incidents directly to APD. Key improvements to the iReport system include:

- Adding new language that encourages and guides people reporting both hate crimes and incidents:
  - *"If you believe you were the victim of an incident but are unsure if it rises to the level of criminal conduct, please proceed with submitting a police report."*
  - *"If you believe you were a victim of a hate crime, click Submit a Report, then click the offense that best applies. During the sequence of questions, you will be asked if you believe you were a victim of a hate crime and why you feel you were."*
- Editing previous language that may have unintentionally deterred people from filing a report.
  - Previous language: *"Filing a false police report is a crime!"*
  - Updated language: *"Intentionally filing a false police report for personal gain or harassment of another can lead to prosecution."*

APD, in partnership with the Communications & Public Information Office (CPIO), will continue to evaluate the [Understanding Hate Crimes](#) webpage and the iReport system for opportunities to improve content and guidance language.

## Communications and Campaign

### Common Language

The City is committed to working with other local government entities and partners to reinforce shared language around hate and bias motivated incidents and crimes. After the City completes remaining internal updates, CPIO will reach out to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to facilitate updates to the Austin/Travis County Hate Crimes Task Force webpage and ensure messaging is consistent among community partners. Additionally, ADL established a working group to discuss other ways to capture incident reports, especially among those not interested in reporting to law enforcement. APD attended the first working group meeting on November 4, 2022 and the group intends to meet again in early December.

### Public Campaign

The City Council approved funding for an Anti-Hate education campaign. CPIO is building the framework for an education and outreach campaign focused on achieving two priority goals:

- A community well informed of tools and resources to report hate crime and incidents; and
- Fostering a community culture grounded in inclusivity and standing against hate in all forms.

CPIO is connecting with partner departments such as the Equity Office, Austin Public Health's Office of Violence Prevention, APD, and Office of Civil Rights. After meeting internally with staff, CPIO will identify and reach out to a diverse mix of community stakeholders, including ATXKind, to explore campaign collaboration opportunities, obtain feedback on the best platform methods to equitably ensure residents are heard, and identify how key stakeholders can play a role as trusted influencers/message amplifiers.

Additionally, as part of the comprehensive plan, CPIO is working to identify reliable tools and resources to capture public sentiment regarding hate culture/climate in Austin as well as perceived trust and safety to identify trends or themes not captured in report filing data. An implementation timeline will be developed as these steps progress.

## Public Access to Information

Public access to information on hate crimes and hate/bias motivated reports is in line with the City's value for transparency. APD shares relevant information on the [Open Data Portal](#) for incidents that have been selected by the hate crimes committee. The open data portal is updated monthly and organized by calendar year. Additionally, APD has provided the District Attorney (DA) with APD hate crimes data from January through September 2022 and will continue sharing data monthly. The DA's office has agreed to combine the City's information with other sources and regularly publish the combined data. For the City to include incidents not reviewed by the Hate Crimes Committee, APD needs to develop a new internal process. APD is prepared to work with the District Attorney's Office to define queries that are similar to other data sets the DA uses in the development of combined reports.

## Training

ATXKind requested planned, proactive training designed to ensure law enforcement and key City officials are informed of best practices for quelling hate activities and for interacting with bias motivated groups. APD begins sworn staff training with cadets in the Academy and provides continuing education for the force that adheres to Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) standards and is tailored to the needs of the local community. Relevant education from recent Academy training is outlined below:

Cadets of the 145th were provided two hours of instruction from the ADL *Introduction to Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement Professionals*, in addition to the TCOLE mandated and APD supplemented sections *Multiculturalism and Human Relations* that pertain to hate crimes. This is an eight-hour course supplemented with two hours of community engagement in small group discussions covering the material. As part of the Academy's Community Connect program, cadets traveled to Houston on September 19, 2022, for a guided tour of the Holocaust Museum. ADL sponsored the trip and discussed hate crime prevention and the role of law enforcement throughout the ten-hour day.

Other training blocks such as LGBTQ+ curriculum (2 hours), *Multiculturalism and Human Relations* (8 hours), and *Interacting with Transgender Individuals* (2 hours) all include discussions of and training on hate crimes. Hate crimes training has increased incrementally from at least the 138th cadet class in 2017 to present. Classes have been revamped to have more emphasis and focus with the 145th having the most focus on hate crimes as a topic with community engagement training supplements.

While much of the formal material is dictated by ongoing mandatory training requirements from TCOLE, the Academy has increased focus and time spent on the topic of hate crimes based on feedback from community partners. *Multiculturalism and Human Relations* has been included in the curriculum for many years and periodically updated. Cadets in the 145th received approximately 22 hours of training time on topics that incorporated training on hate crimes. Staff is also actively considering opportunities to incorporate discussion of hate groups' social media tactics into planned trainings.

APD's full force has not been provided hate crime/hate incident training as part of recent TCOLE cycles, however, there are two relevant courses available for E-Learning and reference. In addition, APD's Continuing Education Unit (CEU) has previously hosted the *Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention* training course as an elective. Due to the COVID pandemic, officers have not been mandated to particular training topics to allow for flexibility in meeting training hours while maintaining social distancing and working around tight schedules. Many educational considerations in the academy will inform continuing education for the full force and the Chief of Police is committed to increasing hate crimes training for all sworn staff.

## Ongoing Efforts

ATXKind requested accountability and preventative measures to combat hate motivated incidents in Austin to include a robust City plan that draws on both law enforcement and non-law enforcement strategies.

Preventative measures include the funded campaign, focused education for APD, and improvements in the reporting process and tagging of hate/bias related incidents. While improvements to reporting and increased training have already better positioned the City of Austin to respond to incidents of hate or bias, it is imperative this work continue to meet the goals set out in the resolution. The City is committed to continual improvement of reporting systems and practices, assessing and increasing relevant training, and learning from the acquisition and sharing of relevant data.

Should you need more information or have questions, contact Sammi Curless at [sammi.curless@austintexas.gov](mailto:sammi.curless@austintexas.gov) or Elise Renshaw at [elise.renshaw@austintexas.gov](mailto:elise.renshaw@austintexas.gov).

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