




## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**FROM:** Joseph Chacon, Chief of Police 

**DATE:** December 28, 2022

**SUBJECT:** APD's Sexual Assault Response- PERF Report (Resolution 2019031-077)

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Council Resolution No. [20190131-077](#) directed the City Manager to conduct a comprehensive evaluation examining how reported sexual assaults are investigated and processed through the Austin Police Department (APD). Through this resolution, the City Council recognized the complexities of sexual assault cases and the need to have responsive policies and protocols in place to address these heinous crimes appropriately and fully support those most impacted.

Several key directives were outlined as part of Council Resolution No. 20190131-077. Specifically, this resolution directed the City Manager's Office (CMO) to engage a nationally recognized external entity to conduct a thorough evaluation of APD's response to sex crimes. In September 2019, the CMO contracted with the Police Executive Research Foundation (PERF), in conjunction with the Women's Law Project (WLP) and the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW), to undertake this comprehensive review. Using a sample of sexual assault cases over a nine-year period, PERF conducted this evaluation using a three-pronged approach: a quantitative analysis; an expert assessment of related policies, procedures, & training; and a qualitative analysis of internal and external stakeholder interviews.

Throughout this multi-year evaluative process, APD, along with the Sex Crimes Unit (SCU), closely engaged with PERF to support the evaluation and address identified concerns in real-time. APD is dedicated to improving processes, reducing crime, and better-supporting victims of crime through the consideration of both internal and external perspectives and recommendations. As a result of this ongoing collaboration and APD's dedication to enhancement, several of the recommendations identified in the PERF report have already been implemented, and improvements are underway and ongoing.

In November 2022, PERF officially released its full evaluation of APD's response to sexual assaults, complete with strengths and areas for improvement. The analysis conducted by PERF includes 103 recommendations for APD's consideration. APD is committed to thoughtfully reviewing each of these recommendations and identifying the most appropriate path toward implementation to better support survivors and solve crimes. The PERF report provides an opportunity for APD to create long-lasting change and positively impact the lives of victims and survivors affected by sexual assault crimes.

At this time, APD has begun an intensive review of its approach to sex crimes using the PERF report as a foundation. As the recommendations in the PERF report demonstrate, there is a need for a

multidisciplinary approach to create a comprehensive system of change. APD is committed to this approach and has already begun to engage in a multidisciplinary collaborative effort with key stakeholders, such as the Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team (SARRT), to better understand the challenges identified in the PERF report and identify a clear path forward. APD and SARRT intend to work together to improve investigative, prosecutorial, supportive, and cultural efforts which go beyond the scope of the recommendations made in the PERF report. APD and its community stakeholders view the PERF report as a starting point to create a deep and meaningful cultural shift regarding sexual assault and recognize that these changes will take years to be fully successful. This is an opportunity for APD to work with its partners and stakeholders to formulate a comprehensive approach to addressing sex crime cases. This broad-reaching approach will allow Austin to become the national best practice model for which it absolutely has the capacity. APD is committed to taking the steps necessary to achieve this realization.

#### Engagement and Collaboration

The foundational building blocks for success are engagement and collaboration. This engagement and collaboration have already begun, and it is important that these efforts become part of the basis of how Austin approaches sexual assault cases in the future. Over the next several months, APD and SARRT have committed to meeting at least every other week to address concerns and develop a robust plan for success. These meetings are integral to the success of the sexual assault response from both APD and the community. Building meaningful trust and rapport between APD, SARRT, community, and survivors are the first steps towards true engagement and collaboration. APD takes the importance of restoring community trust very seriously so that true change can be accomplished.

Closely engaging with partners such as SARRT is crucial to ensure APD can appropriately respond to the recommendations identified in the PERF report. APD is a critical partner in combatting sexual assault and supporting victims, but it cannot be successful on its own. Only through close collaboration with partners on the ground can APD hope to develop a thoughtful implementation plan to create long-lasting and meaningful change. It is crucial that APD closely engage partners and stakeholders to develop implementation solutions that can positively impact the way in which we address sexual assault cases across Austin. APD is committed to creating long-lasting solutions, policies, processes, and training opportunities with the input of local experts in this field.

#### Review of Recommendations from PERF Report

APD is conducting an internal review of all 103 recommendations identified in the PERF report and identifying a proposed status update for each. While this is an important first step, it is not the final determination of the status of each recommendation. APD and SARRT plan to meet in early January 2023 to begin an extensive collaborative review of these recommendations. This collaborative process will allow each party to share their insights and perspectives on these topics. Before identifying meaningful focus areas to create change, all parties should clearly understand the perceptions and realities of APD's performance related to sexual assault crimes. Only from that point of deep understanding can progress and change be made.

#### Prioritization of Key Focus Areas

Once the collaborative review of the recommendations is complete, APD and SARRT will continue to thoughtfully strategize on the key areas identified in the PERF report that should be addressed immediately. This process should yield focus areas, such as training, that will create the most significant and long-lasting change over time. It is not anticipated that this movement will happen quickly. Instead, it will be thoughtful in its design to ensure any changes are built on a solid foundation that can carry the weight of a larger cultural shift. The recommendations offered in the PERF report provide us with an

opportunity to make both immediate adjustments and more fundamental and longer-term changes to address sexual assault cases more effectively and efficiently. In-depth discussions have begun and will continue as APD and SARRT work together to improve policies, practices, training, and culture related to sex crimes.

#### Measurement

APD is committed to transparency and ongoing improvements. APD's Research & Planning Unit has reviewed the recommendations in the PERF report and is currently developing a plan to ensure appropriate measurement and tracking is done to hold APD accountable. The Research & Planning Unit aims to create a public-facing dashboard with key sexual assault crime statistics available to all.

Important work is happening across APD, and its Sex Crimes Unit and thoughtful review and implementation of the recommendations from this evaluation will create a formalized structure for ongoing improvements. APD has already begun implementing several recommendations, such as creating a Working Group and an ongoing partnership with SARRT to support this intensive process. While a full and robust implementation plan will take a substantial amount of time, input, and consideration for completion, APD has begun an initial review of the strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations identified in the PERF report. Through this review, APD has developed a generalized idea of what has already been implemented and which areas need immediate attention. Since the work around sexual assault is not completed in a vacuum, it is important that APD engage directly with SARRT to develop a unified status update for the 103 recommendations. This process will allow APD and SARRT to come together and have frank discussions regarding what is believed to be happening and what those in the community are experiencing. From this unified assessment, all stakeholders will be able to identify areas of deficiency and priority that need to be addressed for success to be fully realized. APD intends to be thoughtful and fully informed when addressing each of the recommendations made. As collaboration between the stakeholders occurs, APD makes a commitment to create and share with Mayor and Council a timeline for evaluation, review, and implementation of the 103 recommendations.

If you have any questions, please contact Commander Chris Vallejo at [Chris.Vallejo@austintexas.gov](mailto:Chris.Vallejo@austintexas.gov).

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