

RESOLUTION NO. 20230413-048

WHEREAS, before COVID, about 20% of the Travis County jail population were identified as having a serious mental health condition and now about 41%, representing 880 inmates, are identified as having a serious mental health condition; and

WHEREAS, approximately 75% of all arrests were for misdemeanors, often for nonviolent, mental health-related disorder behaviors; and

WHEREAS, in May 2022, the Travis County Commissioners Court partnered with Dell Medical School for the Travis County Forensic Mental Health Project to find solutions for those in Travis County jails in need of care for mental health or substance use issues; and

WHEREAS, the project incorporated lead stakeholders, including people with lived experiences, mental health and legal experts, judicial leaders, and law enforcement and community advocates in a 10-month solution-driven process to create actionable recommendations to address these complex issues; and

WHEREAS, the report estimated between 64 and 136 people might be eligible for diversion every month and recommended a facility able to accommodate anywhere from 32 to 70 beds; and

WHEREAS, increasing diversion efforts could not only help with the growing population at the local jail, but could help with the long waitlist at the state hospital that is used to restore competency for people who are involved in the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Commission on Mental Health and Texas Health and Human Services Commission released an “Eliminate the Wait” toolkit that noted over the past two decades, there has been a 38% increase in the number of people found incompetent to stand trial; and

WHEREAS, the competency restoration service is a temporary and narrowly focused rehabilitation effort that does not create a treatment plan for long-term recovery and rejoining the community; and

WHEREAS, the process is inefficient, and people found incompetent to stand trial may be restored and return to jail, only to mentally deteriorate again before their case concludes; and

WHEREAS, county and city officials, working with other community partners, play a critical role in funding, implementing, and coordinating a local continuum of care to support people in mental health and substance use disorder crises; and

WHEREAS, Council adopted Resolution No. 20210729-174 stating its interest in and support of Travis County's initiative to study the opportunities of a mental health diversion pilot program with the Austin/Travis County Sobering Center (Sobering Center); and

WHEREAS, Council adopted Resolution No. 20190620-184, which included direction to the City Manager to expand existing models of non-criminalized connection to services by first responders, such as the Sobering Center and Downtown Austin Community Court, in addition to exploring the use of Houston's mental health jail diversion models of non-criminalized connection to services by first responders; and

WHEREAS, Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (EMCOT) was established in 2013 and provides the crisis services and crisis relapse prevention services array through first responders dispatches and requests for services; and

WHEREAS, from 2015 to 2018, all Austin Police Department calls for service that included EMCOT engagement yielded jail diversion rates at 98% or 99%, emergency detention diversion from 88% to 93%, and hospital diversion rates from 76% to 81% when Emergency Medical Services engaged EMCOT; and

WHEREAS, Integral Care, Travis County's local mental health authority, operates The Inn, a 16-bed facility that provides short-term crisis support for up to seven days for adults recovering from a mental health crisis; and

WHEREAS, The Inn saved the local health care system between \$1.87 million and \$2.82 million annually from 2017 to 2019 when compared with the same treatment and length of stay in a hospital setting; and

WHEREAS, on March 21, 2023, Travis County passed a resolution to implement the recommendations from the forensic mental health project conducted by Dell Medical School which includes the creation of a Travis County Diversion Center; and

WHEREAS, Travis County's resolution seeks to identify funding options, including through partnerships with the Travis County Hospital District, Central Health, CommUnity Care, Integral Care, City, and state and federal partners, and directs staff to report back to the Travis County Commissioners Court within 180 days; and

WHEREAS, Travis County's resolution directs staff to provide recommendations for a program design that will inform the design and construction of the Diversion Center within 120 days; and

WHEREAS, on April 20, 2023, the Travis County Commissioners Court will allocate Travis County's remaining Local Fiscal Recovery Funds; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to explore the feasibility of an interlocal agreement with Travis County, Integral Care, and the Austin/Travis County Sobriety Center Local Government Corporation for the development of a new Austin/Travis County Diversion Center that includes requirements for governance and sustainable funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with Travis County and Integral Care to identify the financial resources necessary to partner in developing a pilot for mental health diversion services and a bridge housing program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to provide regular updates to the Public Health Committee and provide a report to Council regarding the status of these directives by September 1, 2023.

ADOPTED: April 13, 2023

ATTEST:



Myrna Rios
City Clerk