



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Human Rights Commission

Recommendation Number: 20230828-010: Inhumane Prison Conditions

WHEREAS, the historically extreme summer temperatures in Texas are widely acknowledged and have created life-threatening conditions; and

WHEREAS, the absence of adequate air conditioning in two-thirds of Texas prisons subjects incarcerated people and correctional staff to intolerable and unsafe heat levels, which constitute a violation of basic human rights under cruel and unusual punishment clause of the United States constitution; and

WHEREAS, the lack of climate control exacerbates health risks, causing heat-related illnesses among incarcerated people and staff, including heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and other adverse health effects; and

WHEREAS, such conditions have taken the lives of multiple incarcerated Texans, likely contributed to severe staff shortages, and cost millions of dollars in wrongful death and civil rights lawsuits within the past 10 years; and

WHEREAS, the absence of climate control contributes to a hostile and volatile prison environment, heightening tensions and compromising overall safety and security within the correctional facilities; and

WHEREAS, it is our moral and ethical duty to uphold the rights and dignity of all Texans, including those who are incarcerated, and to ensure that they are treated with respect and compassion; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Human Rights Commission that:

1. Austin City Council is urgently called upon to recognize and acknowledge the pressing need to address inhumane conditions in correctional facilities, both within and outside the city limits, resulting from the absence of air conditioning.
2. Austin City Council is further urged to collaborate with the State of Texas on viable solutions, including advocacy for the "AC in Prisons" bill for the installation of air conditioning systems in Texas prisons, prioritizing facilities with the highest risk of heat-related deaths.
3. Austin City Council is encouraged to collaborate with relevant state and federal agencies, along with human rights organizations, legal experts, and advocacy groups, to help raise awareness around this pressing matter.

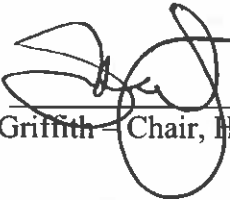
4. Austin City Council is recommended to establish a model for effective monitoring and reporting on climate-related conditions within its own facilities to serve as a state-wide model that ensures adherences to humane conditions.
5. The Austin City Council is called upon to engage in constructive dialogue and consultation with the Human Rights Commission, community stakeholders, and affected parties to develop comprehensive guidelines for addressing extreme heat conditions.

Date of Approval: August 29, 2023

Record of the vote:

FOR: Chair I. Griffith, Vice Chair A. Weigel, L. Garcia, M. Aslam, M. Davis, M. Kruger, K. Duhon, G. Zeidan

Absent: M. Steveson

Attest:  _____
Idona Griffith – Chair, Human Rights Commission