



COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORT PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Date: October 16, 2023

Agenda Item: #5. Briefing, discussion and possible action on the selection process for the hiring of new municipal judges.

Committee Vote: 4-0. Committee members present were Mayor Kirk Watson (Chair) and Council Members Mackenzie Kelly (Vice Chair), José Vela (Vice Chair), and Zohaib “Zo” Qadri.

Sponsors/Department: Mayor Kirk Watson and Council Member José "Chito" Vela

Summary of Discussion:

Presiding Judge Sherry Statman presented a proposal to appoint an additional associate judge and/or up to five additional substitute judges to the Municipal Court of the City of Austin (the “Court”). In support of the proposal Judge Statman identified: (1) the retirement of one substitute judge and the resignation of an associate judge of the Court that occurred since Council’s approval of the current fiscal year budget; (2) ongoing concerns with the availability of adequate judicial staffing at the Travis Central Booking Facility arising from the operating hours at that facility and the physical layout of the magistration area of the facility; and (3) increased responsibilities for judges at the Central Booking Facility under the interlocal agreement for that facility currently in negotiations with Travis County.

The Committee discussed funding for additional appointments of associate and substitute judges. The Committee also discussed the City’s past selection processes for identifying, evaluating, and selecting judges for the Court. Judge Statman and Committee members spoke in support of the 2021 judicial appointment process as an effective and efficient method of bringing forward a high quality and diverse pool of potential judicial candidates.

Committee Recommendation:

On Vice Chair Vela’s motion, seconded by Council Member Kelly, the Committee voted 4-0 to recommend that the Council direct the City Manager to initiate a selection process to identify candidates for Council appointment of one additional associate judge and up to five additional substitute judges to the Municipal Court for the City of Austin for the current judicial term, subject to funding considerations after discussions with the City Manager, and to utilize a recruitment and selection process based on the 2021 judicial selection process including using the citizen panel members from 2021 if available.