



## **DOWNTOWN AUSTIN COMMUNITY COURT ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20240322-005**

Date: March 22, 2024

Subject: Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget Recommendations

Motioned By: Katy Jo Muncie

Seconded By: Mikaela Frissell

### **Introduction**

The DACC Advisory Board would like to thank the Austin City Council for supporting DACC, especially within the last year. Recent Council involvement with DACC has included the addition of two new housing-focused case managers and social service dollars, expanding DACC's jurisdiction, and providing direction to implement a Mobile Court Pilot. DACC has made great strides forward this year, and has also seen a significant increase in demand for their services.

Keeping in mind the anticipated limitations the City faces in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget process, the DACC Advisory Board has targeted its recommendations to address the most pressing needs for the people DACC serves. Our recommendations fall into three categories: (1) support for City Council initiatives, (2) increasing service capacity to meet community needs, and (3) increasing resources for operational needs.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Category 1: Support for City Council Initiatives**

1. \$254,178 of ongoing funding to fund full implementation of DACC Mobile Court.

#### **Category 2: Increase Service Capacity to Meet Community Needs**

2. \$729,116 of ongoing funding to augment DACC's Intensive Case Management capacity by adding two housing-focused case manager FTEs and programmatic funding to continue connecting clients to housing.

#### **Category 3: Increase Resources for Operational Needs**

3. \$82,950 of ongoing funding for one Court Clerk Lead FTE to address increase in cases and support operational efficiencies.
4. \$250,000 of ongoing funding and \$87,500 one-time funding to support and enhance operations of the Violet KeepSafe Storage Program.
5. \$250,000 for facility enhancements at DACC to support a trauma-informed environment and address operational needs.
6. **Future Considerations:** Plan for \$2,187,348 of ongoing funding in Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget for six grant-funded clinical case managers and programmatic funding to continue connecting clients to long-term, stable housing.

## Description of Recommendation to Council

### **Category 1: Support for City Council Initiatives**

- 1. \$254,178 of ongoing funding to fund full implementation of DACC Mobile Court** – As directed by [Resolution No. 20230816-016](#), DACC implemented a Mobile Court Pilot to provide connection to court and case management services in geographically dispersed locations where people were already accessing services in the community. Data reflects that across the 18 Mobile Court service events during the Pilot, that services were well received and impactful for the people who engaged.

During the period of October 18, 2023, through February 5, 2024:

- 383 individuals had their court case status checked by DACC.
- 125 individuals had an open case.
- 35 individuals participated in a DACC Mobile Court hearing.
- 69 cases were docketed cases.
- 48 warrants were cleared.
- 8 individuals were enrolled into the DACC Clinical Diversion Program (CDP) for ongoing case management.
- 100% of surveyed Pilot site participants reported satisfaction in the program.
- 100% of surveyed Pilot site partners reported the program to be a benefit to clients and would be interested in further DACC Mobile Court collaboration.

Sultan Justice Consulting conducted a third-party analysis of DACC’s Mobile Court Pilot (“Report”), which is included here as an attachment. This Report states, “The Pilot aimed to remove barriers to accessing services by meeting people in geographically dispersed locations where they were already accessing assistance in the community. Upon implementation, it was quickly learned that a key benefit of this Pilot was informing individuals of active warrants or outstanding cases of which they were unaware. As many Pilot participants shared that they were not aware of these court statuses, and therefore not planning to address these cases, they were at risk for harsher legal penalties and consequences (such as warrants). By meeting people where they already are, the Pilot offered community members the chance to learn about and address these issues without fear of arrest or incarceration. The Pilot is a vital resource given that active warrants and incarceration records create barriers to housing, employment, and receiving other needed services.”

Additionally, the Report states, “For DACC to fully implement and successfully sustain a Mobile Court, further staffing is required. When surveyed, DACC Court and Homeless Services staff shared that the current staffing resources and ratios are not able to sustain ongoing, full implementation of a Mobile Court program while continuing current services onsite at DACC. Additionally, with increasing numbers of people engaging in court following the jurisdiction expansion and a continued influx of walk-in case management clients, additional staff resources are needed to sustain ongoing, full implementation of a Mobile Court program.”

The DACC Advisory Board, understanding resource limitations, wants to highlight the first of this Report’s recommendations for “a sustainable, fully staffed, DACC Mobile Court Program.” To be able to fully implement Mobile Court while maintaining current onsite services at DACC, the following additional resources would be required:

- A minimum of one FTE Mobile Court Program Coordinator (\$88,927)
- A minimum of one FTE Housing-Focused Case Manager (\$115,251)
- Funding to schedule a substitute judge from the current pool of substitute judges to staff mobile events (\$50,000)

The Report also called for continued collaboration between Austin Municipal Court (AMC) and DACC to embed an AMC Court Clerk Assistant at DACC. This part of the recommendation is currently being implemented.

### **Category 2: Increase Service Capacity to Meet Community Needs**

- 2. \$729,116 of ongoing funding to augment DACC's Intensive Case Management capacity by adding two clinical case manager FTEs and programmatic funding to continue connecting clients to housing.** Consistent with DACC's five-year plan to expand staff sustainably each year to address growing needs for services over time, these funds would enable DACC to hire two housing-focused case manager positions, along with an additional vehicle and corresponding social service dollars per case manager. On average over the last several years, DACC has consistently had a waitlist of between 200-300 people wanting to engage in housing-focused Intensive Case Management services, which has increased further in the last year.

DACC's Clinical Diversion Program (CDP) was created in March of 2023. This program, which embeds case managers in the courtroom with up to 90 days of ongoing services, has proven successful in improving connection to service and increasing court case completion rates. From March 2023 through January 2024, data for CDP includes:

- Number of clients enrolled in CDP: **190**
- Current number of court cases successfully terminated due to clients completing case management activities in CDP: **302**
- Active Engagement: **80%**
  - based on last 60 days of client contact.
- Average # of court cases per client: **2**
- Housing status: **over 80%** of clients entered the program experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Engagement in CDP feeds into DACC's increasing waitlist for Intensive Case Management and engagement with DACC's walk-in case management services. Additionally, DACC has seen increases in referrals from other partners. For example, the Marshalling Yard Emergency Shelter has vans that bring people to DACC daily to engage in services. In 2024, DACC's walk-in services have increased to nearly 70 people seeking help per day, which has been steadily increasing; the average was approximately 36 people per day prior to COVID.

DACC's plan for staff expansion began with the two housing-focused case manager positions and social service dollars included in the Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget, and increasing DACC's case managers continues to be a priority that the DACC Advisory Board urges the City Council to prioritize.

### **Category 3: Increase Resources for Operational Needs**

- 3. \$82,950 of ongoing funding for one Court Clerk Lead FTE to address increase in cases and support operational efficiencies.** This position would address several critical unmet needs for DACC, with the position being responsible for data quality and integrity, monitoring workflows, and taking the lead on process improvement and quality assurance for court case management. Additionally, this would help with DACC's recruitment and retention, as it creates upward mobility options for DACC Court Clerk Assistants and would provide support for those positions, improving overall workload and morale.

Mobile Court, the jurisdiction expansion, and last year's new Clinical Diversion Program have amplified DACC's long-term need for a Court Clerk Lead, as this position would be critical to

implementing and supporting new programs effectively. Since jurisdiction expansion, DACC has seen a 458% increase in case filings over the same time period last year; a 212% increase is due to jurisdiction expansion while a 246% increase is due to new case filings in DACC's primary jurisdiction.

**4. \$250,000 of ongoing funding and \$87,500 one-time funding to support operations and enhance the Violet KeepSafe Storage (VKS) Program.**

- **\$250,000 ongoing funding:** Oversight and management of VKS was transferred to DACC from Austin Resource Recovery in December 2020 without additional resources to ensure this critical service would continue to be available for Austin's unhoused residents. At that time, the program had two staff working Monday through Friday from 7:00am-11:00am and 4:00pm-7:00pm and serving approximately 100 people. Since then, VKS has expanded to seven days per week, 7:00am-7:00pm (with a daily closure from 11:00am-1:00pm). It now requires a total of six staff and bins for up to 350 people, consistently operating at or near capacity. Ongoing funding is needed to support the longevity of this program while ceasing to pull resources from other critical DACC services. Ongoing funding would also provide additional workforce development supports and resources for VKS staff, all of whom have lived homelessness experience. Support for VKS has been requested in the DACC Advisory Board's budget recommendations the previous two years.
- **\$87,500 one-time funding:** Funding is needed to create more dignified and trauma-informed storage solutions for VKS participants. The program originally used purple trash bins to meet a critical unmet need in the community with available resources. DACC has been working to phase in stackable storage crates to improve flexibility and access to belongings. This funding would be needed to replace the majority of the remaining trash bins.

**5. \$250,000 for facility upgrades at DACC to support a trauma-informed environment and address operational needs.** DACC moved into One Texas Center (OTC) in fall of 2021 as an interim facility, making minimal modifications to the facility. With plans for DACC to continue operating from OTC longer term, some facility needs have been identified to help optimize the space at OTC and promote operational excellence. This includes building out a meeting space in the courtroom for prosecutors and case managers to engage with defendants privately, updates to create a more trauma-informed environment, and workspace improvements.

**6. Future Considerations: Plan for \$2,187,348 of ongoing funding in Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget for six grant-funded clinical case managers and programmatic funding to continue connecting clients to housing.** Six housing-focused case managers and funding for housing expenses for clients served by these case managers were initially funded by Emergency Solutions Grants – CARES Act funding, which ended in 2022. These staff and programmatic expenses are now funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was previously slated to end in December 2024. Fortunately, grant terms have been updated to allow expenditures through the end of 2026. While funding is not needed for these staff and programmatic expenses in the coming fiscal year, the Board strongly encourages the City Council to begin planning for these expenses in Fiscal Year 2026-27 to ensure our resources for housing-focused case managers will not be reduced.

Ongoing funding should be identified for these staff and resources to maintain current service capacity of serving 100 individuals per year. If ongoing funds through the City are allocated in the fiscal year 2024-25 budget, continuity for the case management and housing resources would be ensured. ARPA funds currently being utilized by DACC could be reallocated to other identified priorities through 2026 due to ARPA terms allowing the City to provide contracted services through this time period.

**Rationale:**

DACC is serving Austin's most vulnerable residents and stabilizing their lives to the benefit of the entire Austin community. The Downtown Austin Community Court Advisory Board wholeheartedly and enthusiastically supports DACC's services and its request for resources to continue assisting its clients. **The Downtown Austin Community Court Advisory Board urges City Council to allocate funds and explore all available means to avoid setbacks and instead increase DACC's efforts to address homelessness in Austin.**

**Vote**        **8-0**

For:        *Lea Downey Gallatin, Chair; Nicole Golden, Vice Chair; Kergin Bedell; Mikaela Frissell; Dr. Anu Kapadia; Katy Jo Muncie; Robin G. Sontheimer, and Roy Woody*

Against:    N/A

Abstain:    N/A

Absent:     *Kate Garza, Faye Mills, and Lauren Pena*

Attest:     *Lea Downey Gallatin, Chair*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lea Downey Gallatin", is written over a horizontal line.