



## BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

### Human Rights Commission

#### Recommendation Number: 20240325-03: Promoting a Culture of Care Through the Implantation of Harm Reduction Strategies in our Communities.

Whereas, the War on Drugs describes the continued prohibition on and criminalization of a broad set of substances under the Controlled Substances Act; and,

Whereas, harm reduction, in the context of substance use, is a community-oriented public health and safety approach aimed at reducing the negative consequences associated with the use of substances; and,

Whereas, harm reduction is one of the four core strategies being implemented by the Department of Health and Human Services to address the ongoing Opioid Crisis; and,

Whereas, in 2022 the CDC counts 51,435 total overdose deaths, among which 64.3% could have been prevented by intervention, including over 120 overdoses in Austin for the same year; and,

Whereas, in 2022, Travis County ranked 27th among Texas counties with the highest number of unintentional overdose deaths, representing a 23% increase from two years prior, per CDC data; and,

Whereas, the City of Austin was also the recipient of \$1.53m from the State's disbursement of Opioid Settlement Funding, the express purpose for which is to address opioid related harms in the communities; and,

Whereas, the current substance use crisis is inflamed by state laws encouraging abstinence and criminalization-especially regarding the possession of drug paraphernalia including sterile injection materials, testing supplies, and supervised use-have made it more difficult for individuals, organizations, and municipalities to seek and render life-saving aid; and,

Whereas, in the midst of a statewide healthcare crisis under which over 4 million people, per the Texas Medical Association, lack healthcare, including up to 20% of Austin's own citizens under 65; and,

Whereas, stagnant or negative statewide healthcare funding, including for labor and infrastructure, has exacerbated existing gaps in coverage and made it more difficult for individuals to seek care in a timely manner; and,

Whereas, the costs and stigma associated with substance use create a barrier to outreach and access for those who need it most; and

Whereas, the City of Austin's mission involves "partner[ing] with one another and with our community to provide the best service possible" and "actively seek[ing] out good ideas that have a lasting, positive impact on our work, our community and our environment,"; and,

Whereas, discrimination based on substance use is in conflict with this Commission's responsibility to further human rights in the City of Austin, and therefore poses a conflict of greater interest to Austin's citizens,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Austin City Council is strongly urged to Allocate Funding. Allocate funding to the Austin Public Health's Community Engagement department in the amount of \$75,000 for the purpose of developing and providing public drug education courses throughout the Austin community, in partnership with health practitioners, community organizations, local nonprofits, and educational institutions. This funding could be used for the employment of a contracted worker with the City, supporting public programming, creating and distributing public messaging regarding substances commonly found in our community, among other educational purposes intended to raise the level of public health consciousness and develop a community of care.

Date of Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

Record of the vote:

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_