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February 4, 2026

RE: Dr. O.H. and Thelma Elliott House Historic Landmark Designation

Dear Chair Heimsath, Vice Chair Evans, and Members of the Historic Landmark Commission

[Preservation Austin](#) exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write in support of the proposed historic landmark designation of the Dr. O.H. and Thelma Elliott House for architecture and historic associations. Built in 1954, the Elliot House is a testament to the lives of two remarkable educators and civic leaders, Dr. Ora Herman Elliott and Thelma Mitchell Elliott.

The Elliots were leaders in the communities of segregated East Austin and in the state and nationwide Civil Rights movement. Dr. O.H. Elliot served as business manager and Interim President of Samuel Houston College, and was instrumental in the merger of the college with Tillotson College in 1952, forming Houston-Tillotson University. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Elliot led efforts to seek Black representation in elections within the Democratic Party in the 1940s, was a director of the City's Rights Agency tasked with implementation of the Civil Rights Law of 1964, and played a significant role in the founding of Austin Community College in 1973 through his work with the Coordinating Board of Texas Colleges and Universities. Through his decades of political involvement, Dr. Elliot cultivated close relationships with President Lyndon B. Johnson, Governors John Connally, Preston Smith, and Dolph Briscoe, and U.S. Representative Jake Pickle.

Thelma Mitchell Elliot was one of the first students to desegregate the University of Texas in the 1950s and was the first Black woman to graduate and obtain her degree from UT's School of Social Work. She was the first Black female probation officer for the Travis County Juvenile Court, serving in this role for 10 years. In 1966, Mrs. Elliot was recruited to lead the ENABLE (Education and Neighborhood Action for Better Living Environment) program, part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, which tackled initiatives from unsanitary living conditions in rental units to neighborhood safety and infrastructure. Her efforts under ENABLE Austin were recognized as one of the most successful initiatives of its kind nationwide.

Homeowner and daughter, Ms. Ora Houston, carries on her parents' legacy of civic leadership, notably during her time as representative of District 1 on Austin City Council from 2015 to 2019. A committed preservationist, we congratulate Ms. Houston on her efforts to preserve her family's history and the history of East Austin.

Sincerely,

Miriam Conner, President