Austin
City Auditor's Office

Audit Report

Civilian Staffing

November 2026



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There are opportunities for Austin's public safety departments to reassign some tasks currently performed by sworn personnel to civilian staff. Departments continue to rely heavily on sworn staff for some administrative and support functions that civilians could perform. However, the potential for immediate efficiency gains by reassigning staff is limited. This is because contractual agreements and other legal restrictions prevent departments from assigning certain responsibilities to civilians. Through future labor negotiations, the City could work to remove these barriers, expand civilian roles, and allow sworn personnel to focus on emergency response.

Austin City Auditor's Office

Audit Highlights
November 2026

Civilian Staffing

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City is effectively assigning civilian staff to tasks that create efficiencies and allow sworn staff to focus on responding to emergencies.

What We Found

Sworn staff provide critical services to people across the city. They respond to emergencies, provide emergency medical care, investigate crimes, respond to traffic incidents, put out fires, and conduct search and rescue operations. Austin's public safety departments also rely on sworn personnel for some administrative and support tasks. Staff noted that administrative and support tasks, such as record management and technology support, are tasks that some sworn staff perform but could be done by a civilian.

Departments reported some benefits to having sworn personnel in non-operational roles, including the perspective gained from sworn experience and the flexibility to reassign sworn staff because they make up a larger portion of the public safety workforce. Civilian employees, however, offer greater consistency and stability, and they generally cost less to employ for these administrative and support tasks.

Public safety departments must provide first responder services every day despite the hundreds of sworn vacancies the City currently has. As of September 2026, Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services had 134 sworn vacancies, Austin Fire had 80 sworn vacancies, and Austin Police had 350 sworn vacancies. To continue to provide first responder services during this period of high vacancies, public safety departments are using a significant amount of overtime. These costs totaled over $75 million in the last fiscal year.

Public safety departments must balance legal and contractual requirements, budget constraints, as well as operational demands. While some tasks could be reassigned to civilian employees now, the overall efficiencies that can be gained in the immediate term remain limited. However, due to continued vacancy challenges and high overtime costs that are currently affecting all three public safety departments, every sworn staff member that can be moved from a non-operational role back to an operational role can help reduce costs.

Additional tasks could be performed by civilians, but contractual and legal restrictions currently prevent departments from assigning them. Future labor negotiations may offer opportunities to reduce these barriers and broaden the use of civilian staff.

What We Recommend

We recommend that each public safety department chief develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. By evaluating what tasks might be better assigned to civilian staff, public safety department leadership can make better informed decisions on staff assignments and allow more sworn staff to respond to emergencies. We also recommend that Austin Labor Relations use the plans that the public safety departments developed to inform future negotiations.

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Cover: Emergency Communication Image accessed via Adobe Stock Photo, October 2026

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City is effectively assigning civilian staff to tasks that create efficiencies and allow sworn staff to focus on responding to emergencies.

Background

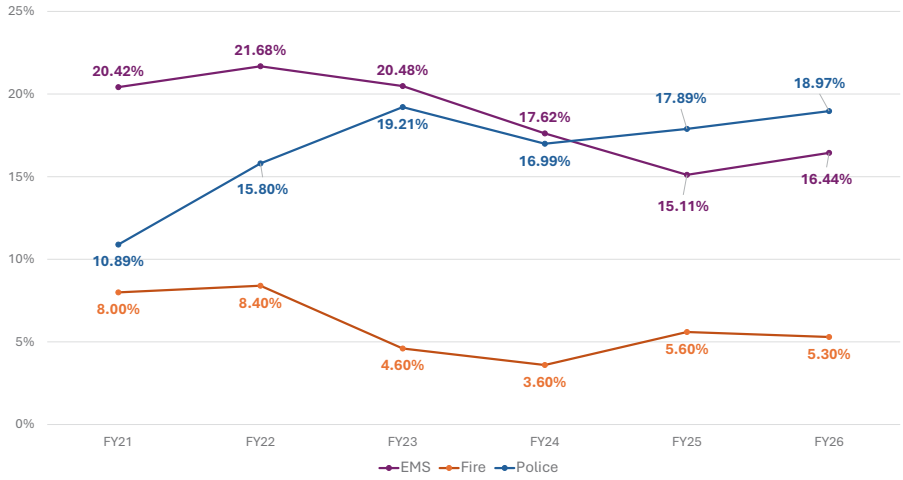
Austin Police, Austin Fire, and Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services (ATCEMS) departments employ over 700 civilian staff to support public safety efforts and over 3,800 sworn staff. City Council sets the authorized strength for sworn employees of each department, at each rank, by ordinance. This is typically passed every year with the budget although Council can adjust the authorized strength anytime.

Sworn staff provide critical services to people across the city. As first responders, they provide emergency medical care, conduct search and rescue operations, investigate crimes, and work under pressure in unpredictable and often dangerous situations. Civilian positions typically involve administrative and specialized duties that support the departments' public safety missions.

Sworn vacancies have led to increased overtime usage, and to maintain operations, sworn staff are taking on more responsibilities and administrative tasks. Overtime remains an area of concern with public safety departments, and there were more than $75 million spent on overtime last fiscal year.

A sworn employee is any member of the Austin Police, Austin Fire, or Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services whose position is covered by Texas Local Government Code Chapter 143. Chapter 143 establishes a civil service system for firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical services personnel.

Exhibit 1: Public safety departments continue to experience vacancies for their sworn staff.



Source: Reported vacancy data provided by public safety departments, October 2026

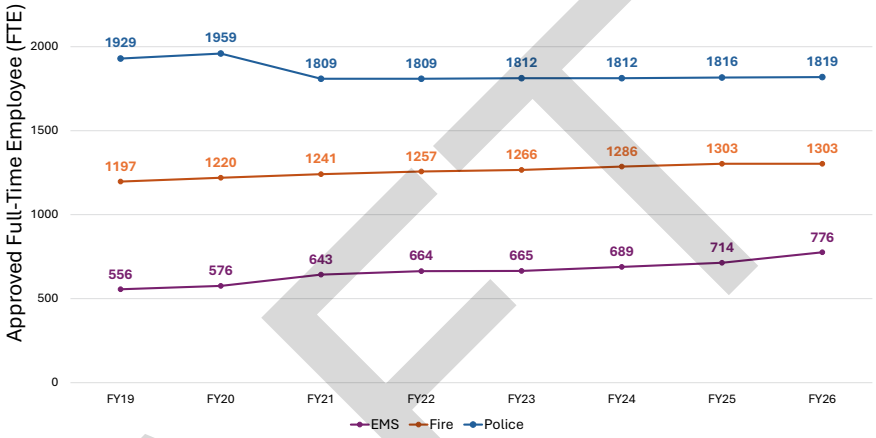
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Over the past decade, Austin Fire and ATCEMS increased both sworn and civilian staffing. Austin Police saw declines in both categories particularly among civilian positions. Reductions in civilian roles, combined with high sworn vacancy rates, have increased reliance on sworn staff for administrative and support functions.

Operational roles are ones that are sworn staff perform as first responders, such as fighting fires, making arrests, and providing emergency medical care.

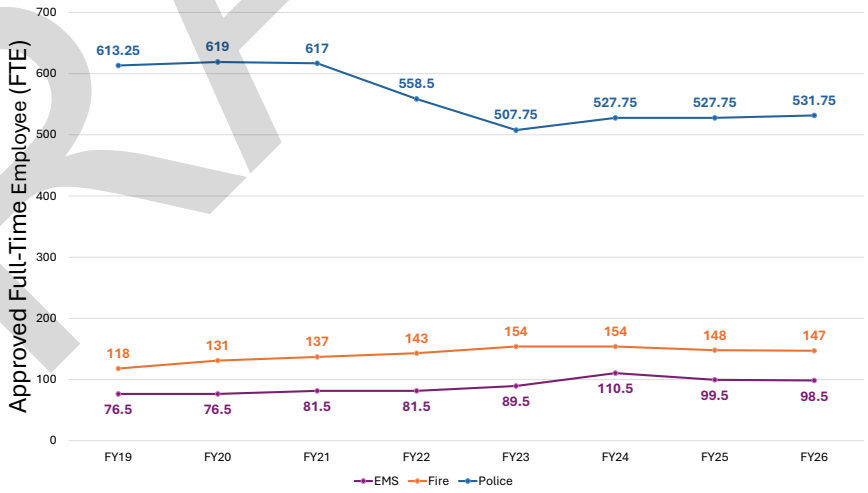
Non-operational roles are the other positions within public safety departments that support those in operations such as administrative roles.

Exhibit 2: Austin Fire and ATCEMS have increased their sworn staffing over the past eight years, but Austin Police sworn staffing has decreased between FY19 and FY26.



Source: City of Austin approved budgets, FY19-FY26

Exhibit 3: Austin Fire and ATCEMS have increased their civilian staffing over the past eight years, but Austin Police civilian staffing has decreased between FY19 and FY26.*



*Note: Exhibit 3 displays approved positions in the City's annual budget and therefore does not account for the civilian positions that were centralized during FY26.
Source: City of Austin approved budgets, FY19-FY26

The public safety departments have implemented measures to ensure operational coverage, such as Austin Police's reallocation of sworn staff to patrol and Austin Fire's sworn restructuring to comply with the four-person staffing requirement for fire trucks. These actions required some sworn staff to be removed from non-operational support units across the departments, but there are still many sworn staff supporting the important work of the department in non-operational roles where they continue to perform tasks like record management, background checks, and public information requests.

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Finding 1

Under current laws and agreements, civilians could perform some tasks currently assigned to sworn staff. However, the overall efficiency gains available today are limited.

Across Austin's public safety departments, sworn employees perform some tasks that could be handled by civilian staff. While state law and labor agreements define when sworn personnel must be used, departments do have some flexibility to assign civilians to roles that are not explicitly restricted.

There are pros and cons when it comes to deciding if a sworn staff member should perform a task

Staff across all three public safety departments report that civilians are already carrying heavy workloads. Sworn staff also repeatedly stated that civilian staff in their departments are valuable and provide consistency and stability to their work areas because they tend to remain in roles longer and develop subject matter expertise. In contrast, sworn employees frequently rotate to other program areas and divisions due to operational changes and so that they can gain skills that will increase their operational readiness.

Additionally, sworn staff may not be formally trained in how to perform certain administrative tasks and may not know how to perform non-operational tasks as effectively. For example, a sworn staff member gained knowledge from their sworn experience and is now tasked with responding to public information requests. This means they may be in a role that requires a new skillset they haven't developed during their sworn experience.

To meet increased demands for maintaining operations, one member of leadership stated that sworn staff are frequently pulled into non-operational roles. They stated that when new programs require immediate action or implementation, the new program may be assigned to sworn staff even though it may not necessarily require their certification or expertise. Public safety leadership staff report that often it is easier or necessary to have sworn staff supervise non-operational divisions and functions due to the hierarchical chain of command. This is because all three departments point to state law, Texas Supreme Court decisions, and labor agreements, which collectively prevent civilians from supervising sworn personnel.

Public safety leadership also noted that because there are more sworn employees and they must follow the orders of the commanding officer, there is more flexibility to assign them a specific task or reassign them to a different work area if needed. These organizational dynamics and cultural preferences for sworn experience combine to limit opportunities for public safety departments to utilize civilian staff.

The cost of utilizing a sworn employee to perform a task is typically greater than the cost of using a civilian employee to perform a task

Public safety departments continue to struggle with managing overtime costs. High vacancy rates have resulted in increased overtime use to maintain emergency operations. Since only sworn staff can perform operational roles like making arrests, providing emergency medical care, and fighting fires, civilian staff could be used for tasks that would not require a sworn employee to perform. Often, sworn employees must use overtime to ensure the departments operate.

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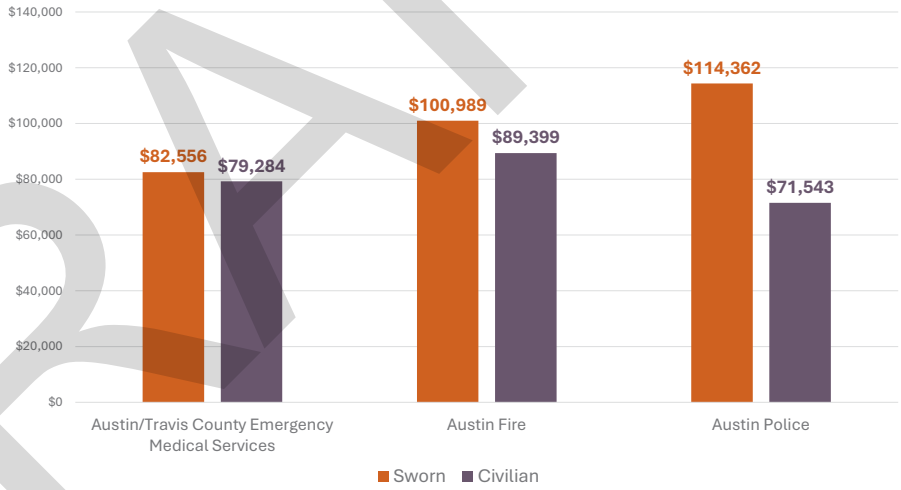
Public safety departments reported the following overtime costs for Fiscal Year 2026:

- Austin Police: $36,342,357
- Austin Fire: $21,008,371
- ATCEMS: $18,143,030

Using civilians to perform tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff is one way in which public safety departments could reduce the amount of overtime used to maintain operations. When sworn staff are reassigned from non-operational roles to operational roles, the department can use less overtime.

In addition to issues noted with overtime, sworn staff are generally more expensive than their civilian counterparts. The annual salary of a sworn employee is about $19,000 more than a civilian employee. However, department staff stated that the sworn experience and a sworn perspective can be valuable in some non-operational roles.

Exhibit 4: The average salary of a sworn employee is more than the average salary of a civilian employee in all three public safety departments.



Source: ACAO analysis, September 2026

There are opportunities for Austin's public safety departments to assign some tasks currently assigned to sworn personnel to civilian staff

Through interviews with sworn and civilian staff, there were multiple opportunities identified in each department where sworn staff perform tasks that could be performed by a civilian employee. We interviewed sworn and civilian staff across all three departments and identified areas where civilians could be used and allow sworn staff to respond to emergencies. Additionally, limitations outlined in state law and the three agreements were reviewed to identify areas where immediate opportunities existed. While these specific areas represent where possible operational efficiencies could be gained, this may not represent every possible opportunity for each department.

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Opportunities at ATCEMS

At ATCEMS, there are sworn employees who have been responding to public information requests (PIRs) for several hours instead of providing critical communication up and down the chain of command. This is a task that could easily be given to a civilian staff employee and allow sworn staff to perform other important tasks.

The employees who work at Employee Development and Wellness provide training to their sworn staff. Civilian staff could be utilized to assist trainers with preparing the training spaces, scheduling, and other administrative tasks. ATCEMS staff acknowledged some other program areas where civilian staff could be further utilized for certain tasks. Exhibit 5 shows the four program areas where civilians could be used to perform some of the tasks in these non-operational areas.

Exhibit 5: There are four program areas at Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services where the use of civilian staff could allow some sworn employees to return to operational roles.

Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services	
Program Area	**Potential Tasks Civilians Could Perform***
Support Services	• Coordinate with law and carry out PIR requests
Community Relations and Injury Prevention	• Provide injury prevention education • Provide public education, outreach and programming
Fleet	• Move fleet throughout the city (Non-Emergency) • Facilitate preventative maintenance, repairs, and unexpected failures
Employee Development and Wellness	• Train employees (Retirees or civilians with pre-hospital medical experience)** • Assist trainers in technology integration, scheduling, and equipment prep • Provide administrative assistance • Support paramedics with clerical tasks

*This table is not intended to suggest replacement of all sworn staff in this program area with civilians. Civilians could potentially support sworn staff by performing some of the tasks listed in the table.
**While some ATCEMS training tasks may be performed by civilians, training tasks that require state-certified ATCEMS personnel or substantial knowledge of emergency prehospital care may be required to remain sworn tasks under the agreement. As a result, not all ATCEMS training tasks may be eligible for civilianization without changes to the agreement.
Source: ACAO Analysis, September 2026

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Opportunities at Austin Police

In 2024, Austin Police hired a consultant to review efficiency opportunities within the department. The consultant provided information to the department on individual divisions and units that could utilize civilian staff. Although Austin Police did respond by reallocating some sworn staff to patrol, Austin Police leadership shared that they have yet to implement some of the consultant recommendations related to increased utilization of civilians throughout the police department.

The primary focal point for the consultants' BerryDunn Investigations and Supplemental Unit Staffing Report was to understand whether personnel from any supplemental units could be allocated to primary patrol response. An additional point of focus involved examining staffing allocation and reviewing operations at a high level to assess efficiency opportunities or other personnel deployments.

Exhibit 6: There are several current tasks at Austin Police that could be performed by a civilian in which sworn employees are performing.

Austin Police	
Program Area	**Potential Tasks Civilians Could Perform***
Recruiting	• Provide outreach coordination, event planning, applicant support, background checks
Training Academy/ Defensive Tactics/ Firearms	• Provide curriculum review, community review, and data research
Police Technology	• Support IT processes and systems
Mounted Patrol	• Provide daily upkeep of animals
Firearms/CGIU	• Analyze crime scenes and/or provide technical support for evidence collection
Range Operator	• Facilitate and manage the range operations at the training facility
Firearms	• Investigate, review, and authorize firearms for destruction with a court order
Highway Enforcement Investigations (HEI)/ Wrecker Enforcement	• Provide wrecker enforcement • Support vehicle abatement activities
Investigations	• Contact victims as a secondary for closed cases
Training Academy/ Advanced Education/ Leadership & Cadet Training	• Train employees (Retirees or civilians with law enforcement experience)** • Provide logistic continuity

*This table is not intended to suggest replacement of all sworn staff in this program area with civilians. Civilians could potentially support sworn staff by performing some of the tasks listed in the table.
**While civilians may be able to provide certain police training functions, some training tasks may require substantial knowledge of police work and police department operations. Those tasks requiring such knowledge may need to remain sworn tasks and may not be eligible for civilianization without changes to the agreement.
Source: Austin Auditor Office Analysis, September 2026

According to the consultant report, there is opportunity for expanded civilian support in eight units at Austin Police. Tasks like outreach coordination, event planning, and applicant support could be effectively handled by civilian staff.

Austin Police staff acknowledged some program areas where civilian staff could be further utilized for certain tasks. One crucial role is the range operator at the training center. All sworn employees must continue to be certified to carry a firearm and must visit the range at the training center to maintain certification. Currently, sworn employees are having to manage the range while handling other roles and responsibilities when a civilian could be leading range operations. This could bring added

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El Paso Police staff acknowledged that some officers prefer administrative roles later in their careers. Officers are able to assume those positions in a civilian capacity after retirement.

consistency to this critical component of operations at Austin Police. Another example where civilians could help drive efficiency at Austin Police is the recruiting division where they could assist with outreach coordination and event planning. Exhibit 6 (above) shows some tasks identified by staff and by consultants that could be performed by civilians.

Opportunities at Austin Fire

Chapter 143 creates restrictions on how civilians can be used throughout the department. The Collective Barganing Agreement (CBA) for Austin Fire reinforces some of these restrictions but allows for some additional use of civilians some areas. However, due to the restrictions in both Chapter 143 and the CBA, there were no clear tasks identified that could be performed today by civilians without changes to the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Public safety departments could use retired and former sworn employees for tasks that do not require a sworn employee

Other Texas peer cities have explored using retired sworn employees for civilian roles.

Retired and former sworn employees could be considered to fulfill tasks that do not require a sworn employee. By doing so, the public safety department would have a civilian salary and would still have the sworn experience and the sworn perspective. Additionally, retired or former sworn employees may hold useful certifications required to perform some non-operational functions at the department.

Public safety department leadership can make better informed decisions on staff assignments and allow more sworn staff to respond to emergencies

Public safety departments have an opportunity to review the tasks that do not require a sworn employee to perform in their department and consider their civilian and sworn staffing numbers in the future. Consultants and internal City staff have identified many opportunities for utilizing civilians at Austin Police, but Austin Fire and ATCEMS have not conducted a formal analysis to better understand where civilians could be utilized to allow sworn staff to be more effectively assigned to respond to emergencies.

By evaluating what tasks might be better assigned to civilian staff, public safety department leadership can make better informed decisions on staff assignments and allow more sworn staff to respond to emergencies. Department leadership can reassess which tasks require sworn personnel, allowing the City to use its most expensive and highly trained staff where they are most needed while reducing operational pressures created by vacancies and overtime.

Why this matters

Public safety departments are struggling with high levels of sworn vacancies and significant overtime costs to maintain operations. As part of the public safety department staff, civilian staff can provide support in operations at a generally lower cost than sworn staff. When civilian staff are effectively assigned tasks in the department, public safety departments can fill some sworn vacancies, reduce overtime costs, and provide consistency and stability to certain non-operational roles through the use of civilian staff.

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Finding 2

The City could achieve further efficiencies and more opportunities for civilians in public safety departments by using future labor negotiations to remove barriers that prevent civilians from performing certain non-operational roles.

Like Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio public safety departments are under labor agreements with their local public safety unions.

It should be noted that El Paso and Dallas have not adopted Chapter 143. Chapter 143 outlines standard rules for hiring, promotions, leave, and other processes for sworn staff. This means that they have different civil service requirements for their sworn staff.

Although there are some tasks that could be moved from a sworn employee's workload to a civilian's workload beginning now, there are legal and contractual barriers that significantly limit how Austin's public safety departments can use civilian employees. Some of these restrictions stem from state law while others are the result of local labor agreements that could be renegotiated. However, staff noted that removing these restrictions may result in the unions advocating for changes to other areas of the agreements.

The City of Austin has adopted Chapter 143, which is a state law that outlines standard rules for hiring, promotions, leave, and other processes for sworn staff. In addition to Chapter 143, all three public safety departments have agreements currently in place with respective unions. In these agreements (Austin Police's Meet and Confer, ATCEMS's Meet and Confer, and Austin Fire's Collective Bargaining Agreements), the department and the union can supersede Chapter 143 civil service restrictions. Each department's agreement offers different levels of flexibility.

Opportunities at ATCEMS

For example, the Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services agreement states only sworn employees can be used in communications which aligns with state law requirements for these positions. Exhibit 7 shows positions that could be filled by civilians but are currently limited by state law and reinforced in the Meet and Confer Agreement.

Exhibit 7: There are some positions at Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services that could be filled by a civilian but are currently limited to sworn staff.

Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services	
Program Area	**Potential Roles Civilians Could Fill***
Clinical Naviation	• Provide greater support with follow-up work
Communications	• Perform emergency communications operations job duties

*This table is not intended to suggest replacement of all sworn staff in this program area with civilians. Civilians could potentially fill some of the roles listed in the table if changes to the Meet and Confer Agreement were made.
Source: ACAO Analysis, September 2026

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Opportunities at Austin Fire

Both Chapter 143 and Austin Fire's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) contain explicit limits on what a civilian can and cannot do. In some areas, the agreement is more permissive than state law and allows certain civilians to perform fire inspections and fire administration. Also, Chapter 143 outlines specific positions where civilians cannot be utilized. The CBA reinforces some of these prohibitions concerning civilians working in communication and training roles. If changes to the CBA are made, the City could use civilians in training, communication, and in additional inspection roles to allow fire fighters to return to operational roles. Exhibit 8 shows roles that could be filled by civilians but are currently limited because of both Chapter 143 and the Austin Fire's Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Exhibit 8: There are some positions at Austin Fire that could be performed by a civilian but are currently limited to sworn staff.

Austin Fire	
Program Area	**Potential Roles Civilians Could Fill***
Risk Management/ Training	• Train employees (Retirees or civilians with firefighting experience) • Provide administrative assistance
Logistics/Operations Support	• Provide active and reserve fleet repair and movement support
Logistics/Facilities	• Provide maintenance and planning
Fire Marshal/Prevention	• Conduct inspections • Check compliance of building systems such as sprinkler systems
Communications/Dispatch	• Perform dispatch emergency communications operations job duties
Communications/Other	• Perform emergency communications operations job duties

*This table is not intended to suggest replacement of all sworn staff in this program area with civilians. Civilians could potentially fill some of the roles listed in the table if changes to the Collective Bargaining Agreement were made.
Source: ACAO Analysis, September 2026

The City of El Paso has 144 positions in its dispatch. Of the 144 positions, only one role is sworn, and it is the battalion chief who supervises call takers. The City of El Paso has trained some firefighters to fulfill the role should they be short-staffed, but overall, dispatch is mostly civilian employees.

However, El Paso does not follow Chapter 143 and has different requirements for managing their sworn staff.

These statutory constraints collectively reduce the City's ability to expand or strategically utilize civilian staffing across public safety departments. There are pros and cons to utilizing a civilian staff employee in these roles. Civilian employees could conduct an inspection task, such as inspecting an AED defibrillator at a school, at a lower cost than a sworn employee. In addition, the sworn employee could instead complete a task that a civilian staff employee could not, such as helping operate a fire truck. However, if a sworn employee were to inspect the AED defibrillator to ensure it is properly working, they may use their previous firefighting experience to observe other fire hazard risks while the inspection takes place. Also, a civilian staff employee may not carry as much perceived authority as a sworn employee.

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The 1991 Supreme Court of Texas decision (*Lee v. City of Houston*) held that positions which require substantial knowledge of police work and work in the department must be classified as sworn police officers.

Opportunities at Austin Police

Austin Police do not have as specific statutory constraints in Chapter 143 or limitations on the use of civilians in their Meet and Confer Agreement. However, in future agreements, the City can consider opportunities for civilian staff to be further utilized in the department.

Why this matters

Although there are tasks that could be performed by civilians beginning today, these larger categories of roles within public safety departments, such as communications and inspections, will continue to be limited to only sworn staff unless changes are made in future agreements.

The City could alter its strategy when it comes to future agreements in order to allow more opportunities to utilize civilians. Peer cities could provide examples on how to perform some functions with civilian staff that are currently performed by sworn staff in Austin. Currently, the City must work within the existing legal framework, but as labor agreements end and new ones are created, the City can consider opportunities to expand the roles of civilians in public safety departments which can help departments more efficiently assign sworn staff to respond to emergencies.

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Recommendations and Management Response

1 To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. The plan should consider:

a. opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.
b. the use of retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.
c. estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.
d. undergoing a legal review.
e. identifying barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: See management memo below

2 To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin Fire Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. The plan should consider:

a. opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.
b. the use of retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.
c. estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.
d. undergoing a legal review.
e. identifying barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: See management memo below

3 To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin Police Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. This plan should consider:

a. utilizing previous consultant reports
b. opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.
c. the use of a retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.
d. estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.
e. undergoing a legal review.
f. identify the barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: See management memo below

4 To address how efficiencies can be gained in future labor negotiations, Austin Labor Relations staff should use the plan developed by public safety departments to inform future negotiations and to consider opportunities for civilians to perform tasks in public safety departments.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: See management memo below

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Management Response

Austin

MEMORANDUM

To: Jason Hadavi, City Auditor

Through: Ramón Batista, Assistant City Manager RB

From: Chief Robert Luckritz, Austin-Travis County EMS
Interim Chief Tom Vocke, Austin Fire
Chief Lisa Davis, Austin Police LD
Roxana Stevens, Chief Labor Relations Officer

Date: November 10, 2026

Subject: **Management Response to Civilian Staffing Audit**

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This memorandum presents a collective response to the City Auditor's draft audit report on Civilian Staffing, which makes recommendations for Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services (ATCEMS), Austin Fire (AFD), Austin Police (APD), and Austin Labor Relations (ALR). The public safety portfolio appreciates the thorough review of each agency's staffing and operational structure, as well as the recommendations to improve efficiency by assigning civilian staff to tasks currently performed by sworn personnel.

Public safety leaders recognize the importance of maintaining an efficient balance between operational and support personnel, one that ensures critical services are delivered to the community while accounting for baseline coverage, annual funding allocations, and employee well-being. ATCEMS, AFD, and APD have previously sought to reduce sworn personnel workloads and reliance on overtime through staffing reallocations and transferring certain tasks to civilian personnel. This audit offers an opportunity to further assess each agency's current operational framework and identify adjustments that could enhance service delivery while reducing costs. Proposed implementation plans for each recommendation are provided below.

Recommendation 1
To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. The plan should consider:

a. *Opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.*
b. *The use of retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.*

Management Response Continued

Date: November 10, 2026
Subject: Management Response to Civilian Staffing Audit

c. *Estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.*
d. *Undergoing a legal review.*
e. *Identifying barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.*

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan:
Collectively, ATCEMS supports the recommendation to identify administrative tasks civilian staff can perform. Texas Local Government Code Chapter 143, including Subchapter K, establishes rules for sworn public safety personnel. The current meet-and-confer agreement also specifies which departmental positions must be classified as "uniformed staff." In general, employees who hold state EMT or paramedic licenses and whose positions require or involve substantial knowledge of emergency prehospital care must be classified as "uniformed staff." Training, instruction, and developing credentialed providers are core civil service duties. These responsibilities require a strong understanding of emergency medical service practice and prehospital care. Assigning these essential duties to civilian staff under the current State Law presents challenges for Austin-Travis County EMS.

Credentialing and delegated practice under a medical director require instructors and trainers to remain credentialed, including through ongoing field deployments that maintain their qualifications. Academy instruction for cadets requires verification of both clinical and operational proficiency. Instructors need hands-on experience to teach skills and processes effectively; replacing sworn instructors with civilian staff severs the connection to the experience needed to train new personnel.

Lastly, identifying opportunities to assign appropriate administrative functions to civilian personnel can improve departmental efficiency and allow sworn staff to focus on operational priorities. At the same time, the department should carefully consider roles involving clinical instruction and credentialing preparation. These functions rely on specialized operational experience, established field competencies, and supervisory responsibilities closely tied to the development, evaluation, and readiness of sworn personnel. This skills training is directly connected to life-saving clinical instruction essential to public safety. For these reasons, sworn instructors and trainers continue to play an important role in developing staff and delivering this training.

Below is a summary of the specific steps ATCEMS will take to implement a formal plan, as recommended by the City Auditor.

- By February 1 each year, as part of budget development, staff will identify duties performed by sworn personnel that could be performed by civilians. For each task or position, staff will determine:
- Whether the opportunity to transition the position from sworn to civilian is immediate or may arise in the future;
- Whether the task or position requires the skills of a retired paramedic or a civilian with 911 advanced life support EMS experience;

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Management Response Continued

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Subject: Management Response to Civilian Staffing Audit

- The return on investment, including estimated overtime savings from returning a paramedic to Operations and salary savings from using civilian rather than sworn personnel to perform the task
- Whether there are any legal barriers to hiring a civilian to perform the task.

By March 1 of each year, staff will:

- Determine whether to request a civilian FTE as an emergency budget request for the following fiscal year or as a regular budget request two years out;
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare a transition plan for the sworn employee currently holding the position to return to Operations; and
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare to hire a qualified civilian.

Each August, staff will submit a list of future opportunities to the Labor Relations Office, including sworn position(s) that civilians could perform if barriers are removed during contract negotiation. The list will include the following information:

- The nature of the tasks performed by sworn personnel in the position;
- The anticipated legal barriers to placing a civilian in a similar position to perform the same tasks;
- A statement from the labor association describing its position on the list; and
- An expectation that, when labor negotiations resume after the upcoming 2027 bargaining sessions, the Labor Relations Office will consider how the list of positions might be addressed in negotiations for the next Labor Agreement. The current Labor Agreement expires on September 30, 2027.

Proposed Implementation Date:
Annually on October 1; final upon renewal of the next Labor Agreement following any agreement resulting from the 2027 bargaining sessions, given the current Labor Agreement's expiration on September 30, 2027.

Recommendation 2
To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin Fire Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. The plan should consider:

a. *Opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.*
b. *The use of retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.*
c. *Estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.*
d. *Undergoing a legal review.*
e. *Identifying barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.*

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan:
Overall, Austin Fire (AFD) agrees that we should identify specific tasks civilians can perform. However, implementing our plan presents several challenges. As noted in the audit, Article 19 of

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our Collective Bargaining Agreement, "Use of Civilian Employees," and Texas Local Government Code § 143.003(4) specify which duties civilian employees may perform and which civil service duties firefighters must perform. Fire management has no intention of circumventing these legal requirements.

Second, we believe the difficulty in identifying sworn positions as immediate opportunities in Exhibit 8 reflects our previous efforts to use civilian staff as part of budget-reduction measures. For example, firefighters previously assigned to community outreach were returned to Operations to help reduce overtime costs. We have explored tasks that could be performed by civilian staff in the past and welcome the opportunity to continue this work, informed by the insights from this audit.

Experience in the Fire Service leads to hesitation in replacing firefighter trainers with retirees or civilians with firefighting experience, since civil service law does not permit civilians to supervise sworn personnel. Chief Officers will continue to play an important role in training cadets and incumbent firefighters. Given the critical life-safety implications for both the public and firefighters in the field, it is essential that new firefighters be trained by current, experienced firefighters. Additionally, Tex. Loc. Gov't Code § 143.003(4) identifies "fire training" as a job function requiring sworn firefighters.

Below is a summary of specific steps AFD will take to implement a formal plan as recommended by the City Auditor.

By February 1 of each year, as part of Budget Development, staff will identify tasks performed by sworn personnel that could be performed by civilians. For each task or job, staff will determine:

- Whether there is an immediate or future opportunity to move the position to a sworn role, based on any legal barriers to hiring a civilian to perform the task;
- Whether the task or job requires the skills of a retired firefighter or a civilian with fire service experience; and
- The return on investment, including estimated overtime savings from returning a firefighter to Operations and salary savings from paying civilian rather than sworn wages to perform the task.

By March 1 of each year for sworn positions considered an immediate opportunity, staff will determine the following:

- Determine whether to request the civilian FTE as an emergency budget item for the following fiscal year or as a regular budget item for two years out;
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare a transition plan for the sworn employee currently holding the position to return to Operations; and
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare to hire a qualified civilian.

Each August, staff will submit a list of future opportunities to the Labor Relations Office, including sworn position(s) that could be performed by civilians if barriers are removed during contract negotiation. The list will include the following information:

- The nature of the tasks performed by sworn individuals occupying the position;
- A statement from the labor association describing its stance on the list; and

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- An expectation that the Labor Relations Office will consider how the list of positions might be addressed when labor negotiations resume in Fiscal Year 2030.

Proposed Implementation Date:
Annually on October 1; Final upon renewal of the next Labor Agreement.

Recommendation 3
To address opportunities to effectively use civilian staff, the Austin Police Chief should develop and implement a plan to identify specific tasks that are currently performed by sworn staff that civilians could be performing in their departments. The plan should consider:

a. Opportunities for immediate change and long-term change.
b. The use of retired or former sworn employees to fill roles that may require advanced certification and/or prior industry experience.
c. Estimated cost-savings for using civilians to perform these tasks and estimated reduction in overtime savings.
d. Undergoing a legal review.
e. Identifying barriers to implement the plan and decide next steps to resolve.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan:
Austin Police Department (APD) generally agrees that there are opportunities to identify specific roles and tasks that civilians could perform. To assess whether certain sworn support positions could be civilianized, APD consulted the Austin City Attorney's Office (LAW) for legal advice. Although a detailed discussion of the governing legal standards and associated risks is more appropriately addressed in an attorney-client privileged memorandum, LAW has advised that significant legal obstacles stand in the way of civilianizing positions within APD. As the audit recognizes, the Texas Supreme Court has interpreted Chapter 143 of the Texas Local Government Code to require a position to be classified as sworn when it "require[s] knowledge of police work and work in the police department." Conversely, a job assignment that "requires no knowledge of police work and work in the police department, and entails no supervision of classified officers" need not be sworn. Lee v. City of Houston, 807 S.W.2d 290 (Tex. 1991).

The Department has implemented several measures to improve operational efficiency, reduce overtime costs, and strengthen public service delivery. These include deploying non-sworn temporary employees department-wide to perform administrative, support, and investigative tasks; establishing the Police Reserve Force to supplement sworn officers, including at special events; and developing the Community Service Officer (CSO) program to assist with vehicle abatement, non-emergency report-taking, and evidence collection. APD has also reallocated sworn personnel on several occasions to increase the number of officers assigned to patrol. Together with thorough executive-level monitoring of sworn overtime by unit and command, these reallocations have contributed to notable reductions in overtime expenditures during Chief Davis's tenure. APD continues to prioritize effective sworn-officer recruitment and retention strategies to reduce vacancies and further limit reliance on overtime.

Each Fiscal Year, as part of the Budget Development process, APD executive staff work to identify unmet needs. This process, which is also used to address any staffing deficiencies, includes

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evaluating factors outlined by the City Auditor. To further align with this recommendation, APD will specifically evaluate:

- Whether there is an immediate or future opportunity to reassign the sworn position;
- Whether the task or job requires the skills of a former police officer or a civilian with law enforcement experience;
- The return on investment, including estimated overtime savings from returning an officer to Patrol and salary savings from using civilian rather than sworn wages to perform the task;
- Whether any legal barriers prevent a civilian from performing the task;
- Whether to request a civilian FTE as an emergency budget request for the following fiscal year or as a regular request for two years out;
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare a transition plan for the sworn employee currently holding the position to return to Patrol; and
- If the civilian FTE is budgeted, prepare to hire a qualified candidate.

APD is committed to working together to identify additional efficiencies that support employee wellness, generate cost savings, and improve service delivery. APD will continue conducting annual Fiscal Year evaluations that consider these factors, align with the City Auditor's recommendations, and help inform the Budget Development process.

Proposed Implementation Date:
Annually on October 1; Final upon the renewal of the next Labor Agreement.

Recommendation 4
To address how efficiencies can be gained in future labor negotiations, Austin Labor Relations staff should use the plan developed by public safety departments to inform future negotiations and to consider opportunities for civilians to perform tasks in public safety departments.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan:
Austin Labor Relations (ALR) will use each plan to set priorities for the corresponding negotiations toward a renewed Labor Agreement. As bargaining strategies take shape, ALR will meet with the respective Chief and the Chief's designated staff to discuss the plan. This process will include a legal review by LAW to identify legal barriers and potential opportunities to negotiate changes to the Labor Agreement.

Proposed Implementation Date:
Upon completion of the initial plan by each public safety department and ongoing with each contract renewal thereafter. Note: Contract length and expiration dates are subject to negotiation. ALR will continue implementation upon receipt of an annual plan from each Public Safety Department (Fire, EMS, and Police).

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Austin-Travis County EMS Chief Robert Luckritz (Robert.Luckritz@austintexas.gov), Interim Austin Fire Chief Tom Vocke (Tom.Vocke@austintexas.gov), Austin Police Chief Lisa Davis (Lisa.Davis@austintexas.gov), Division Chief (City Attorney's Office) Chris Coppola (christopher.coppola@austintexas.gov), or Austin Chief Labor Relations Officer Roxana Stevens (Roxana.Stevens@austintexas.gov).

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cc: Neal Falgoust, Division Chief, Austin City Attorney's Office

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Scope

The audit scope included sworn and civilian staffing within public safety departments between 2019 and 2026.

Methodology

To complete this audit, we performed the following steps:

- Interviewed staff from Austin Police, Austin Fire, Austin-Travis County, Emergency Medical Services, Austin City Attorney's Office, Austin Labor Relations, and Austin Budget and Organizational Excellence Office
- Interviewed public safety union representatives, Public Safety Commission members, and external consultants
- Reviewed reports conducted by consultants, City budgets, and staffing numbers of public safety departments
- Analyzed vacancy data of public safety departments
- Performed a cost analysis of sworn and civilian roles within public safety departments
- Reviewed Public Safety Committee meeting notes
- Identified and selected Texas peer cities for analysis, conducted interviews and analyzed information received from peer city staff. Peer cities reviewed included: Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio (The team contacted peer cities but did not connect with representatives from Houston Police, Dallas Fire, and Fort Worth Fire Departments)
- Evaluated risk of fraud, waste and abuse related to the City's public safety staffing
- Evaluated internal controls related to the City's public safety staffing

Audit Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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The Austin City Auditor's Office was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. We conduct performance audits to review aspects of a City service or program and provide recommendations for improvement.

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