RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

AUSTIN-TRAVIS COUNTY FOOD POLICY BOARD

Recommendation Number: 20261109-004 - Evaluating City of Austin Social Service Contracts - Social Service Contract Reset

WHEREAS, In FY26-27, City of Austin forecasted revenue shortfalls triggering budget cuts across all city departments. These revenue shortfalls are forecasted to extend through FY27-28 before forecasts show revenue surpluses for FY28-29, FY29-30 and FY30-31. To address current budget shortfalls, Austin City Council Resolution 20260812-014 calls for comprehensive review of social services, including a needs assessment, and inclusion of regional collaboration, insourcing versus outsourcing, funding context, intentional performance management, and accountability.

WHEREAS, Resolution 20260812-014 calls on City Staff to work with the committee chairs of the Public Health Committee, Public Safety Committee, Economic Opportunity Committee, and Housing Committee to complete and report on a comprehensive review of social service contracts.

WHEREAS, the Austin Public Health Committee is requested to complete and report on comprehensive reviews of 6 focus areas, including Basic Needs, Behavioral Health, Family Services, Health Equity, HIV Services, and Homeless Services.

WHEREAS, multiple of the sub-committees of Austin Public Health, such as Basic Needs, Workforce Development, Health Equity, Children, Youth and Early Childhood, and Homeless Services, include food access and food security contracts, yet food security and food access are not currently included as a focus or priority area within any committee.

WHEREAS, the lack of acknowledgement of food access and food security as a priority area is concerning because 17.7% of all residents in Travis county are experiencing food insecurity, with 26.% of children, 34% of Black residents, and 24% of Hispanic residents experiencing food insecurity, a rate higher than national averages.

WHEREAS, the landscape of federal and state supported food assistance programs are becoming more difficult to access, such that 23,720 Texans in Austin and Travis County have lost food assistance benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program between September 2025 and September 2026 according to data from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission published on the Central Texas Food System Dashboard.

WHEREAS, measures based primarily on cost or service volume may not adequately show who can access services, who is missed, whether nutritional and food-security outcomes improve, or whether services have sufficient capacity to reach residents facing significant barriers;

WHEREAS, meaningful evaluation of food-access and food-security services should consider who is reached and who may be missed, nutritional and food-security outcomes, barriers to accessing services, equity and community impact, participant experience, and the capacity of providers to reach households facing significant barriers**;**

WHEREAS, residents with lived experience using food-access and social services can provide important insight into access barriers and community impacts that may not be reflected in contract performance or service-volume data;

WHEREAS, The City of Austin adopted the Austin Travis County Food Plan in 2024, which prioritized the expansion of access to nutritious and culturally relevant food to address food insecurity and barriers to food access (Goal 6), highlighting the importance to Austin and Travis County residents of addressing food security and food access in their communities. The Austin/Travis County Food Plan incorporated the Healthy Food Policy Project's four working principles: addressing power imbalance, building trust, addressing institutional and structural racism and using an asset-based approach to strengthening our food system.

WHEREAS, the role of the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Board is to advise the City Council and Travis County Commissioners Court concerning activities to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally and sustainability grown food at reasonable prices for all residents, and therefore, can serve as a unique partner in addressing food access and food security.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that the City of Austin,

1) Create a transparent, comprehensive evaluation strategy of social service contracts in partnership with organizations and agencies responsible for carrying out City of Austin social service contracts.
2) Ensure food access and food security are explicitly addressed in the evaluation process, which takes into account the complexity of food access and food insecurity in social service delivery and incorporates principles addressing power imbalance, building trust, addressing institutional and structural racism and using an asset-based approach to strengthening the food system.
3) Establish food access and food insecurity as a priority area for social service contacts.

Date of Approval: November 9, 2026

Motioned By: Kacey Hanson Seconded By: Natalie Poulos

Vote: 9-0

For: Andrea Abel, Maggie Amaku, Lisa Barden, Nitza Cuevas, Kacey Hanson, Alexandra "Lexie" Lewis, Seanna Marceaux, Natalie Poulos

Against:

Abstain: Andrea Abel

Off the dais:

Absent: Beth Corbett, Erin McDonald, Amanda Wadsworth

Attest: 

City of Austin, Austin Climate Action & Resilience, Staff Liaison, Amanda Rohlich