

Community Statement: City Council Must Vote FOR Austin Values by Voting AGAINST an Expensive and Harmful Police Contract

Austin's inclusive vision for health, safety, and equity should be the basis of any agreement undertaken by the City of Austin. We, the undersigned organizations, urge the Austin City Council to **send this too-costly and too-harmful police contract back to the bargaining table**. We urge the Mayor and City Council to vote **no** on this police contract and use our city resources to maximize the quality of life of disenfranchised residents.

We object to this tentative agreement because it violates the will of the voters for greater transparency, accountability and oversight of our police after decades of impunity and secrecy.

We oppose this tentative agreement because:

- The \$218M price tag is an insult to all the community, environmental, and social service organizations who fought for scraps just a month ago.
- The \$218M will require tax increases, cuts to core services, or both based on the City's own financial forecasts.
- The \$218M may well also be taken from reserves, impeding the long-term stability that the manager and elected officials prioritized in the last two budget cycles.

We stand with AFSCME, representing 4,500 city workers in other departments who are potentially facing cuts to pay for this expensive deal. Indeed, the city cannot invest \$218M more in one department while expecting the rest to operate with limited resources. Further, this deal threatens COLA increases for all other city workers in future years, along with COLA increases for the workers in organizations who contract with the city to implement all of Austin's budgeted services.

Despite repeated extreme weather events since 2021 inflicting untold hardship and trauma on this community and widely recognized failures on the part of the City to respond appropriately, contributing to the ousting of the City's last full-time City Manager, funding for a long-time community demand for local Resilience Hubs and an improved extreme weather emergency response ecosystem has yet to materialize. Prior to the increase in funding to the police, the community's calls for the health and safety of our most vulnerable should be recognized.

The City manager is now claiming there is some path by which this \$218M over the next five years can be paid, after months of discussion around the “ARPA cliff.” City leaders have warned that when federal ARPA dollars run out, our City will be unable to maintain the social safety net we’ve built for our most indigent people. Just this week, the Council debated closing shelter beds and putting 260 people back on the street due to a budget shortfall of just a few million dollars.

This year, the city finally began to reinvest in park maintenance after years of decline in the park services that make our green spaces enjoyable. The reinvestment totaled just \$2.2M, due to budget constraints, even though everyone agrees that much more is needed now and in the future as our park acreage grows. Parks and Recreation is the next largest department after the public safety departments and will no doubt face the largest cuts to pay for this contract, at a time when Council Districts have aligned on the need to invest in all our parks, in all our Districts.

This past summer, after years of working with the community, the City released its Austin/Travis County Food Plan. No funding for either the food plan or the Climate Equity Plan (completed in 2021 and still underfunded) was included in the Manager’s budget. Only thanks to a willingness by a majority of the Council to scrape from reserves on the very last day did the Climate Equity Plan get modest staff and project support for the coming year. And yet suddenly the city can afford \$218M for police -- an average year-over-year increase to the budget of \$40M!

This past summer, the City could not find just \$2M in ongoing funding to pay for appropriate EMS and Integral Care crisis response for mental health emergencies, but there’s a seemingly endless supply of money for police to do that same job without adequate training, presenting less support and potentially more danger to those who need services. Most voters in Austin support expanding successful and more cost-effective alternative responders, paying for street outreach and harm reduction, and further expanding violence prevention services. These services make all our residents safer.

At a moment when Texas’ most vulnerable populations are under attack by state lawmakers, the city struggles to fund the basic legal and social services that will protect immigrant families, women, LGBTQ+, Black and Brown families, trans families, and our most indigent some degree of safety. While the waitlist for rental assistance to prevent eviction grows by the day, Council members fought for funding, finally getting a paltry \$7.1M allocated to modestly fund half a dozen programs with a proven track record of success. As SB 4 expands the threat to our migrant neighbors and they sometimes wait months for legal assistance, immigration legal services got no additional funding.

Austin has a vision for what life in a healthy, safe, and equitable community can be, and this contract betrays that vision.

Signed,

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