

May 4, 2026

Mayor Watson
Austin City Council Members
301 W. 2nd Street
Austin, TX 78701

RE: Urgent Call to Pause City's Plan to Expand APD-Led Encampment Sweeps and Invest in Housing, Services, and Care in Austin

Dear Mayor Watson and Austin City Council Members,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals – representing healthcare providers, social workers, labor leaders, faith communities, and advocates for housing and justice – write to express deep concern about the City's plans to expand the use of encampment sweeps.

Recent [reporting](#) from the Austin American-Statesman outlines a plan to scale up encampment sweeps across the city – pairing Austin Police Department officers with camp clean up crews, without embedded outreach workers to offer shelter and services. This comes at a time when Austin faces federal cuts and resource constraints, with nowhere near the housing, shelter or services needed to support people experiencing homelessness.

As organizations and community leaders working across health, housing, and public safety systems, we are united in this: encampment sweeps are not an effective or humane response to homelessness. They disrupt access to healthcare; result in the loss of critical belongings like medications, identification, and survival gear; increase instability and trauma, making it harder for people to secure services; undermine trust between vulnerable communities and service providers; and place additional strain on already overburdened systems.

Further, recent local data underscores how costly and ineffective sweeps are at addressing the root causes of homelessness. City officials estimate that last fall's three-week cleanup surge cost about \$830,000, clearing 669 sites and contacting 1,212 people. Of those, only 181 entered shelters, 87 were connected to services and 109 later returned to living in encampments.

This plan also represents a concerning departure from the City's stated commitment to a coordinated housing- and service-first response. Many of us have worked alongside City leaders to invest critical dollars into a system grounded in housing, care, and coordination. We are deeply concerned that this approach moves Austin in the opposite direction.

Austin's homeless response system continues to face major gaps that this plan fails to address. With thousands of homeless individuals and families, the City lacks sufficient shelter capacity – particularly low-barrier, non-congregate, and family options. There is not enough permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness, nor enough deeply affordable housing for those exiting homelessness. At the same time, critical

gaps persist in health care, substance use, and harm reduction services, as well as in basic needs infrastructure such as access to toilets, showers, laundry, and storage.

Expanding sweeps while failing to address these major systemic gaps will only harm people further, without providing any alternatives or places for people to go or resources they can access.

Lastly, we are also concerned about the disproportionate impact of these policies. As ECHO pointed out in 2023, in [“Input on the Violation of the Human Rights of People Experiencing Homelessness in the Enforcement of Laws Against Public Camping in Austin, Texas,”](#) the effects of the camping ban and subsequent encampment sweeps fall disproportionately on Black people in Austin. [Of the 2,038 camping citations issued since 2021, 34% were given to Black people who account for only 8% of the population in Travis County.](#) In addition, expanding APD-led sweeps raises serious concerns for our undocumented community. Increased police presence and enforcement create real fear and drive people further away from resources, and a minor arrest for camping or trespassing can trigger immigration consequences.

Austin must change course. We urge the City to:

- Immediately pause the plan for enhanced APD-led sweeps aimed to start on May 11th
- Ensure that any encampment management is led by trained outreach and public health professionals – not police
- Invest in solutions to homelessness including housing and low-barrier shelter
- Expand access to healthcare, harm reduction, and other services
- Expand access to toilets, showers, laundry, and storage
- Protect the rights, property, and dignity of people experiencing homelessness
- Coordinate with impacted communities and advocates when considering major shifts in strategy

The solution to homelessness is clear: housing, services, and care – not displacement and punishment. We stand ready to partner with the City to advance humane and effective solutions that improve health, safety, and stability for all Austinites.

Sincerely,

Organizational:

Advocates for Social Justice Reform
AFSCME Local 1624
American Civil Liberties Union of Texas
Austin Area Urban League
Austin Community Law Center
Austin DSA
Austin Justice Coalition
Austin Mutual Aid
Austin Raging Grannies

CARMAhealth
Casa Marianella
Central Presbyterian Church
Communities for Recovery
Equity Action
Go Austin/Vamos Austin
Grassroots Leadership
Ground Game Texas
Hands Off Central TX
Homeless Advocacy Project
Nonviolent Austin
Reimagine Wealth
So Glad You're Here
Street Forum
Sunrise ATX
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance
Texas Housers
Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
Undoing White Supremacy Austin
United Workers of Integral Care
VOCAL-TX
Workers Defense Action Fund

Individual Signatories:

Abby Tatkov — Project Manager; Advocate
Alan Schalscha — Physician
Alice Thompson — Psychiatrist
Alicia Butler — Attorney
Alisa Carr — Resident of Austin, Owner of Eye of the Heart, Member of St. Hildegard's
Community
Amelia Hunter — Biologist
Andy Katsetos — Retired
Angela Greco — Landscape Designer / Writer
Ann Marie Case, MD — Physician
Anupama Kapadia — Physician
Apurva Rawal — Born & Raised Austinite
Ashley Coleman Taylor — Assistant Professor
Barbara Muntz — Volunteer
Betty Cole — Teacher
Blair Walker, MD — Chief of Psychiatry, Dell Seton Medical Center; Clinical Associate Professor
of Psychiatry, Dell Medical School; Legislative Committee Member, Travis County Medical
Society; Board Member, SIMS Foundation

Bob Batlan — Advocates for Social Justice Reform Co-Founder
Bobby Shi — Concerned Austinite
Brian Soria — Author
Brooks Keener — Internist and Primary Care Physician
Camden Parker — Software Engineer
Catherine Fontenot — Tattoo Artist
Cayce Anderson — Healthcare for the Homeless Nurse Practitioner
Chantel Pridgon — Criminal Justice Campaign Manager
Chloe Crumley — Engagement Manager
Christian Rodriguez — Executive Director
Christin Durham — Principal Research Associate, Urban Institute
Christina Charles — Leander Democrats Together
Christine Constable — RN, Nursing
Christine Girolamo — Individual
Christine Schumacher — LMSW
Christopher C. Martin — APRN
Courtney Szigetvari — LCSW-S
Crispa Aeschbach Jachmann — Medical Director
Crystal Murray — Individual
Daniela Silva — Founder of Nuevo Mundo
Daniella Sadeh — PMHNP-BC
David Chincanchan — Self
Dr. Elizabeth Schulwolf — Physician
Elliott Trahan — High School Teacher
Feba Thomas — Physician for Unhoused Individuals
Hamza Tantau — Community Health Worker
Hans Maverick — Policy Researcher
Heather Elizabeth Neary — Spiritual Counselor
Heid Bray — Self Employed
Hemali Patel — Physician
Ian C. Adams — QMHP
Ian Evidente — Data Engineer
Ilona Farkas — NP
Isabela Johnston — Baker
Jacob Emerson — Homelessness Advocate
Jami Rivera — Case Manager
Jasmine Tumewu — RN
Jason Haskins — Habitavit
Jeff McCreight — Physician
Jennifer Anderson — RN
Jennifer Kolb — LCSW
Jennifer Nunes — Physician Assistant
Jess Bowen — Patagonia
John Embers, MD — Internal Medicine & Addiction Medicine Physician

Joni Rothenberg — Concerned Citizen
Jordyn Middlebrooks — Community Member
Julia Moen — Educator
Kaci Thomas — Physician, Addiction Medicine
Kady Burgan — LMSW
Kat Garia — Community Advocate
Kate Hargett — CHW
Kathy Mitchell — Retired
Kendel Jones — Constituent
Kimberly Pena — Registered Nurse
Kristin Connelly — PhD Student at UT Austin
Laura Blakley — Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
Laura Santos-Farry — Mutual Aid Volunteer
Laurie K — Citizen
Lily Hughes — Capacity Building Manager, Texas Harm Reduction Alliance
Lindsey Davis — Teacher
Lora Ann Gerson — Retired
Lorie Kmetz — Family and Addiction Medicine Nurse Practitioner
Maggie Exner — Park Ranger
Maggie Luna — Executive Director, THRA
Malisa DiGiacomo — Austin Resident
Mandy Blott — Community Member
Marilyn Arenas — Nurse
Marina Roberts — Former Homes Not Handcuffs Organizer
Mary Price — Austin Resident
Michelle Ahmad — IT Manager
Michelle Bozemon — Nurse
Monica Guzmán — Community Leader
Mónica Jiménez — Associate Professor
Mustafa Moheeth — Physician
Nancy Wolf — Concerned Citizen of Austin
Nathaniel Nevitt, MD — Psychiatrist
Nicole Meitzen — LCSW
Paul Tardie — Drop-In Specialist
Paula McDermott — Touchstone Connections Consulting
Rachel Gunner — Social Worker / Community Advocate
Rachel Schuyler — PLE Expert Advisor, Community Advocate and Volunteer
Rachel Thompson — Registered Nurse
Raini Gomez — Concerned Citizen
Rebekah Wilson — Mother
Regina Evidente — Nurse Practitioner
Richard Garrett Key — Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry
Sage Russella — Individual
Samantha Hurlbut — PMHNP

Sarah Hammaker — Social Worker
Saskia Witthoft — Caretaker
Scott Henson — Retired
Skye Bauer — Nurse
Snehal Patel — Physician
Sydnee Mwakutuya — Social Worker
Tammy Foskey — Retired
Terrence Bethel — Individual
Tim Mercer — Physician
Travis Ward — Community Tenant Organizer
Tyler Landrum — Inventory Specialist
Vivian Sule — NP
Walter Randolph Adams — Ph.D., MPH
Wesley Mostert — Teacher