

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
McCallum YDSA
Nonviolent Austin
Queertopia ATX
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: *Names removed for privacy*