



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities

Recommendation Number: 20210312-2D: A Resolution For an Austin Police Department Disability Training and Community Liaison

WHEREAS, Austin, being home to both the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Texas School for the Deaf, the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center and the Austin State Hospital, along with other smaller facilities, has a very large population of people with disabilities. In 2019, people with disabilities were 103,634 of the 2019 Travis County population, including the City of Austin (People with Disabilities: A Texas Profile Texas Workforce Investment Council (March 2019) at <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/People-With-Disabilities-2019.pdf>);

WHEREAS, the percentage of people with disabilities living within the City of Austin is expected to grow as the population both increases and ages. It is also expected to grow from survivors of the Covid-19 pandemic. People with disabilities do not necessarily have the same needs and/or life experiences as a person without disabilities. The distinct needs and culture of people with disabilities need to be acknowledged and considered, including by the Austin Police Department;

WHEREAS, the Austin Police Department provides Americans with Disabilities Act legal training both to all incoming cadets and active officers. In response to prior constructive criticism from the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities and acknowledged by APD management, the department implemented increased counselor screening for mental health calls. However, the disability community still experiences bias from APD and the City of Austin. Ableism adversely impacts people with disabilities' quality of life and access to justice;

WHEREAS, a 2019 University of Texas Law School Human Rights Clinic report found that out of the 15 largest United States cities, the City of Austin had the highest rate of people with intellectual disabilities/developmental disabilities ("ID/DD") being shot by law enforcement on mental health related calls. It was then recognized that the Austin Police Department had limited use of appropriate de-escalation techniques when interacting with ID/DD individuals

who might be unable to clearly understand and/or then comply with the arriving Austin officers' directions. At times, the person an Austin Police officer may be working with may not be having a "crisis" per se but just may lack the cognitive/functional skills necessary to properly comprehend the officer's directions in order to avoid being injured and/or killed;

WHEREAS, culture encompasses the shared norms, values, and beliefs of a group of people and police culture traditionally operated with an "us vs. them mentality." People with disabilities have a different experience with officers compared to people without disabilities and the City has not formally acknowledged that ableism is a form of discrimination;

WHEREAS, an officer who is themselves fully fluent in disability culture could assist both their peers in the department and community groups who work with/for people with disabilities in developing and providing appropriate and comprehensive disability outreach trainings for organizations especially servicing people with disabilities;

WHEREAS, a community liaison could provide the critical connection between the Austin Police Department and Austin's disability community. Because he or she would be part of the department and the police culture, a designated community liaison could also help peers and the department understand that bias takes many different forms. One of those forms is ableism or discrimination against people with disabilities;

WHEREAS, people with disabilities are treated differently by the Austin Police Department even while the police academy and department provide training on the ADA. Limited prior personal experience with disability and disability culture depersonalizes people with disabilities to the arriving officer. Officers currently give crime victims with disabilities crime scene cards that are not printed in Braille or otherwise accessible to the visually impaired or deaf communities. These cards provide no way for people who are deaf and/or blind to effectively communicate follow up. Because they cannot directly communicate with APD, deaf and/or blind individuals are treated differently by APD even if this was not the department's and/or management's deliberate/conscious intention;

WHEREAS, unlike a person without disabilities, an individual with ID/DD may not be able to otherwise cognitively understand an arriving officer's directions and/or clearly process what will, in fact, actually happen if they do not immediately comply. People with disabilities who are not ID/DD also experience unequal treatment since they cannot tell the officer what is happening/has happened to them in mutually accessible language or obtain timely follow up from the department after an encounter occurred. Somebody not able to read an analog watch specifically because of neurological disabilities may still be asked to tell what time it is without looking at their digital watch by an arriving officer to help figure out if they are okay and the officer only ends up measuring that specific person's disability itself instead of an actual injury ;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that The Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities recommends that the City of Austin : should give The Austin Police Department a designated and permanent disability community liaison who is multilingual in English, American Sign

Language, Spanish and Vietnamese. This liaison would be modeled after the community outreach liaison position already funded and provided to other communities such as African American, Asian, seniors, LGBTQ and immigrant communities. Community policing requires establishing, building and maintaining trust with historically underserved/marginalized local communities. A permanent and designated disability community liaison will demonstrate a commitment to address and remedy both conscious and unconscious bias. Preference hiring for the permanent active/non-desk duty position should come from the disability community itself as much as possible. The community liaison will work with the Austin Police Department the City of Austin and the Office of the Police Monitor to appear at disability community events and facilities to promote and maintain better community outreach. This hired APD disability community liaison will promote improved community relations between the entire disability community and Austin Police Department

Date of Approval: 03/12/21

Record of the vote: Unanimous on a 7-0 vote with Commissioners Gene Brooks and Taurean Burt absent.

Attest: *Lee Nguyen*

(Mayor's Committee for people with Disabilities City Co-Staff Liaison)