




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager 

DATE: November 5, 2020

SUBJECT: Ending Human Trafficking in Austin (Resolution 20151015-033)

The purpose of this memo is to provide a response to Resolution No. [20151015-033](#) regarding the City's efforts to end human trafficking.

Background

The Resolution directed the City Manager to:

- Appoint a liaison to local organizations that share the City's goal of ending human trafficking in Austin;
- Incorporate information about preventing, identifying, and responding to human trafficking into existing training for City employees; and
- Develop plans and policies to prevent and reduce human trafficking in the trafficking related to all City tourism initiatives and City-sponsored events.

In response to the resolution, the City Manager's Office (CMO) worked with the Austin Police Department (APD), Austin Fire Department (AFD), Austin Code Department (ACD), and Austin-Travis County Medical Services (EMS) to address the requirements outlined in the resolution and identify initiatives and opportunities to further prevent human trafficking.

In January 2020, Mayor Adler and City Manager Cronk reaffirmed the City's commitment by joining other transportation industry leaders in publicly pledging to support the Transportation Leaders Against Human Trafficking Initiative. Under the initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the City of Austin pledges to continue providing employee education, raising public awareness, and measuring collective impact on human trafficking by tracking and sharing data points.

Efforts

Austin Police Department

In 2009, APD established the Human Trafficking & Child Exploitation Unit within the Organized Crime Division. The Unit's mission is to proactively combat and investigate human trafficking in an effort to prosecute traffickers and connect victims to social service organizations. The Unit investigates cases involving trafficking of persons, for the purpose of sexual or labor exploitation, and enforces organized gambling, organized prostitution, and pornography-related State laws and City ordinances.

APD collaborates with members of the Central Texas Federal Law Enforcement Task Force on coordinated efforts to combat human trafficking. APD also is part of the Central Texas Human Trafficking Task Force, a state-wide multidisciplinary group working to identify victims and prosecute traffickers through proactive and reactive investigations. This task force is led by the U.S. Attorney's Office and consists almost entirely of law enforcement professionals. Though the department does not receive funding for community awareness, education or prevention campaigns, the department continues to work with community partners and non-governmental organizations, including Allies Against Slavery, and The Refuge, Refugee Services of Texas, who facilitate education and awareness campaigns. In 2019, APD's Human Trafficking (HT) Unit handled 220 cases that were reported to involve human trafficking.

Because of their expertise in this field and participation and affiliation with State and local agencies targeting human trafficking, APD serves as the City's liaison to local organizations. This fall the HT Unit is developing online training to share with City departments, specifically departments providing customer-facing services to the community, such as Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Department, Austin Resource Recovery and Aviation. This online training will be designed to provide staff with key information to be able to detect signs of trafficking and know how to appropriately report it. APD's Victim Services will also be a resource in providing information on support services that are available to victims of trafficking.

Austin Fire Department

During the summer of 2019, AFD's Training Division attended specialized training on anti-human trafficking awareness, which led to the development of a 4-hour medical continuing education (CE) class on human trafficking entitled "2019 Summer Human Trafficking Awareness." The course focused on awareness and helping responders be able to:

- Describe the size of the human trafficking problem globally, nationally, and in Texas.

- Describe the environmental clues for the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in identifying human sex trafficking.
- Identify the average age of minor sex trafficking victims.
- Identify terms frequently used by human traffickers.
- Be familiar with possible signs of abuse or trafficking and have the resources to act.

All AFD personnel and Travis County Emergency Services Districts (ESDs) that use the City's Blackboard CE program were eligible to take the class. Between AFD and Travis County, a total of 1,197 individuals attended the online course. Of those who attended the course, 1,192 were AFD firefighters.

Austin Code Department

Austin Code inspectors are in a unique position with respect to observing signs of human trafficking, as their work provides a front facing service with the community. Inspectors routinely make inspections and observations at residential properties, hotels, motels, short-term rental (STR) properties and Rooming & Boarding Houses, all of which could potentially be locations for human trafficking to occur.

Currently, ACD has a policy in place, ACD 162, which outlines staff's response to observing potential issues of human trafficking. This policy went into effect on August 21, 2018 and remains in place today. In addition, a portion of ACD staff attended an APD Human Trafficking Awareness Training in November 2018.

ACD currently has several proposed initiatives under review, which include:

- Incorporate Human Trafficking training into the standard curriculum for the Austin Code Academy, require this training for all field staff, and make it available to other interested staff as an optional training.
- Include educational literature in licensing application packets for hotels/motels, short-term rentals, Rooming & Boarding Houses, and venues that could potentially serve as sites where human trafficking may occur.
- Add a web link on ACD's Licensing and Registration webpage connecting users to educational information about human trafficking and how to file a report.
- Collaborate with other City departments to promote a public awareness on social media.

ACD Training will have staff review ACD's internal policy regarding Reporting Suspected Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation. ACD will continue to identify opportunities to educate staff and the public, and remains committed to working to preventing this threat in our community.

Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services

The Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services' Community Health Paramedics have received training related to detecting human trafficking, which remains a high priority for the department. The department is assessing how they might expand its Academy training to include topics such as human trafficking, equitable services, and equitable outcomes. In addition, the department is exploring opportunities for medics to receive in-depth field training with other agencies.

Next Steps

In September 2019, during the 86th Legislative Session, Senate Bill 72 was passed, which directed the Attorney General to establish the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Coordinating Council (THTPCC) to coordinate State and local activities. The THTPCC distributed a statewide survey to agencies such as, law enforcement and prosecution entities, prevention programs, victim-serving organizations, advocacy groups and health care providers. The purpose for this survey was to identify best practices and gather information regarding current expenditures of state funds to address human trafficking in Texas. APD participated in the survey in Spring 2020 and will continue to lead this effort.

The National Slavery and Human Trafficking Awareness month is scheduled for January 2021 and during this month, APD in partnership with the Corporate Public Information Office (CPIO) will collaborate with the other City departments including AFD, ATCEMS and ACD to promote public awareness on social media.

Finally, a working group comprised of representatives from the Development Services Department's Special Events Division, Economic Development Department, Austin Convention Center, and Austin Police Department will begin meeting on November 18, 2020 to determine how they might develop and implement plans and policies to prevent and reduce human trafficking in all City tourism initiatives and City-sponsored events.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or Patricia Bourenane (Patricia.Bourenane@austintexas.gov) should you have questions or require additional information.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
CMO Executive Team
Chief Brian Manley, Austin Police Chief
Chief Joel G. Baker, Austin Fire Chief
Chief Ernesto Rodriguez, Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Chief
José G. Roig, Austin Code Interim Director
Denise Lucas, Development Services Director
Sylvia Holt-Rabb, Interim Economic Development Director
Trisha Tatro, Austin Convention Interim Director