

EQUITY + JUSTICE

Austin is a city with a bright future and layered past. Since 2015, Austin Mayor Steve Adler has had a staunch commitment to ensuring the advancement of equity and civil rights in Austin. Throughout his tenure, Mayor Adler has been a watchdog for justice in the face of state and federal acts of oppression. The last seven years have set a template for the creation of an Austin where all can not only survive but thrive.

The work of equity is never complete, however, and Mayor Adler is excited to see how the next generation of decision-makers will continue the fight for the humanity of all with the precedents he has set.

LGBTQIA+

The Austin City Council created the LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission in 2017 to serve as advisors on issues regarding the LGBTQ+ community and work to enhance government accountability on its behalf. The commission released its first quality of life survey in 2021, finding that many people surveyed felt accepted and safe with chosen family and friends at work. However, the survey found there is still much work to be done for every resident of Austin to feel accepted in public places like restaurants.

In 2019, the City of Austin celebrated Intersex Awareness Day for the first time. In 2021, Austin was one of the first cities in the South to pass a resolution formally condemning non-consensual and medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children.

(Source: [CoA](#))

Reproductive Rights

- Council voted 10-1 in November 2018 to add 20 years to Planned Parenthood's lease renting from the City for \$1 a year. The new contract ends in 2038. Council approved the first lease for the site in 1972.
- Council approved \$150,000 for organizations that help women afford incidental costs like transportation, lodging and childcare when they seek an abortion, in 2019.

- Passed in 2022 after the *Dobbs* Supreme Court ruling, the Guarding the Right to Abortion Care for Everyone (GRACE) Act requested that City funds not be used to solicit or investigate reports of abortion and that APD make investigating abortion their lowest priority.
- Council also approved resolutions directing the City Manager to explore the City's ability to conduct a public education program on long-term birth control including vasectomies and ensuring that City employee health insurance covers low-cost birth control, including but not limited to vasectomies.
- Another post-*Roe* resolution directed the City Manager to make recommendations to the Council on the feasibility of providing City employees with benefits for them to be able to access reproductive health care services that were previously available to them but are no longer lawfully available in the state of Texas.

Equity Office

In an effort to address racial inequity in our community, the Austin City Council passed a resolution in 2015 directing the City Manager to evaluate the impact of existing city policies and practices on racial equity and develop an Equity Assessment Tool that can be used across City departments during the budget process.

The Equity Office was created in 2016 to focus on advancing equity in all aspects of City operations. The first Chief Equity Officer, Brion Oaks, began this work in October 2016. Annually, the Office trains more than 500 people, and consults on more than 600 different programs, services, and policies with City staff and the community.

Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities

Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities was initially sparked in 2016 by the death of David Joseph, a 17-year-old African American who was unarmed when he was shot and killed by an Austin police officer.

The Task Force was headed by Colette Pierce Burnette (president and CEO of Huston-Tillotson University) and Paul Cruz (then superintendent of AISD). It focused on five pillars: education, real estate/housing, health, finance, banking/industry, and civil/criminal justice. The Task Force submitted its final report in March 2017 with Council then directed the City Manager to review the report and its recommendations and to bring actionable items back to Council as is practicable.

Mayor Steve Adler joined a coalition of community activists in October 2020 to launch a new nonprofit organization, the Central Texas Collective for Racial Equity, to succeed the Task Force and bring its 278 recommendations to fruition.

Evictions and Displacement

Throughout the pandemic, eviction protections saved lives by stopping potential cycles of homelessness and keeping people in their homes. **In fact, Austin led big cities in Texas in lowest pandemic-related evictions, and continues to have one of the lowest eviction rates in the nation.**

Additionally, Project Connect is setting aside \$300 million for an investment in anti-displacement efforts that will include acquiring property. An Equity Assessment Tool will also be created for Project Connect to analyze how its implementation may exacerbate conditions leading to displacement of residents. The tool will also identify investments to create economic opportunities for residents living in those transit corridors.

(Source: [CoA](#); [Princeton Eviction Lab](#))

Reimagining Public Safety

In 2020, the City of Austin kicked off a comprehensive approach to assessing and expanding public safety systems, called Reimagining Public Safety (RPS). RPS is dedicated to the core value that Austinites deserve to feel safe and have the most suitable public safety resources in their times of need. RPS also focuses on leveraging city resources in order to design community-focalized interventions to decrease harm and address the core cause of systematic inequalities.

On August 13, 2020, Council approved an APD budget of approximately \$290 million which reflected a budget change of \$153.2 million. APD funding was reduced and reinvested by approximately \$31.5M – taken primarily from cadet classes and overtime – to reinvest in permanent supportive housing and services, EMS for COVID-19 response, family violence shelter and protection, violence prevention, workforce development, and a range of other programs.

On August 12, 2021, Austin City Council approved a \$443.1M budget for APD as part of the City's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) budget. The funding amount ensured full compliance with the then recently-enacted State Legislation HB 1900, which set a funding minimum at the higher amount of a city's police budgets from the two prior fiscal years.

The approved FY 22 budget also included \$36.5 million dollars directly tied to advancing RPS initiatives. The budget maintained \$27.2 million of funding approved in the FY 21 budget, while providing an additional \$9.3 million in one-time and ongoing funding for public safety reform recommendations brought forward by the RPS Task Force.

The funding approved in the FY 21 budget that continued into FY 22 was for a variety of initiatives including the Reimagined Police Training Academy, Office of Violence Prevention, mental health first response, a family violence shelter, permanent supportive housing and services, and other alternative public safety strategies.

On August 18th, 2022, Austin City Council approved a budget with funding for three Austin Police cadet classes to help fill officer vacancies and improve response times to emergency calls.

(Source: [CoA](#))

Safety and Crime

The FBI released National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) crime data in 2019 that ranked Austin 11th safest in crimes against persons, 12th safest in crimes against society, and 9th safest in crimes against property for U.S. cities with a population of 400,000 or greater.

Austin responded to longstanding requests from the community for a more appropriate response to mental health crises that are assigned to APD through 9-1-1. As of February 1, 2021, 9-1-1 callers are now asked if they need police, fire, EMS, or mental health services. Austin was the first Emergency Communications Center in North America to add a mental health diversion option for 9-1-1.

In January 2020, the Austin City Council approved a resolution for APD to stop arresting or ticketing people for most low-level marijuana possession offenses in Austin. Austin voters codified the practice by approving a local ballot measure to decriminalize marijuana, as well as a ban on no-knock warrants, in May 2022.

In April 2021, APD's Violence Intervention Program was launched to take proactive measures to reduce the number of violent and gun crimes occurring in Austin. In June 2021, the City of Austin was one of fifteen cities to join the Biden Administration's Crime and Violence Initiative Collaborative. Through the collaborative, Austin has shared its ongoing work with re-imagining public safety and pushed for more federal action on increasing gun violence in American cities.

(Source: [FBI](#); [CultureMap](#))