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BREAKING: 25 local organizations oppose petition effort funded by Republicans & elites

EMS, mental health care, parks services, & more could be devastated by the ballot effort

Petition would force Austin to arbitrarily hire 500 more police officers

Austin needs a comprehensive approach to public safety

AUSTIN, TX – Today **Save Austin Now**, funded by national Republican money and Austin’s wealthiest elites, filed its petition signatures with the City Clerk. The petition threatens to force Austin to arbitrarily hire an estimated 500 more police officers, and more every year, without regard to the damage done to other critical programs in the budget. This misguided ballot effort could devastate the budgets for EMS, mental health care, victim services, homelessness solutions, park improvements, and more.

To date, 25 organizations representing a wide variety of constituencies oppose this petition, and more will be added in the coming days and weeks.

“The local Republican Party, Governor Greg Abbott, Congressman Chip Roy, and some of Austin’s wealthiest Republicans are attacking our local democracy once again,” **said Sukyi McMahon, senior policy director of the Austin Justice Coalition**. “They’re trying to force our city to hire 500 more police officers next year even if it means slashing other safety services or public programs.”

Save Austin Now’s petition requires Austin to “ensure at all times” that the police department has two sworn officers per thousand residents, or about 2,050 officers based on the current population, along with other stipulations that require even more police to be hired. All told, this would require at least 500 more police to be hired next year, according to **Just Liberty**, a bipartisan criminal justice organization.

“This petition sets a mandatory police officer staffing requirement that will require, initially, at least 500 new officers at a cost of roughly \$50 million,” **said Kathy Mitchell, policy coordinator for Just Liberty**. “More and more police officers will have to be hired every year

no matter what is happening with crime, while we would have to underfund other public safety priorities like EMS. That's absurd."

"Austin has begun to make reforms to policing and police budgets, inspired by the protests against the murder of George Floyd" **said Chas Moore, executive director and founder of the Austin Justice Coalition.** "We've begun to put in place creative proposals to address the needs of our community – our youth, our families, our elders – with all kinds of staff and services that will make us all safer together. This ballot item, if successful, will end all of that. Instead of a comprehensive public safety system that takes care of everyone, we will be forced to put all our city's new revenue into the police department and nothing else."

"In the wake of the killings of George Floyd and Mike Ramos (to name a few police-related deaths in 2020), Austinites from across the city rose up to protest the treatment and brutality that Black people face from police," **said Alycia Castillo of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition.** "They championed the City Council's decision to provide real budgetary change to transform how we approach public safety, and they still support that necessary, life saving shift."

"We need a comprehensive public safety approach that centers community well-being and addresses the root causes of community harm," **said Cate Graziani of Texas Harm Reduction Alliance.** "Austin took a step in the right direction when they invested in more paramedics, mental health clinicians, and harm reduction outreach teams. This right-wing petition basically says Austin is only going to hire police officers forever - at the expense of EMS, mental health, street outreach and social services - and sabotages our work to reimagine public safety."

"This year, we hoped to finally see the City invest in park rangers," **said Bill Bunch, a longtime environmental advocate.** "Park rangers can improve the security of our parks while educating and acting as ambassadors to our parks. If this initiative passes, we won't be increasing park rangers, and we may well face serious cuts to other park staff. When we have to increase investment in police, it is often our parks and environmental protection that get cut to pay for it."

"Rosewood swimming pool is closed three days a week this summer. It is closed on Saturdays," **said Carol Guthrie, business manager for AFSCME Local 1624.** "We need more money for our parks, our pools, our public spaces. We need more money, not less, for health care clinics, libraries, the history center, and the Equity Office to name a few. A huge number of city employees stand to lose their jobs if this ordinance passes. You can also forget about road repairs."

"Today we stand together -- Austin Justice Coalition with the Texas Freedom Network, Workers Defense with the Survivor Justice Project, Ground Game Texas with CAIR, and so many more," **said Amanda Lewis, of Survivor Justice Project.**

"This Republican-led proposition for more police would continue negative interactions for the city's Black and Hispanic communities, which already face disproportionate stops, searches, arrests, and uses of force," **said Katie Naranjo, Chair of the Travis County Democratic**

Party. “This right-wing proposition is not only an attempt at reversing progress that Austin has made to reduce over-policing of Black and brown bodies, it is clearly harmful.”

“After our experience with the winter storm and COVID, it is clear that public safety is comprehensive and takes all of us,” **said Austin City Council Member Greg Casar.** “If we want to protect our safety, that means we need medics, public health programs, firefighters, mental health staff, 911 call takers, and police. But if we are forced to simply hire hundreds and hundreds more police, then I do not know how we could also pay for other basic services. Right now we are struggling to find funds to pay for a dozen more firefighters and a dozen more EMS staff. If we had to hire 500 police officers right now, we would be getting pushed to lay off other employees, to cut library and pool hours, and to shut down essential programs.”

The following groups oppose the Save Austin Now petition:

ACLU of Texas
AFSCME Local 1624
Austin Area Urban League
Austin Community Law Center
Austin Justice Coalition
Black Lives Matter Austin
CAIR Austin
Grassroots Law Project
Ground Game Texas
Indivisible Austin
Indivisible Rosedale Huddle
Just Liberty
MEASURE
Planning Our Communities
Statewide Leadership Council
Survivor Justice Project
Texas Appleseed
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance
Texas Fair Defense Project
Texas Freedom Network
Texas Women's Coalition
Travis County Democratic Party
Workers Defense Action Fund

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