



Position on Police and Public Safety in the City of Austin

OVERVIEW/WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO SAFE

The SAFE Alliance is a Central Texas nonprofit agency that is working to stop abuse for everyone through extensive prevention, intervention and social change programs. SAFE recognizes the intersection of violence, oppression and abuse and condemns racism, bigotry and hate. As a part of our social change efforts, we work to change the social norms, conditions, institutions and beliefs that allow them to exist.

As an agency that primarily provides services for victims/survivors of abuse across the Austin community, we understand the very real impact that power, privilege, oppression and trauma have on the cycle of violence, abuse, victimization, perpetration, incarceration, hopelessness and despair. SAFE staff and volunteers work in close partnership with all aspects of the criminal justice system, public health, schools and community. An effective, fair and responsive public safety response is critically important to SAFE's successful mission achievement.

In 2019 SAFE served 6,628 youth and adults experiencing, or at risk for experiencing sexual assault and exploitation, child abuse and neglect, and/or dating and domestic violence. SAFEline responded to 19,617 contacts and 491 sexual assault forensic exams were provided in the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault. We provided 24/7 emergency shelter for 794 youth and adults at our SAFE Family Shelter and Children's Shelter, for a total of 101,963 bed nights/days of care. Fifty-five percent of people served across all SAFE programs disclosed more than one type of victimization and 77 percent of clients received services from more than one program. The full year-end performance overview is available at https://www.safeaustin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2019_FullYear_PerformanceOverview.pdf.

SAFE is the culmination of the mergers of multiple community agencies including the Austin Rape Crisis Center, founded in 1974; the Center for Battered Women, founded in 1977; SafePlace, founded in 1998; and the Austin Children's Shelter, founded in 1984. It operates from two large campuses comprising more than 20 acres and 17 different buildings plus PlanetSAFE in the downtown area and the Elizabeth Ann Seton Drop-In Center, more familiarly known as Liza's House, in South Austin. It is governed by a +/- 27 person volunteer Board of Directors, employs +/- 400 people in the Austin area, and 1,322 volunteers dedicated 34,155 hours to SAFE in 2019.

Most victims of violence have experienced multiple forms of abuse, both currently and/or in their past. A highly trained, trauma-informed response is important. SAFE has found Victim Service professionals are essential as part of the response team.

SAFE BELIEVES IN FOSTERING HEALTH, PEACE-KEEPING, AND SAFETY FOR AUSTIN

SAFE believes the City of Austin's public safety measures should be rooted in shared community-centered principles, including:

Respectful and trusting relationships * Anti-racism, accessibility, and equity * Focus on victims/survivors * Accountability * Effective Responses * Continuous learning and adaptation * Investment in the community

We believe that we must transform our model of policing in order to create stronger and safer communities. If the City of Austin is committed to reimagining how public safety services are delivered and dollars are reallocated, the City should invest more money in community-driven solutions that foster health, peace-keeping, and safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Belief	Strategic Direction	Recommendations
Respectful and Trusting Relationship	Prioritize increasing trust levels for victims/survivors particularly for our communities of color.	<p>Start from a victim center place by engaging with and listening to victims – early and often and repeatedly – particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, e.g. People of Color, LGBTQIA+ and undocumented individuals.</p> <p>Become knowledgeable about the communities served, supporting and working with and for these communities, and courageously prioritizing this work.</p>
Anti-Racism, accessibility, and equity	Create non-discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, policies and procedures, training content and public safety practices.	<p>Increase diversity at the highest levels of the City and all of its departments.</p> <p>Include intensive anti-racism hiring screening and promotion protocols.</p> <p>Provide ongoing training in diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels.</p> <p>Ensure that training includes continuous retraining for long time law enforcement officers and COA employees.</p> <p>Consideration for promotion and advancement should include demonstrated cultural competency.</p>
Focus on Victims/Survivors	Recognize, prioritize, empower and elevate Victim Services within the City structure	<p>Name a qualified professional social service director level manager of Victim Services reporting directly to the Chief or ACM.</p> <p>Increase number of Victim Services workers, ensuring they are a valued part of the immediate response with survivors of child, sexual and family violence.</p> <p>Provide criminal justice alternatives, with consideration given to victim desire, including dispute resolution and solutions through restorative practices and other alternative strategies while ensuring victim safety.</p> <p>Review U-visa certification policies in a timely manner, with a victim-centered approach, and with designated points of contact for legal aid providers.</p>
Accountability	Create systems of transparency and accountability to victims and the community that ensure effective oversight in all interactions and procedures across all levels.	<p>Active participation by law enforcement and Victim Services in community task forces and coalitions.</p> <p>Create effective systems for removal of law enforcement officers who abuse or inappropriately use force, e.g. official oppression, coercive control, abuse of power, and abuse in personal life.</p> <p>Ensure an independent investigation of and response to police abuse in all its forms including to those who are abusive in their personal lives, and to ensure an appropriate response commiserate with the offense committed.</p>

<p>Effective Responses</p>	<p>Invest in appropriate and effective responses and long term solutions to issues and activities that aren't criminal and pose no danger to anyone.</p>	<p>Ensure that there is a non-law enforcement response to mental health emergencies, including behavioral interventions that de-escalate situations and effective longer term interventions.</p> <p>Ensure that public safety personnel and 9-1-1 operators have a full understanding of alternative community responses and a seamless process for accessing those services when appropriate.</p> <p>Utilize experts in the community to provide ongoing training about the community and the landscape associated with community needs.</p>
<p>Continuous Learning and Adaptation</p>	<p>Emphasize intensive and ongoing de-escalation, trauma-informed response, and culturally responsive training for law enforcement.</p>	<p>Provide ongoing de-escalation, trauma-informed response, and behavioral intervention training.</p> <p>Ongoing required training on anti-racism.</p> <p>Ongoing required training on issues of sexual harassment.</p> <p>Ongoing specific training on LGBTQIA issues.</p> <p>Ongoing specific training on working with undocumented individuals.</p> <p>Both initial and on-going training for sworn law enforcement officers should include components facilitated by outside experts in those fields (sexual assault, family violence, experts on people with disabilities, mental health, etc.)</p>
<p>Invest in the Community</p>	<p>Ensure that Austin lives up to its ideals as a City that is committed to peace, safety and health. Make Austin a city intolerant of violence and committed to peace, safety and well-being of all citizens. Divert funding to proven community solutions</p>	<p>Create more diversion programs like City of Austin funded Bridge to Safety. (100% of participants reported they didn't have to involve police because of Bridge to Safety intervention.)</p> <p>Increase investments in safe shelter, including respite and help services like advocacy, basic needs, legal services, etc.</p> <p>Invest in victim empowerment and freedom programs, e.g. housing options, family support services that break the cycle of violence and abuse but also build the capacity and skills of people, affordable child care, substance use treatment and counseling, mental health treatment and counseling, education and health care.</p> <p>Create public campaigns to recognize Austin as city that is intolerant of violence and is committed to peace, safety and well-being of all citizens. Ensure that the campaign also provides ways to get help, and specific actions to promote peace and safety.</p>

*People of Color are defined as Black/African-American, Indigenous, Latina/o, Asian, Pacific Islander and Middle Eastern.

SAFE has worked in partnership with APD for many years and has many great relationships with individual officers and leaders. However, too few SAFE clients perceive law enforcement, or the criminal justice system, as allies. All too often, victims/survivors of sex trafficking relate instances of being further victimized by law enforcement, of being criminalized, or of being ignored. Youth at our Children's Shelter perceive law enforcement as "enforcers" that will further tear apart their homes and communities. And survivors from our Family Shelter say that law enforcement intervention sometimes results in the loss of income, housing and children - resulting in less safety. Some survivors of sexual assault tell us of being revictimized, further traumatized and not believed. SAFE clients are disproportionately People of Color, who are particularly reluctant to involve law enforcement because of the racism they have encountered in the past.

Our goal is to work together with the City to create public safety systems that protect and serve while building communities of peace and safety.