



Austin Police Association
"Serving Those Who Serve"

5817 Wilcab Road
Austin, TX 78721
Office: 512-474-6993
Fax: 512-474-6996

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Chairman Green, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Michael Bullock and I'm the President of the Austin Police Association in Texas as well as a Senior Police Officer with the Austin Police Department.

I wish it were amidst better times that I sit here before you today, but this somber week of honoring our fellow law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty sets the tone for the state of our profession.

In my view, the state of law enforcement is dire. We all recognize that criminal justice as a whole, is a complex policy issue for which no singular solution exists. But if we continue to do nothing – the sense of lawlessness being perpetuated in urban city centers and across the country will only get worse.

Austin is the 10th largest city in the United States with a million people living in the Capitol of Texas. Despite this, we don't even make the top 25 list when it comes to staffing. We're 700 officers short of where studies done by the city of Austin have shown we need to be. Our staffing issues can be linked to a few key events, though our struggles are shared by agencies across the country.

In 2017 the Austin City Council unanimously voted against a contract with the Austin Police Association which governs the wages, benefits, and working conditions of the men and women of the Austin Police Department. As a result, beginning in 2018 we have had more officers leave our department each year than have joined. Compounding this problem in 2020 was when our city leaders defunded our department by \$150,000,000, cut 150 authorized positions, and cancelled cadet classes all for the sake of political posturing.

Our staffing has been in a freefall that's led us to a vacancy rate of over 30%. Little surprise then that after these decisions and an exodus from the department began, that a year later our number of homicides nearly doubled. The last 3 years have been the highest homicide numbers in Austin's history.

Though we are not a border city, the impact of immigration policies is felt by us as well. Our city has asked for help from the Texas State Troopers who came for a time and had a notable impact on crime. But due to the ongoing border crisis they were called away to help secure the Texas border and no longer able to help us in Austin. In May of 2023, teenagers shot and killed a man in southeast Austin when attempting to rob him. The reason they gave for this heinous crime, was they knew State Troopers had left Austin and decided to start committing crime again.

Adding additional layers of complexity to this issue is a lackadaisical attitude towards holding criminals accountable by judges and prosecutors, while at the same time seeing those same prosecutors target officers, which has in turn encouraged criminals to be increasingly violent towards law enforcement.

Over these same time periods we've seen a myriad of critical incidents take place. We have dealt with a serial bomber planting improvised explosive devices across our city killing our residents, had numerous mass shootings including one breaking out during one of our largest festivals, and most notably on our minds is an incident that took the life of one of our own. On November 11, 2023 in the early morning hours, our APD SWAT team was called to a residence in southeast Austin where an armed subject was barricaded inside the residence, had already stabbed one his family members with two more inside, and shot at officers. Fearing for the lives of others inside the residence and knowing this vile suspect had already attempted to kill one of his own family members and willingly shot at our fellow APD officers – our SWAT team went through the door to try and save lives. After going in they were met by a hellacious barrage of gunfire from the suspect who was well armed and wearing body armor. While the suspect was ultimately taken out it came at a high price. Two of our officers were shot, one of which was Officer Jorge Pastore who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Across this country we now see a law enforcement officer shot in the line of duty every 21 hours. This year alone we've had over 145 officers shot which has been increasing year over year.

Our job is to uphold the Constitution and enforce the laws passed by yourselves as well as your state and local counterparts. This is a charge we take seriously and one we are willing to sacrifice our lives for. I sit here before you today though pleading for your help. We need help in addressing our staffing needs, support in enforcing our laws, providing better training resources, and transcending the political rhetoric to end the war on law enforcement and restore law and order in our country. The trends we see in Austin are not isolated – and if not reversed, I fear that lawlessness is all but inevitable.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Bullock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Bullock
President
Austin Police Association