

**Austin Police Department Acting Chief Joseph Chacon**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**Written Testimony**  
**S.B. 23**

Dear Chairwoman Huffman and committee members,

My name is Joseph Chacon and I am the Acting Chief of Police for the Austin Police Department. I am writing you this letter on behalf of the Austin Police Department and the City of Austin to provide written testimony against S.B 23.

Before I share the reasons why we are against this bill, I would like to share with you a little bit about my qualifications to speak to those concerns. I have served with the Austin Police Department for over 22 years overseeing the Central Bureau, which includes the Downtown Area Command, Special Events, Parks and Lakes, and Special Operations. I have represented the Austin Police Department on the Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Advisory Committee and as Executive lead in the implementation of the mental health diversion initiative as recommended in the 2019 Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute report, and I have served as Ex Officio Member on the Sobering Center Board of Directors. I share these points with you as evidence to support my and the Austin Police Department's belief that we don't just provide public safety services TO our community, we provide public safety services WITH our community.

Consistent with our belief that in order to best serve our community we must work with them, so too do we believe that there may be times that a designated priority may need additional funding over that of the police department and which can be reallocated from the police without negatively impacting police services. That is what we did during this last budget cycle.

S.B. 23 lists certain items that if reduced are deemed by the bill as defunding police: including our budget appropriation; the number of police officers we are authorized to employ; overtime funding; recruiting and training cadets. However, the list of budget items is based on assumptions that reductions of those items are by default defunding of the police department and also assume that we do not agree with the changes.

For example, a 2018 Meadows report found that APD had one of the highest rates of fatal police shooting of people suffering from a mental health crisis. As you can imagine, APD was not proud of that finding and we were very supportive of changes that would help us determine the cause for these outcomes and improve them. I served on the committee we formed to review our practices and recommend changes. One recommendation was that police should not be the first course of action to answer every call that involves a person with behavioral or mental health needs. The City agreed and we reallocated people and funds from our department in order to implement new response protocols.

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Another example is that we moved our forensics lab out of APD to be its own department. We did so because we heard our community's concerns that having the forensics lab as its own department and not under the police department would improve trust in its findings with the community. We also knew that this model is used by Houston and is regularly touted as a model of best practice. This change also required the reallocation of people and funds to implement this recommendation and created a forensics lab that would be separate from APD.

Over the last 4 years, concerning reports regarding APD employing aggressive training tactics in its police academy has come to the attention of Council. Upon review of these reports, City Council and APD hired researchers to independently evaluate APD training practices. These reports found that the APD academy had a culture that seems to prioritize physical aggression, as well as highlighting significant racial and gender disparities. It was after these findings by evaluators that the City decided it was going to delay cadet classes until the issues identified with APD training and recruitment practices were addressed. We now have a solid blueprint that will provide us with a way forward. S.B. 23 proposes to consider the action of delaying cadet classes as defunding despite the evidence that change was needed.

The Austin Police Department and the City of Austin believe that the desired effect of the bill, to not shrink police budgets or authorized strength, is an overstep by the legislature as these decisions must be made at the local level with our community when and to the degree needed to help build and maintain trust.

We respectfully request you vote no. I am happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Chacon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joseph Chacon, Acting Chief of Police  
Austin Police Department