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Austin Police Shootings During Mental Health Calls Violate Human Rights

Alleges New Report by UT Law Human Rights Clinic and the Austin Community Law Center

AUSTIN, TEXAS – Today the **Human Rights Clinic** of the University of Texas at Austin School of Law and the **Austin Community Law Center** released a report, “Human Rights Framework Regarding Austin Police Department Mental Health Related Shootings,” finding that Austin is violating international human rights standards by having the highest per capita rate of police shootings during mental health calls among the 15 largest cities in the United State.

“It is a human rights problem,” said professor **Ariel Dulitzky** of the Human Rights Clinic. “The *corpus juris* of international human rights – which is built on a framework of treaties, conventions, resolutions and declarations – both prohibits the police from arbitrarily taking a person’s life, and requires states to guarantee equal rights for people with disabilities. It is evident the Austin Police Department is violating both.”

“Austin is lagging behind cities like Memphis, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Seattle in methods for responding to mental health calls, and people are dying as a result” said **Brian McGiverin**, Executive Director of ACLC. “That is unacceptable.”

Upholding international human rights standards should be a high priority for the City of Austin, and, in fact, has been in the past. Under Mayor Adler’s leadership, the City has sought to recognize such international instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Paris Climate Accord.

The City has already begun the process of working to improve its record: Thanks to the work of community activists led by the Austin Justice Coalition, the 2019-20 city budget includes increased funding for non-police responses to mental health calls. However, it remains incumbent upon the Mayor and City Council to ensure that the money is used to effectively address this crisis with the urgency it demands.

The Human Rights Clinic and ACLC recommend that APD provide officers with training that increases their awareness of people with psychosocial disabilities, and their ability to make meaningful attempts at de-escalation. Further, it recommends that officers who do not comply with use of force policies should face meaningful disciplinary sanctions. The report also encourages the City to improve community services for those with psychosocial disabilities to reduce the frequency with which they come into contact with the police.

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