

HOUSTON POLICE REFORM PROGRESS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

Reduce wasteful spending by civilianizing the police force: “Considerable cost savings are possible from the civilianization of non-patrol or investigative positions currently held by sworn officers”¹

Increase transparency and address police misconduct by adopting a body cam video release: Update HPD’s body cam policy to “maximize public access to footage in a prompt manner.”⁵

Decrease reliance on court fines and jail as a means to collect fines: “Ensure that the municipal court fine collection practices do not prey on indigent citizens, by expanding the use of community service, prohibiting the use of jail as a means to collect fines from the poor, and insulating the municipal courts from pressures to collect fines”⁷

Reduce the police budget by investing in crime prevention and diversion programs: Crime reduction strategies other than police “have been proven to have a significant impact in the reduction of crime and are often less expensive than hiring additional police officers”⁹

Prevent unnecessary arrests and reduce wasteful spending by adopting a cite and release policy: “Issue a standing order requiring cite-and-release: (1) for all Class C misdemeanor citations, and (2) for those Class A and B misdemeanors set out in articles 14.06(c) and (d) of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure; and include in that standing order the guideline that the immigration status of an accused should not be a barrier to eligibility for cite-and-release.” Cite and release “would increase patrol strength without a need for additional hires or additional cost”¹⁰

Reduce wasteful spending through consolidation: “...the City of Houston should begin discussions with METRO on police consolidation. If these discussions ultimately lead to a merger, the City might then pursue similar discussions with school districts with schools in the City of Houston and other independent police agencies”¹³

Reimagine a community policing approach: Develop a collaborative policing plan in partnership with community organizations.¹⁶

Invest in employment opportunities for people with records: “Establish an effective strategy to reintegrate ex-offenders into society by facilitating their reentry into the workforce”¹⁷

Relationship with ICE: Adopt a “written policy that HPD will not inquire into the immigration status of anyone they encounter”¹⁹

STATUS

NO ACTION Instead of reducing the police budget and civilianizing a significant portion of the HPD workforce, the number of sworn officers provided for in the budget has steadily increased², the civilian workforce has decreased³ and the City of Houston voted on June 10 to increase the Police Department budget by nearly \$20 million.⁴

NO ACTION The Houston Police Department’s body camera policy does not maximize or automate release of footage in a prompt manner⁶, and the Houston Police Department has not released video from body cameras in six deadly officer-involved shootings since April 2020.

NO ACTION More than ninety-five percent of the revenue for the Houston Municipal Courts still comes from fines and forfeitures⁸, Houston continues to participate in the “Great Texas Warrant Roundup,” and Houston maintains a contract to participate in the OmniBase license hold program, which takes away driver licenses of people who miss a court date or cannot afford to pay their citations.

UNCLEAR The HPD budget does not provide sufficient detail to determine the level of spending on programs that focus specifically on crime prevention.

INCOMPLETE The City of Houston still has not adopted a policy requiring citation in lieu of arrest for these offenses despite having the legal authority to enact cite and release for more than a decade.¹¹ The Houston Police Department does, however, participate in a marijuana diversion program that reduces arrests and prosecution for some people caught with marijuana if they agree to take a four-hour class and pay \$150.¹²

INCOMPLETE The Harris County Jail and HPD completed a consolidation of their jails in 2019.¹⁴ METRO and Houston Police Department have not been consolidated.¹⁵

INCOMPLETE The Houston Police Department has multiple community policing programs, including the Homeless Outreach Team, Citizens Police Academy, Citizen’s Patrol, the Positive Interaction Program, and the Police and Clergy Alliance.

INCOMPLETE The City of Houston runs the Community Re-Entry Network program, which provides life skills training and provides access to the City of Houston’s General Services Department. While it provides services to around 500-600 participants annually, an estimated 15,000 people are released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice into Harris County each year.¹⁸

NEEDS LEGISLATIVE FIX Texas Senate Bill 4 was signed into law in May 2017. It bans jurisdictions from prohibiting officers from questioning immigration status of those they arrest or detain.

¹ City of Houston. (2017). A Ten Year Plan for the City of Houston: A Plan for Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth. pp. 79-80. <https://www.houstontx.gov/finance/COH-Ten-Year-Plan-Report.pdf>

² Barsed-Smith, S.J., & Scherer, J. (2019, September). Houston’s mayoral candidates say crime is getting worse. The numbers say otherwise. Houston Chronicle. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Houston-s-mayoral-candidates-say-crime-is-14439725.php>

³ City of Houston. (2020). FY 2021 Budget: Citywide Personnel Summary. https://www.houstontx.gov/budget/21budprop/I_TABIV.pdf; City of Houston. (2015). FT 2016 Budget: Citywide Personnel Summary. https://houstontx.gov/budget/16budadopt/I_TABIV.pdf

⁴ Debenedetto, P., Rice, J. (2020, June). Houston Passes Budget That Increases Police Funding, Amid Calls To ‘Defund’. Houston Public Media. <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2020/06/10/375627/houston-passes-budget-that-increases-police-funding-amid-calls-to-defund/>

⁵ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 4-5. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf

⁶ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 4-5. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf

⁷ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 12. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf

⁸ https://houstontx.gov/budget/16budadopt/III_MC.pdf

⁹ City of Houston. (2017). A Ten Year Plan for the City of Houston: A Plan for Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth. pp. 83. <https://www.houstontx.gov/finance/COH-Ten-Year-Plan-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 3. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf; City of Houston. (2017). A Ten Year Plan for the City of Houston: A Plan for Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth. pp. 82. <https://www.houstontx.gov/finance/COH-Ten-Year-Plan-Report.pdf>

¹¹ Act of September 1, 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., ch. 320, 2007 Tex. Gen Laws 596 <https://lrl.texas.gov/legis/BillSearch/billdetails.cfm?legSession=80-0&billTypeDetail=HB&billNumberDetail=2391>

¹² Shelton, C. (2017, March). 5 things you need to know about Harris County’s marijuana diversion program. Community Impact Newspaper. <https://communityimpact.com/houston/city-county/2017/03/01/5-things-need-know-harris-countys-marijuana-diversion-program/>

¹³ City of Houston. (2017). A Ten Year Plan for the City of Houston: A Plan for Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth. pp. 173. <https://www.houstontx.gov/finance/COH-Ten-Year-Plan-Report.pdf>

¹⁴ Sherer, J. (2019, January). Houston and Harris County open joint inmate processing center. Houston Chronicle. <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Houston-and-Harris-County-open-joint-inmate-13578743.php>

¹⁵ Operations. METRO. <https://www.ridemetro.org/pages/MPDOperations.aspx>

¹⁶ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 5-7. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf

¹⁷ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 13. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf

¹⁸ <https://forwardtimes.com/a-second-chance-at-life-ex-offenders-celebrate-success-at-city-of-houston-community-re-entry-network-program-crmp-20th-bi-annual-graduation-program/>

¹⁹ Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Transition Committee on Criminal Justice. (2016). Criminal Justice Committee Report. pp. 8. https://houstontx.gov/mayor/transitionreports/criminal_justice.pdf, p. 8