

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1900

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: March 25, 2021 8:00 AM

TERRY TODD, MS.

SELF- PRECINCT CHAIR 109

OVILLA, TX

NO COUNTIES SHOULD REDUCE OR DEFUND BUDGETS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES. NOR SHOULD THERE BE FORCED "CRITICAL RACE THEORY" TAUGHT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Scean Smith

80%

Clute, TX

If they want to defund the police, they will lose all state funding and those funds will be used to fund state forces to cover expenses to protect the citizens.

Leah Mulaly

Austin

Austin, TX

Just like states have rights outside of the federal government, cities have the right to govern as they see fit. Texas is a big state and is not one-size-fits-all. This bill is directly aimed at Austin, and the city should not be punished for being progressive. If you don't live here, don't tell us what we can and cannot do with city funds.

Frank Pomeroy

myself as a concerned citizen

Seguin, TX

As a concerned citizen I find it rather appalling that we would think of defunding those who put their lives on the line everyday to help protect my freedoms. Those who seem to complain about LEO's are those who are breaking the law. Why should we penalize and endanger those who are law abiding citizens to placate the criminals in society or to play politics with hot button issues. I agree that all LEO's should be frugal and think about training funds and such however we should be encouraging and supporting these men and women in uniform not making them scapegoats for a radical agenda from the criminals. I humbly ask the house to please pass this bill so as to penalize any municipalities or county that chooses to put politics before safety by defunding LEO's.

Jennifer Touchton

self - Sr. Business Analyst

Austin, TX

The state should not be mandating local funding. Each locality should be allowed to decide what is best for its residents.

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Audrey Ference
self, instructional writer
Austin, TX

APD is not solving the problems of our city, and throwing more money at the police is only going to cause more suffering, more shootings, and more police violence. The way forward is imagining non-carceral solutions for the issues that face our community. Defunding the police and investing in our communities must be allowed

Lyra Seaborn
self (student)
Austin, TX

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to HB 1900. Cities that make local choices to allocate less funding to law enforcement in any particular budget year should not be punished. For example, the decrease in the police budget that the Austin city council implemented last summer came after a wave of local BIPOC-led organizing that sought to make the city safer for all residents. Cities and towns should not be harmed for listening to and honoring the demands of their most marginalized constituents. I urge you to vote against this bill.

Sarah Bentley
self
Austin, TX

I OPPOSE HB 1900, which aims try to punish cities that make local choices to allocate less funding to law enforcement in any particular budget year.

Jill Reilly
Safehorns
Austin, TX

I am absolutely against any municipality or county that adopts a budget to defund law enforcement agencies. The government's first role is to protect its citizens. Defunding safety and law enforcement are the opposite of protection.

John Thomas
SafeHorns
Houston, TX

Municipalities and Counties have a responsibility in safeguarding their residents and taking away funding from law enforcement agencies for any other purpose is a farce.

Mary Gray
Self / enterprise architect
Plano, TX

Please do not support municipalities and counties that defund the police

Christine Sheraden
Self

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Mansfield, TX

As a parent of TWO UT Longhorns, who have lived and will live in West campus area, it is absolutely vital to not defund the police in this particular area. My daughters have firsthand experience of very aggressive panhandling. West campus needs a heavy police presence to deter this activity, better lighting, a safe zone, etc.

Amelia Long

Self, nonprofit employee

Austin, TX

I am a Texan against HB 1900. Municipalities and counties should be freely allowed to defund police. We've built a monster with today's police. We need to defund racist, militarized police forces and rebuild a new law enforcement that truly serves and protects the people.

Paul Osbourn

self

Bryan, TX

Municipalities that defund law enforcement should not be entitled to request state assistance.

William Glenn

Self, Retired

San Antonio, TX

Do not vote to impede local municipalities for taking the steps necessary to ensure the safety of their citizens whether it be from bad acts by police officers or from the over militarisation of police forces in the form of equipment or training. We've had enough murder. Allow local municipalities to decide what is the best way to guide their police. It's legislation like this that causes problems in local areas. The state has many avenues available to it now to address a local municipality not providing enough police protection. This smacks of making sure the state controls police protection in any given municipality. This is not the Texas way. I sincerely invite you to consider this request of mine and please take my comment as a respectful reflection on legislation of this kind.

Amy Betzen

Self/Homemaker

Hereford, TX

Defunding law enforcement agencies is a detriment to the community. Their services help keep the community safe! We have a young daughter who will be attending UT in the fall and we worry about her safety. Let's support our law enforcement agencies.

Kendall Kibby-Deck

Self, hairdresser

Austin, TX

I am against this bill.

James Castagneto

Self /family retired teacher

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Dripping Springs, TX

In my humble opinion, any municipality or county adopting a budget to defund law enforcement should have those in office removed immediately as it would be clearly apparent that they have no respect for those who daily put themselves in harms way to protect us, and don't have respect for the businesses and residents in the districts they were chosen to represent. I truly question their loyalty to the state and US Constitution.

Lynn Panepinto

self, social worker

Austin, TX

I urge lawmakers to vote against HB 1900. Cities that choose to allocate less funding to law enforcement should NOT be penalized. Cities should make their own choices regarding public safety. Please vote against HB 1900.

Ledith Blair

SafeHorns; self, parent of High School & UT students

Dallas, TX

I am concerned about the safety of my students and the municipal community in which they reside. I do not want police department or law enforcement to be defunded.

Alex Meed

Self, cybersecurity analyst

Austin, TX

Chair and members,

Frankly, this bill strikes me as quite odd. The whole point of "defund the police" is that we're trying to shift burdens away from the police to systems that work better to meet those burdens--and since we can't pay for those new systems and also retain existing police funding, we choose the former. So, if a city defunds the police, the state takes away the money they would need to re-fund the police? Mighty strange to me.

In a time when we're worried about the resilience of our power grid, the section on municipal utilities is especially striking. Shouldn't we be investing more, not less, in our municipal utilities? And perhaps the author forgot his own colloquy with Representative Howard at the ERCOT joint hearings, when she explained that municipal utilities put their net receipts back towards the public benefit of the citizens. Less ability to adjust rates means less net receipts means municipality-with-a-municipal-utility-bashing--or let's call it what it is, Austin-bashing, yet again.

Respectfully submitted,

Alex Meed

Frank Netscher

Self - Public Employee

AUSTIN, TX

You are guaranteeing that police officers will never get a raise again, and cities will never want to hire another officer, because they won't want to budget for it indefinitely.

Nathan Lesch

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self

Austin, TX

Please vote against HB1900. Defunding local police is necessary for safer communities, and well within cities' rights and should not be the concern of state government.

Michelle Orcutt

Self

CORPUS CHRISTI, TX, TX

safe and secure communities should not be political is should be practical. Any defunding of ANY emergency service without a full disclosure and accounting must be met with reduction in state funding and sanctions by the state. However this should not limit thoughtful sound budget considerations by any municipalities to right size emergency services for their communities as they grown to shrink.

Jene Flood

Safehorns

Dallas, TX

The area around UT and west campus is so unsafe for our students , homeless men walking around with knives and chains . It's utterly disgusting and so scary for our students! I'm furious that this continues and it needs to stop now!!!!!!

Michelle Edwards

Self, Assistant professor of sociology at Texas State University

Austin, TX

I would like to submit a comment against HB 1900, which tries to punish cities making local choices to allocate less funding to law enforcement. This kind of state-level overreach is outrageous!

Thomas Flood

Self

Dallas, TX

Do not defund the police. Make Austin safe again

Gillian Flood

n/a

Austin, TX

The homeless people camping near our university campus and in the city are threatening our safety and the general cleanliness of Austin.

Edmund Heimlich, Exec Director

INFORMED CITIZENS

Austin, TX

I am a Republican. These bills are directed at depriving the people of Texas of their Right to local Self Government. This is

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contrary to everything the Republican Party has stood for since Reagan was President. It is contrary to the will of the people who are members of the Republican Party of Texas. This is known to any who paid attention at last years convention and any who have read our Party Platform. You will find absolutely NO support for the Governors call for the protection of the special interest of the Police Unions and their statewide associations that derive their funds from taxpayers to lobby for the special interest of these Socialist enterprises. To the contrary; Our platform item 23 demands Government Accountability. And I quote; "We call upon the Texas Legislature to eliminate all special collective bargaining statutes for public employees and to hold all public servants accountable to taxpayers through existing civil statutes. We oppose any distribution of taxpayer dollars to unions." See also platform item 124. And I quote:

"The Texas Legislature should ban collective bargaining with police unions." But here we see Officials elected under our brand name promoting the opposite !!!

Our Party is opposed to Socialism. Maybe you do not know but Socialism exists when the government owns and exercises a monopoly in providing a product or service to the public. Policing is a Socialist enterprise. It does not need to be. Much of what police departments do could be privatized. Even patrol and arrest functions performed by licensed police officers can be performed by the same licensed professionals operating under the supervision and management of a private firm that has contracted with a neighborhood or even a large city to provide the service now provided by a Socialized enterprise. The result would be better training, cost saving innovation, cost saving management of the human resources, resulting in lower taxes for the citizens.

The propaganda emanating from Police Union members and racists among our population promoted the absurd conspiracy theory that Black Lives Matter was a plot by Marxists. They tried to revive the Red Scare of the cold war to instill fear in the public. It is absurd. Black Lives Matter is a phrase that says what it means and means what it says.

You have to understand that from the perspective of our fellow citizens of color unlawful acts committed under the cover of a position of public trust appear to be racially motivated. And we know there can be an unconscious, if not overt, racial bias at play. But a more common denominator among the victims of police crimes is their social economic status. The police pick on the poor. The poor cannot fight back. Our wealthy citizens pay the tax that funds the unnecessary prosecution and excessive incarceration. After reading the RPT platform I can say the Republican Party is opposed to this bill.

Carol Goodwin

self - retired

Austin, TX

I oppose HB 1900. I do not think the state should dictate how municipalities and counties revise their budgets to create a more equitable distribution between community services and law enforcement agencies. This morning I attended a rally in front of our state capitol to support legislation aimed at preventing police violence. If you had attended you would have been incredibly moved by story after story from families in Austin and San Antonio who lost brothers and sons to unjustifiable police shootings. To address this dire problem in my city, I advocated for the Austin City Council to reallocate Austin Police Department funding to community, social and mental health services, to restructuring response systems to send the most appropriate professionals to address police calls, and to appointing a public safety committee to address racial biases in the police department. I commend the Austin City Council for taking steps to revise the city budget to reflect these requests from communities of color and their white supporters, such as myself. It is state overreach to interfere with these decisions, which are based on the needs, requests and personal experiences of local citizens.

Cynthia Saha

Ut student mom

Sugarland, TX

Support

Jill Salinaro, Mrs

Self/ Ut Students

Dallas, TX

We need the police in every city and town in Texas. I have 3 children who attended the University of Texas in Austin, my

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daughter is still there. Part of campus living is, West Campus, is protected by the APD. These students cannot be protected from the homeless population and the constant crime without a well staffed APD. It has gotten very dangerous in Austin, especially campus and downtown. How dare these students not feel safe. Austin city council should feel ashamed.

Tara Sinicropi

Self

Austin, TX

Give local communities the autonomy to make the best decisions for their citizens. Do not punish cities for allocating less funding to law enforcement in any particular budget year. Vote NO to HB 1900.

Kari Rector

Self

Richardson, TX

Do not support

Beth Muffett

self/mother

Austin, TX

I am AGAINST this bill. There is no need to get involved in punishing cities that make local choices to allocate less funding to law enforcement in any particular budget year. We know what we need locally.

thomas scott

self

cut and shoot, TX

this is not the way to help fix a broken system. we the people have elected officials to help fix this not create more problems and empower the criminal element

Denise Hernández

Self, Council Aide

San Antonio, TX

Local government should retain local control. Defunding the police is an appropriate step to regaining a true public safety model that doesn't center carceral, traumatic systems of policing and further militarization of police in our communities. Individual communities know what is best for themselves. Defund the police and fund our communities.

Frank Holman, Citizen

Self

Austin, TX

I support this bill. When a call for help comes in who decides who responds. Mismanagement is not a justification for defunding.

Mayuri Raja

self

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Austin, TX

I oppose this bill. This should most certainly fall within a municipality's control. Cities and counties will know the needs of their local residents better than the state, especially in a state as large and diverse as Texas, and so only they will know how much of a budget their police department and other law enforcement agencies need. This is a transparent attempt at preventing cities from making choices that are perceived to be "liberal" or "radical."

Julia Von Alexander

Self, Policy Analyst

Austin, TX

I strongly oppose HB 1900. Cities and counties govern closest to the people and are the closest to a true democracy in the US. Cities and counties must be able to determine their own budgets without being threatened by the state. Let local government do its job. Thank you

Chris Harris

Texas Appleseed

Austin, TX

After hearing much of the testimony regarding this bill, we believe that there are numerous misconceptions, both about what Austin did with its police budget in FY21 and about the relationship between police funding and violent crime. First, the Austin City Council decreased the Austin police department budget by roughly \$21 million dollars in FY21, with much of it reallocated to other public safety efforts, specifically Emergency Medical Services. Additionally, a number of units, including the Forensics Lab, are in the process of being considered for being removed from the department, but not having the budgets or services provided by those divisions reduced. Finally, there is a process by which a task force is making recommendations for potential other uses of police funding geared toward public safety that the City Council can consider, but nothing close to the initial media reports of \$150 million has been removed from the Austin Police Department.

Second, this bill was introduced under the assumption that this roughly ~\$21 million cut, or less than 5% of the budget, is associated with the an increase in murders in 2020. There is no proof for this claim. In fact, after almost 30 years of continual decline in violent crime nationally, there was an increase in murders nationwide in 2020 that began prior to the George Floyd protests and most city's budget deliberations over the summer of 2020. These increases occurred overwhelmingly in cities that did not decrease their police budgets, because like most years, very few cities reduced their police budget.

Finally, there are very good reasons for year-to-year fluctuations in police budgets that, if this bill were to pass, would punish cities with no intention of reducing police funding or duties. During the Great Recession, many jurisdictions were forced to reduce budgets in the face of decreases to tax revenue. Departments also see variations in retirements, issues with cadet academies, pensions or other scandals that impact hiring and can reduce allocations to police. If cities want to inject funds to respond to disasters or address known issues, like rape kit backlogs, they will be less likely to do so given that they would then be required to maintain that level of funding even if tax revenues don't support it to avoid facing sanction under this bill.

Amite Dominick

Texas Prison Air Conditioning Advocates

Rockport, TX

I am against this bill! This bill limits the choices and authority of local government

Barbara Wiederaenders

self/retired

Austin, TX

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I support HB 1900. Locally elected officials should have final say over the budgets of their constituents. Modifying police budgets should lead to a transformation of policing such that citizens who are not criminal or violent should have their issues resolved in the best interest of the offender and the public without police involvement.

Natalie Houchins

Self, Content Designer

Austin, TX

For people to espouse small government and self-government and state's rights and local rights, y'all are certainly concerned with how we do things. It is Austin's prerogative to manage its own law enforcement and public safety. APD is Austin specific and Austin can do what it feels is right.

Elliot Liebman

Self / Software Developer

Austin, TX

I am a Texan concerned about public safety. This summer, Austinites came together in response to the extra-judicial, state sponsored murder of Mike Ramos. We attended days of grueling hearings following protests during which police shot Brad Levi Ayala, a teenager, leaving him with permanent brain damage. Since these shocking and traumatic events, Austinites have come together to reimagine public safety in our city, and we've made great progress in the form of a new budget. Among other things, this budget establishes funding for an independent forensics lab, which would serve to provide unbiased analysis of evidence, without the potential conflicts of interest present in a lab run by APD. We've also moved money into public health, providing support to our fellow Austinites most impacted by COVID-19.

This bill would punish our city for exercising our right to self determination. We have a right to shape the city we want to live in, and to punish us for these decisions, made by our voters and elected officials, is nothing short of tyranny. We may not agree on the best approach to public safety, but this is our city, and it is our right to determine it's policies. This is part of a distressing trend in Texas where our state legislators seek to undermine the autonomy and sovereignty of our great city. It's un-Texan, and it's un-American. If you believe in the right of people to shape the communities they live in, if you believe that political power is inherent in the people, from whom all ethical government derives it's power, then you must oppose this bill.