



The Homeless Advocacy Project identified three policy priorities for Austin leaders to consider funding or adopting in 2026. These solutions do not reflect the entirety of the need and will not end homelessness for most. However, they do rise up as solutions that address the dire immediate needs and reality of the crisis in Austin. Given that the City and County will not be able to house or shelter all of the people experiencing homelessness in Austin, we ask that leaders consider these solutions that will address not only public health and safety for many, but will also give people a space to simply exist when current laws make it difficult for many to do so.

1) Allocate \$2.7 million for the Community Shelter at SAFE to remain open and continue to be a refuge for kids and families at high-risk.

Domestic violence remains one of the leading causes of homelessness among women, with national studies showing that between half and two-thirds of women experiencing homelessness cite domestic violence as a primary factor.

Austin continues to see rising need among families:

- Families represent a smaller share of the overall homeless population than single adults, but they face **far fewer shelter options** and significantly longer waitlists.
- AISD identifies more than **1,000 students experiencing homelessness** each year under the McKinney-Vento Act, demonstrating the scale of family homelessness in the region.
- Emergency shelters in Austin are consistently full, and families are often left with **no safe indoor options**, forcing many into cars, tents, or other places not meant for habitation.

This lack of family shelter capacity has serious consequences:

- Children experience trauma, hunger, instability, and disrupted learning.
- Parents—especially survivors of domestic violence—face impossible choices between safety and homelessness.

While the City of Austin has added **hundreds of emergency shelter beds for single adults** over the past three years, **no comparable expansion has occurred for families**, despite clear evidence of growing need.

SAFE's Community Shelter serves survivors of domestic violence, trafficking and child abuse. The shelter provides immediate refuge while survivors stabilize their circumstances, address safety concerns, and begin planning for longer-term housing and support. The Community Shelter maintains 81 beds and 6 cribs for emergency placement, serving up to 120 individuals at any given time and 550 people per year. SAFE has 100 people on the waitlist for shelter on any given night. The Community Shelter will be at risk of closure if they do not get the funding to continue its operation.

2) Create a prioritization system for scarce emergency shelter beds.

Currently, there is no system to prioritize high-risk individuals on the waitlist at the ARCH and 8th Street Shelters. The COA contracted with the National Alliance to End Homelessness in 2018, which resulted in the ***Recommendations for the Redesign of Emergency Shelters in Austin Report***. The report recommended that the city ***Standardize operations of all shelters and use the coordinated entry system for 50 percent of bed referrals***. It also recommended that the City ***use a community-wide decision-making process to determine prioritization for who gets shelter beds***.

A July 2023 Shelter Assessment by Austin Public Health recommended the City ***establish a coordinated shelter referral and access process, utilize a bed management tool and create a common intake assessment for city-funded shelters***.

These best practice recommendations were never implemented. The City still has an estimated one bed for every five individuals who are homeless, making it more important than ever that the community have input in how we allow for access to this scarce resource. A percentage of beds should be prioritized for those at highest risk, such as people who are ill, elderly or pregnant.

3) Apply for a sanctioned camping space for neighbors who must live/camp outdoors.

The City of Austin has a no sit/no lie, no camping ordinance that leaves many unhoused Austinites with few options.

Enforcement is inconsistent and problematic and little data exists about outcomes.

On March 31st, the **Austin Homeless Strategy Office** reported ten encampment closures by the Rapid Response Team. The office does not collect data on where the people in the encampments go after these camps are closed. It is likely that some went to emergency shelter while many were left to set up camp in another location. While

effort is made to give notice and clean in a humane manner, people are still being “swept” and critical documents are sometimes discarded, setting people even further back in resolving their homelessness. The fact that there is no legal place for people to camp makes for an impossible situation for unhoused people in Austin.

While some weeks likely bring more than ten site closures, and some fewer, using the March 31st report as an average would translate to 480 encampment closures a year. This is likely much higher since the State’s Department of Public Safety, TxDOT, and Austin Police Department also have the authority to close camps. The number also does not include HEAL initiative closures, where people are guaranteed access to shelter, but many do not accept it.

Nowhere to go

APD Homeless Encampment Enforcement guidelines cite COA Penal Code § 48.05(g), which requires an officer to make a reasonable effort to do the following before or at the time the officer issues a citation, unless the officer determines there is an imminent threat to the health or safety of any person:

- ***Advise the person of a lawful alternative place to camp.***

Currently, APD directs unhoused persons to McKinney Falls State Park or Emma Long Metro Park to camp. **This would cost a person \$620 a month.**

History, and Opportunity

Governor Abbott designated land in 2019 for unhoused people in Austin to camp. The Other Ones Foundation stepped up and provided oversight of the camp, gave people safety and peace of mind, and helped resolve homelessness for hundreds of Austinites since that time.

The Texas Government Code provides that a political subdivision may submit a plan to use a property for homeless individuals to camp to **the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)**. A template is provided on the website.

The City of Austin, and Travis County have this important tool at their disposal to address the crisis. Writing and submitting a plan would acknowledge the dire reality that many unsheltered Austinites are living and could provide a pragmatic solution for many. It would also give many people the stability they need to move forward more quickly to resolve their homelessness.

For more information contact Andi Brauer, andi@cpcastin.org, 512.565.4480.