

Executive Summary

The City of Austin’s Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is tasked with hearing disputed Internal Affairs cases at the Austin Police Department (APD). Over time, the CRP has identified a range of problems at the Department and has developed recommendations to address those problems.

In an effort to understand both the identified problems and the recommendations, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition requested under the Public Information Act all letters of recommendation sent from the CRP to APD’s Chief of Police in 2016. We chose this time period because it is both recent, reflecting real issues in the current policies and procedures at the Department, and also far enough in the past that if APD had chosen to make changes it could have reasonably done so by now.



David Joseph, age 17, killed February 8, 2016.



Richard Munroe, Feb. 3, 1990 to July 5, 2015 (Age 25)



Cassandra Bolin, died at 31 after standoff, suicide call.

The CRP made the following major recommendations over this one-year period:

- APD should stop unnecessary delays that are triggering the “180 day rule,” which sets a strict timeframe for officer discipline
- Internal Affairs should interview non-police witnesses to police action
- APD should revise and amend use-of-force policies to create policies of de-escalation
- APD should review and revise training to promote de-escalation, and consider removing trainers who do not agree that de-escalation is a priority
- APD should implement new policies to address mental health/suicide calls, including changes to 911 protocols and policies requiring officers to fall back and seek help from mental health officers, the Crisis Intervention Team, or mental health professionals

Un-named man dies in custody after showing signs of mental breakdown at an HEB

- An officer outside the chain of command should review excessive force complaints
- APD should consider amending its “ride-along” policy to exclude family members or significant others
- APD should review and revise policies to ensure greater coordination when multiple officers respond to the same call, and should ensure an appropriate command structure at all times



The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition reviewed the newly issued Austin Police Department Policy Manual to determine if changes had been made in accordance with these CRP recommendations, and attended all meet and confer meetings to determine if recommendations were incorporated into the new agreement.

Our review reveals that none of the recommendations issued by Austin's CRP have been implemented in the new Policy Manual, and none appear likely to be included in the soon-to-be-final contract with the Austin Police Association. Many of the recommendations made by Austin's Citizen Review Panel during this period were attempts to re-raise issues the CRP had previously raised. **If Austin's current oversight system does not result in a path to appropriate policy and procedural reforms that will better guide officers and reduce tragic deaths, then Austin's current process is not working.**