





TOOLKIT



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OUR MISSION

Austin Justice Coalition (AJC) is a racial justice group that builds community for people of color through policy, education, and community programming, so they may be the driving force behind their own liberation during a time of systemic injustice in America.

AJC envisions a world where racial, economic and political equality is attained through the central pillars of AJC's advocacy: policy reform, civic engagement, community, and education.

Dear World,

I just want to live
long enough to make
my mama proud of me.
Please don't kill me or
my brothers.

-Anthony



HISTORY OF AJC

AJC was founded in 2015 by Chas Moore. It first emerged as a prominent voice of protest against police brutality, but soon Chas and his colleagues recognized that real change would not come through protests and rallies alone.

In 2016 AJC organized and facilitated town hall meetings and forums focused on police reform and Black empowerment, while broadening its outreach to civic engagement with criminal justice reform at the city and state levels.

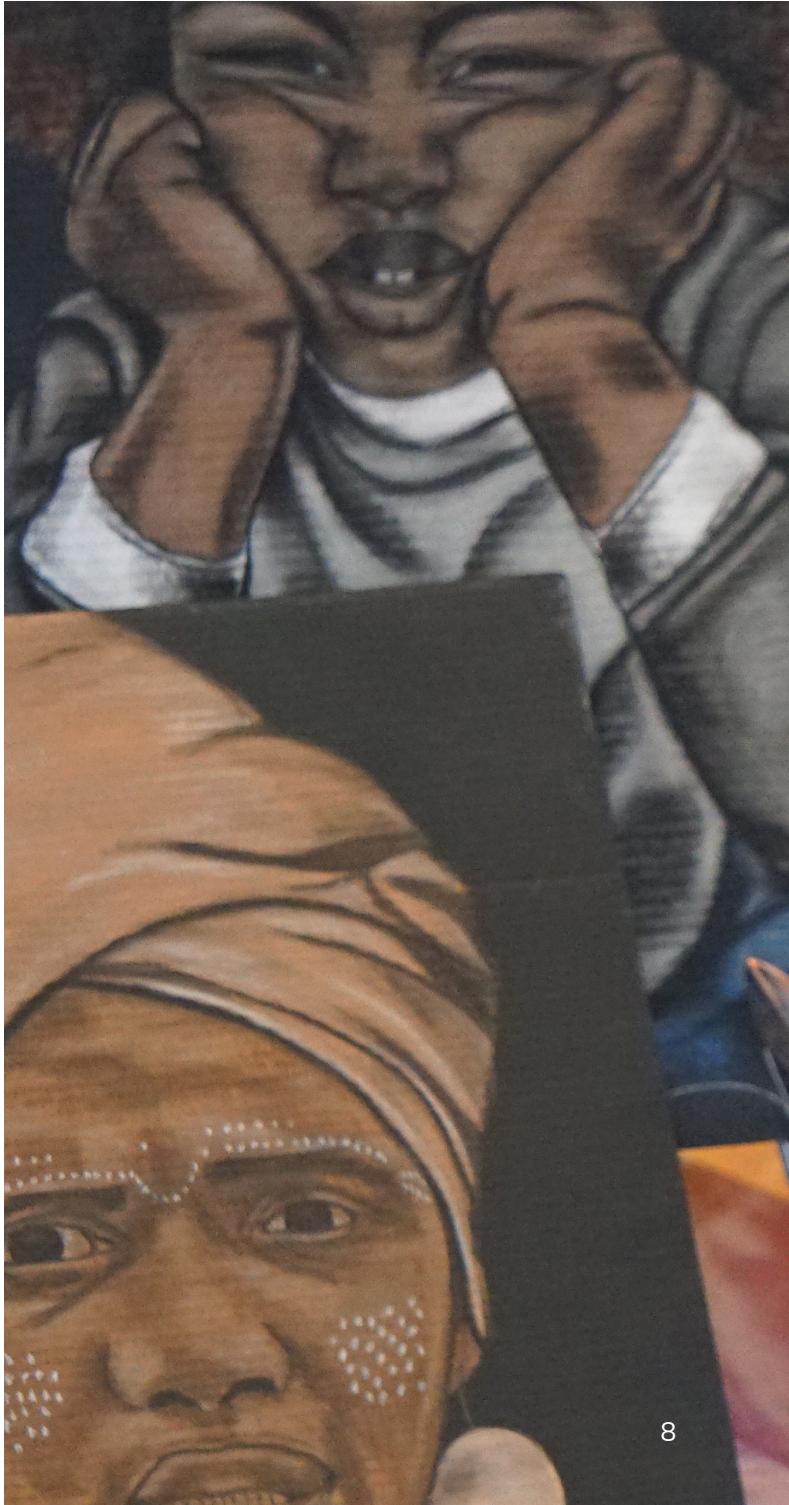
Over the next four years, AJC's focus on criminal justice continued, especially in the areas of police shootings and misconduct, but its strategic planning also expanded into new territory. Robust programs were developed to address Black health, education, employment, housing, safety, and other quality-of-life issues. AJC became a regular participant at Austin City Hall and the Texas State Legislature. Through strategic partnerships, community mobilization, and persistence, AJC has achieved significant reforms at the local and state levels in only five years.

WHY AJC, WHY NOW?

The need for change in Austin's racial and economic climate is unquestionable. Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the country, experiencing 20.4% population growth between 2000 and 2010. Yet it is the only major city to experience a decline in the Black community—a 40% reduction in the same decade.

A 2018 survey concluded that the significant out-migration of Black people from Austin is due to segregation followed by gentrification and the resultant lack of affordable housing. In addition, employment opportunities for Black people are sparse. In a city that touts itself as a technosphere, Black people have little access to or training in technology due in part to educational disparities at all levels.

Policing is another major factor in the exodus of Black people from Austin, as they are disproportionately stopped, searched, and arrested. According to the 2014 Annual Report from the Office of the Police Monitor, Black people had a 1 in 6 chance of being searched if stopped. This was the same rate that occurred in 2012 and 2013. The probability of white people being searched when stopped was 1 in 22 in 2014 and 1 in 20 in 2013.



**“AUSTIN SAW A 20.4%
TOTAL POPULATION
INCREASE AS THE
BLACK POPULATION
DECREASED 40% IN
THE SAME DECADE.”**

AJC IN ACTION

The fictional narrative below about a shooting of a Black homeless man by a white police officer is a composite of incidents that occurred in Austin. Delano Carnforth is not a real person. His story is intended to illustrate the main problems plaguing the public safety paradigm today, and therefore the main areas of AJC's advocacy. We will use this to walk through the specific tactics AJC uses in its work that have brought us success in combating these issues at the local and state levels. There is, of course, more work to be done.

THE INCIDENT

Delano “Del” Carnforth was a 30-year-old Black man with diagnoses of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, who had been without his prescribed medications since he was released from jail six weeks ago. He was arrested last year for possession of a small amount of marijuana, sentenced to jail for nine months and fined one hundred dollars. He received medication while in jail, but upon release he did not know where to get another prescription, had no money, no car, and no home. He’d been homeless periodically before. Family members let him stay with them from time to time; however, none of them could help him now.

Del kept to himself in wooded areas of the city. He stayed at a homeless camp for a few weeks.

After being without medication for so long, he felt his symptoms return. He didn’t want anyone to notice this, so he resumed camping alone, never staying in the same place very long. One night he slept in a wooded area at the end of a quiet street behind an old, neglected cemetery, about two blocks from the neighborhood’s main street. Upon waking one morning, he had a vision of the archangel Michael carrying a sword. Bright white light radiated from him. Del heard him say, “Delano, you must take a stand!” The archangel repeated this several times, leaving Del awestruck, and knowing that he had a mission.

He walked through the untended cemetery thinking about what he must do. There was always trash and odd objects strewn among the grave markers. He noticed something metal lying on the ground partly covered by sand. It was an old butter knife that someone had dropped some time ago. He picked it up and gazed at it reverently for a long time, knowing that it would guide and protect him. When he got to the main street he turned north toward the bus stop across from a mechanic’s garage. His walk was rapid and deliberate. As he mumbled to himself, he held the butter knife in both hands, out in front of him, pointing at the sky.

A few minutes later, Officer Jones stopped his

car about half a block away from Del, who was standing on the sidewalk near the bus stop holding the butter knife in front of him, pointed upward. Officer Jones got out of the vehicle with his gun drawn as he walked up the street toward Del. He shouted, "Drop the knife, now!"

Del stayed where he was, staring at the officer and the gun. Officer Jones repeated his command, louder this time. Del continued to stare. He slowly pointed the knife at Officer Jones while still holding it out in front of him.

Del shouted, "This is my sword and my shield! I must take a stand!"

Officer Jones crouched, shifting his weight from foot to foot, pointing his gun at Del. "Drop the knife and get on the ground NOW!" He shouted.

Del felt confused. He took one step forward and repeated, "This is my sword and my shield! I must take a stand!"

Again Officer Jones shouted for Del to get on the ground. He was ten feet from Del, who took another step forward. He pointed the butter knife at Officer Jones and opened his mouth to explain his mission.

Officer Jones shot him in the chest. Del fell on the sidewalk several yards back from where he had been standing. The butter knife flew out of

his hand, landing on the ground.

Del was pronounced dead when EMS arrived and examined him. Officer Jones said he was in fear for his life when he shot Del. Officer Jones was routinely suspended from duty while the incident was investigated by the police department. At the close of the investigation no charges were filed against him, and he was not disciplined before returning to work.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE PUBLIC SAFETY PARADIGM

I. Police Use of Force

Prior to 2018, APD had no formal de-escalation policy. When to use force was left to the discretion of each officer and often used as a first resort. Brandishing anything that might be deemed a weapon, even one that is obviously harmless, justified officers to use force, even deadly force.

In cities across the USA, when force is used, investigations into civilian deaths or injuries are typically undocumented, informal, and opaque to the public. Use-of-force is so ingrained into policing, there is often little to no debate in city governments in terms of resourcing police departments that carry out use-of-force policies.

De-escalation policies, third-party offices of police oversight and the transparency of public complaints are not only not the standard for America's police departments, those that do exist have only been formed after assertive and sustained pressure from the city's population and leadership.

Del was not a threat to anyone in the vicinity, especially Officer Jones. It was this type of use-of-force policy that led directly to Del's death. Additionally, the lack of any required reporting or transparency into the application of these policies keeps the city government and the general population from reviewing, questioning, and often even knowing about what happened to Delano and other individuals like him.



**“BLACK PEOPLE IN
AUSTIN HAVE A 1 IN
6 CHANCE OF BEING
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II. Emergency Response to Mental Health Crises

We know that implicit bias often influences officers' behavior when they encounter Black and Brown people, the homeless, and people with mental disabilities. A 2018 City Auditor report found that Austin's mental health first response system was out of line with widely-accepted best practices, and that Austin police used deadly force during mental health calls more often than peer cities. This lack of adequate training for police officers has resulted in nearly a quarter of use-of-force incidents in Austin happening during police responses to 911 calls. Research done in Austin and published in 2019 shows that eight of the 24 people who were shot and killed by APD from 2010 through 2016 had diagnosed mental health conditions. Twenty additional people experiencing mental health crises were shot by Austin police during the same time period and survived.

AJC is actively advocating for reforms with Integral Care, EMS, APD and others that include the following:

- Adding a “mental health” option for those who call 911 (along with police, fire, or EMS);**
- Training 911 call takers to accurately identify mental health calls;**
- Installing a mental health clinician in the call center to assist with assessment of calls and dispatch;**

- Directing mental health calls to EMS and Integral Care rather than to the police department;**
- Increasing the number of clinicians available to manage mental health crises;**
- Increasing the number of Community Health Paramedics available for intervention and follow up care;**
- Providing mental health training to all police officers.**

Mental health crises deserve a health response not a police response. Reform to the mental health first response system could have saved the lives of [**Mauris DeSilva \(2019\)**](#), [**Morgan Rankins \(2017\)**](#), [**David Joseph \(2016\)**](#), [**Micah Jester \(2016\)**](#), and [**many others**](#).

III. Criminilization of Homelessness

Homelessness in Austin has been criminalized since at least the late 1990s, when city ordinances made it illegal to sit or lie down on sidewalks, panhandle aggressively, and camp in public. Additional Class C Misdemeanors targeting the homeless include loitering, sleeping in a vehicle, shoplifting, and trespassing. Because there is not adequate shelter space, homeless people are subjected to police forcing them to move to other locations. If they refuse, they receive citations, which could result in arrest and jail. If they are jailed, they usually cannot afford bail, and upon release are homeless again.

This is a self-perpetuating cycle of homelessness and prison, where minor, inevitable infractions

send people from the streets to jail, then back onto the streets with no resources, starting the cycle over again. Not only does this not help people out of homelessness or make our city safer, but it also increases the risk of physical harm of this population by police. Had Del Carnforth had a safe place to live, he would never have been on the street where he was vulnerable.

IV. Racism and Implicit Bias in the Police Force

In late 2019, several anonymous complaints were filed with the Austin Police Department, alleging that two Assistant Chiefs of Police made racist remarks to other members of the department, and that a third made homophobic remarks and displayed homophobic behavior by seeking gay conversion therapy for his child.

The Office of Police Oversight and City Council members requested an investigation of these complaints, and Austin City Council unanimously approved a resolution to begin a thorough, independent investigation of discrimination, racism, and misconduct in all functional aspects of the Austin Police Department. After the first allegations were made public several Black police officers reported their experiences of racism within APD. In January 2020, several Black officers claimed retaliation by white officers for speaking publicly about racism within the department.



Both overt racism and implicit bias impact the behaviors of police officers when they encounter Black and Brown people in the community, which puts these people at a higher risk for physical harm or death. Nationally, Black men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men. The likelihood for a Black man to be killed by police is 1 in 1,000. These staggering numbers show the urgent need for new training and new visioning for public safety at all levels of government.



THE WORK SO FAR: AJC'S WINS IN AUSTIN

Between 2017 and 2020, AJC accomplished several major milestones with Austin's City Council and police department that specifically addressed the issues outlined above: police use-of-force policy, response to mental health crises, criminalization of homelessness, and racism and bias in the police force. Our goal is to abolish stories like Del Carnforth's, in which innocent civilians, and especially Black and Brown civilians, are killed by police. These milestones include:



Austin's First De-Escalation Policy + Reformed Police Union Contract

In the spring of 2017, Austin Justice Coalition delivered a revised de-escalation policy to APD, but was met with silence. So, that summer AJC began organizing around something the APD cared a lot more about: the Austin police contract. AJC led a coalition of groups in opposition to the renewal of the existing contract language, laid out demands for revision, and built a citywide movement against renewal.

As it became clear in the fall of 2017 that the Austin Justice Coalition might actually have the votes at City Hall to terminate the police contract, the police department suddenly issued a de-escalation policy, which it added to its policy manual in November of 2017. This was AJC's first major policy victory. The new policy required de-escalation, but the ability to enforce that requirement depended on the outcome of the police contract vote. AJC and its large coalition of allies kept up the pressure, and in December of 2017, Council voted "no" on a police contract for the first time ever.

The union agreement ran out at the end of the year, and in 2018 the city had no contract with

the union. When the city finally returned to the negotiation table, it had more leverage and a strong movement behind it. Further reforms were included and a contract was finally approved in December of 2018, exactly one year later. Improvements in transparency and accountability around misconduct, and the elimination of costly special “stipends,” were included. This was the first time that a liberal, Black-led group led the city in a refusal and improvement of a police contract. Austin cut the cost of the police contract by \$40 million over four years, allowing for the allocation of millions to address unsheltered homelessness.

Since that time AJC has assisted several cities in the United States in developing their strategy for renegotiating their police union contracts and reinvesting city dollars in communities. AJC also provides training on city budgeting processes to community members.

Investigation Into Racism Inside APD

After several anonymous complaints were filed with APD alleging racist and homophobic remarks within the department, AJC held two press conferences supporting an investigation. The first was to inform the public about the allegations and the need for thorough investigation to root out racism in the Austin Police Department. The second, on January 14, 2020, was to inform the public that several Black officers had come forward claiming retaliation by white officers for speaking publicly about racism as well as supporting the proposed investigation.

AJC organized this press conference to include Black, Latinx and LGBTQTS police officers who spoke about their experiences. AJC wanted to show solidarity with these officers as well as with City Council members who experienced retaliation for their work in publicizing the complaints. After several hours of public testimony from community members, AJC leaders and volunteers, the City Council approved the investigation with a unanimous vote. This began in early 2020 and includes audits of all cadet training materials and procedures, of recruitment programs, and of police officers' social media accounts.

Rewritten Body Cam Policy

AJC began its work on the Police Body Camera Ordinance in 2015. Over a year of discussions and negotiations with Mayor Steve Adler and the City Council resulted in a plan for every Austin officer to be equipped with a body camera in 2018, with AJC rewriting nearly 80% of the policy in use. AJC ensured that 1) The cameras had a failsafe data retention tool, preventing footage from being deleted, and 2) footage automatically uploaded via wifi upon returning to base. AJC was also involved in the next iteration of the body cam policy, which resulted in public release of footage within 60 days of the incident. Any delay in release must be announced and validated within 45 days of the incident.

Independent Office of Police Oversight

In 2018, thanks to AJC's victory with the police contract, the city finally agreed that a stronger Office of Police Oversight would be created without a police contract. A far stronger OPO replaced the inadequate Office of the Police Monitor, which had no leverage over the department, offered no transparency during investigations, and had no authority to recommend disciplinary action if appropriate. The new OPO has expanded capabilities to investigate serious incidents of police use of force, conduct preliminary reviews of complaints, initiate complaints, acquire access to confidential police department records, conduct random assessments of body cam footage, and recommend disciplinary action. It also accepts online and anonymous complaints from citizens, with no affidavit. The Austin Police Chief is obligated to submit written explanations of any disagreements with the OPO's recommendations.

No Arrests for Class C Misdemeanors and Unsheltered Homelessness

In 2017 Senate Bill 1849, The Sandra Bland Act, passed with two provisions for which AJC advocated: improved racial profiling data collection and appropriate mental health care management in jails. However, the most important provision to many advocates statewide was stripped out in the Senate Committee: ending arrests for minor infractions like Sandra Bland's failure to signal.

While AJC continues to advocate for this critical limit on police power at the legislature, Austin City Council picked up this reform locally, passing "Freedom Cities" in the summer of 2017. The Freedom Cities ordinances made it local policy that a person cannot be arrested for Class C Misdemeanors, and was followed by further clarification by Council that police would not arrest for unsheltered homeless violations. Due to these ordinance changes, between 2017 and 2019 Austin's minor infraction arrests fell 60% and its bookings fell nearly 20%. While the relatively small number of arrests for low level violations still occur disproportionately to Black residents, the number of such altercations has dropped by thousands, and jail bookings by hundreds per year.



#ReimagineATX: Redistribution of 30% of Police Budget Funds Over 3 Years

The murder of George Floyd occurred a month after the murder of Mike Ramos in Austin. When George Floyd was killed, the Austin Justice Coalition had already galvanized a coalition of more than 30 local organizations to demand the firing of the Chief of Police and several other key leaders involved in Austin's public safety. AJC's position, as a group that had long sat at the table with APD, was clear: if the reforms at APD had not prevented the death of this unarmed man, then APD was simply not trying and we needed leadership who would.

As street protests mounted, AJC started to work on a specific set of budget demands and build a coalition around a set of \$150 million in specific line items that could be moved out of the police budget. Council issued a vote of no confidence in the police leadership, but the City Manager made no change in public safety personnel.

Meanwhile, police violence surged in street protests. On May 31, six people were seriously injured by shots to the head from "less lethal" munitions. AJC cancelled and then reorganized a bigger, peaceful rally. The Justice for Them All Rally drew thousands of Austinites to the State Capitol, and City Council began to lean towards budget reductions. AJC led hundreds

in testimony at Council in July, and pushed ten thousand emails for \$150 million in budget cuts. By August of 2020, Austin's City Council heard from Austinites of every district—across race, age, and background—and voted unanimously to move \$21 million from APD's budget and to fund alternative forms of public safety. They also voted to shift functions such as the 911 call center and the forensics lab, totaling \$80 million. Decoupling such functions from APD ensures that diverse calls for service are met with an appropriate response (EMS, Mental Health, Law Enforcement, etc.) and that the forensics lab is led by scientists. They also committed to evaluating how another \$50 million is spent, such as whether horses are useful in 2020 or (more likely) a romanticized policing practice that belongs in the past.

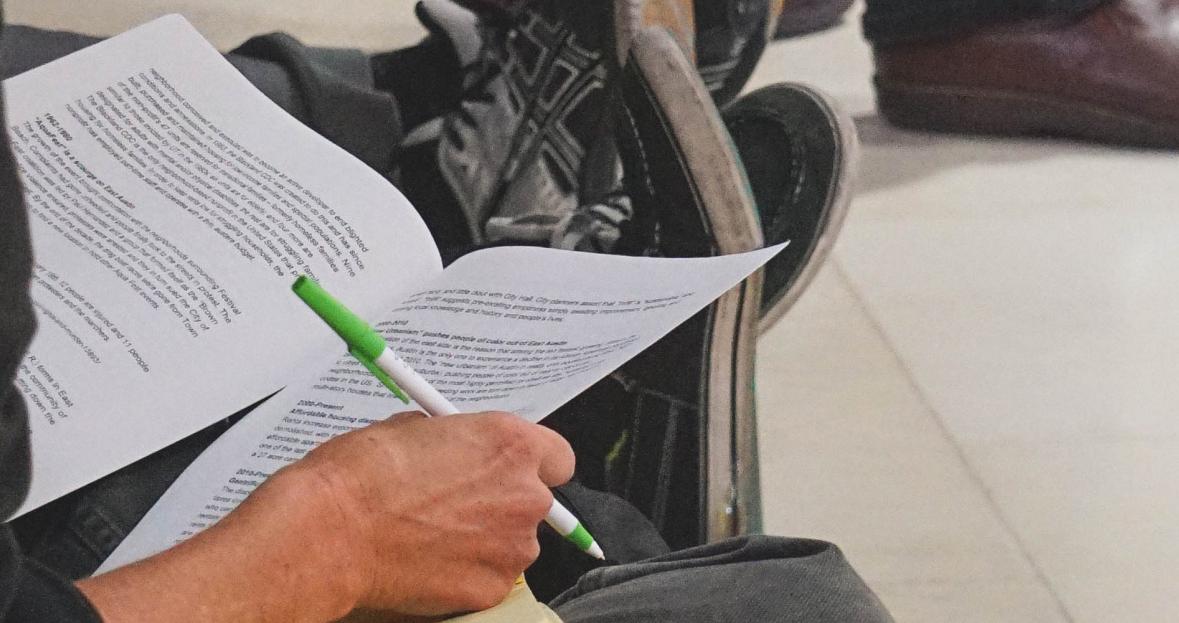
Finally, while APD remains in the hands of the same management, new appointees are participating in #ReimagineATX, the public safety process that will implement the \$150 million worth of budget changes. The City Manager appointed a new Assistant CM for this process, and added to the Task Force the Director of the Office of Police Oversight as well as the ACM in charge of public health and Director of the Equity Office. Meanwhile, the City has agreed to push for state law changes that will facilitate firing Austin's police chief.

**“POLICE UNION
CONTRACTS ARE
RIPE FOR REFORM.
YES, THE PROCESS
CAN BE LONG. BUT
THE REWARDS ARE
SUBSTANTIAL.”**

— AJC Leadership

HOW WE DID IT

The above milestones were not solely the work of AJC, but a grand coalition built between the community and its representatives. That said, AJC has a specific and unique way of building such a coalition and pushing reforms through. We have found our approach to policy reform to be effective not only in Austin, but in other cities where we have trained and partnered with advocates. Below we describe our key tactics for creating transformative reforms in your city.



TACTIC 1: EDUCATE YOURSELF

Any effective reform strategy must be couched in both history and current events. It's up to you to make your group the most informed people in the conversation. When we decided to reform APD's use-of-force policy, our first step was to become well-informed. We created a reading group and scoured available data about police use of force and de-escalation. Over a period of weeks we reviewed APD's use-of-force policy, similar policies in other cities, local and national news articles on the topic, academic and scholarly essays, reports and studies by state and national organizations, relevant legislation in Texas and other states, and many additional sources.

Keep in mind one person cannot know everything. Share knowledge, leverage experts, and rely on others to find and bring new resources so that the entire group gets smarter.

TACTIC 2: EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY

Give people the facts and the opportunity to act from a place of knowledge. This will empower them to fight not only alongside you, but to take initiative and come up with creative solutions that perhaps your group hasn't even thought of yet!

In August of 2017 Austin Justice Coalition began a massive **public education and outreach campaign** to inform the community about Austin Police Department's faulty police contract and to encourage citizens to recognize and support this rare occasion for much-needed reform. This was timed strategically to ensure proposals to the 2017 police contract could be heard. We identified key swing-vote and no-vote districts and held forums there. Through these forums we convinced influential citizens, including environmentalists, health care practitioners, church leaders, members of key commissions and boards, and the Travis County Democratic Party, to sign a statement of support and endorse our reforms.

Public education can take the form of community forums, town hall meetings, press conferences, and speaking engagements at local organization or business meetings. The community can be educated about proposed policy changes, upcoming votes, and other chances to participate in the legislative process. Often these events



happen and the public does not participate because they do not know about it. Build a platform for yourself with regular communication with your support base, so when important events like this take place, they know about it.

Sometimes public education is one-on-one. AJC leadership set up meetings with university professors, leaders in the health sector, the environment, faith leaders, key Democrats, and many others. We asked these individuals to sign a simple statement of support for a NO vote on the contract. Most were very willing to sign, and many understood that the city's bloated police budget was strangling investment elsewhere. We got dozens of signatures from key individuals and circulated them to Council.

Another effective way to educate the public is to participate in major community events. AJC participates in SXSW, meetings at City Hall, and speaking engagements at Huston-Tillotson University, Austin Community College, and others.

As an example, during one of these public events, AJC played a portion of the 911 call relating to the 2015 shooting of Richard "Brick" Monroe. At this event, two City Council members and their staff attended. Afterwards, Councilwoman Ann Kitchen urged the Austin City Council to approve funding for a Meadows Institute study on police response to mental

health crises. The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute made six recommendations for the creation of an emergency mental health response to 911 calls, with an initial response to this type of call that would not include police. This was a huge victory for Austin, especially considering stories like Del's, and it came from the pointed education of one council member. To achieve political reform, you must have public support, and education is the best vehicle we have found to gain that support.

TACTIC 3: LISTEN TO THE COMMUNITY TO BUILD YOUR GRAND COALITION

Solidarity among many groups is more powerful than any one group alone. Change occurs when multiple perspectives are united. That's why we promote the participation of all marginalized groups in the movement toward reforms in criminal justice, education, housing, healthcare, and other institutions. The strength of the reform movement is powered by the contributions of diverse sources of knowledge, experience, strategies, histories, and perspectives. Support must come from a cross section of the larger community, not just activists.



In August 2016, AJC and the Urban Institute began collaboration on the Community Voices Survey to evaluate how citizens in neighborhoods with a high frequency of police interactions perceive those interactions. Community members and members of Austin Police Department fully participated in the development and implementation of the survey to make it as accurate and reliable as possible. The goal was to learn about the realities and the necessary changes needed in Austin's heavily-policed areas, so the men and women in the affected neighborhoods had to guide the reform process. This survey generated 10 key recommendations that continue to guide AJC's actions and perspectives today.

Delano lived in the type of neighborhood that Community Voices surveyed. He could have been among the voices giving their perspectives on interaction with APD officers. It is likely that someone in similar circumstances did participate. AJC targeted these communities because they are the best sources for information about police conduct.

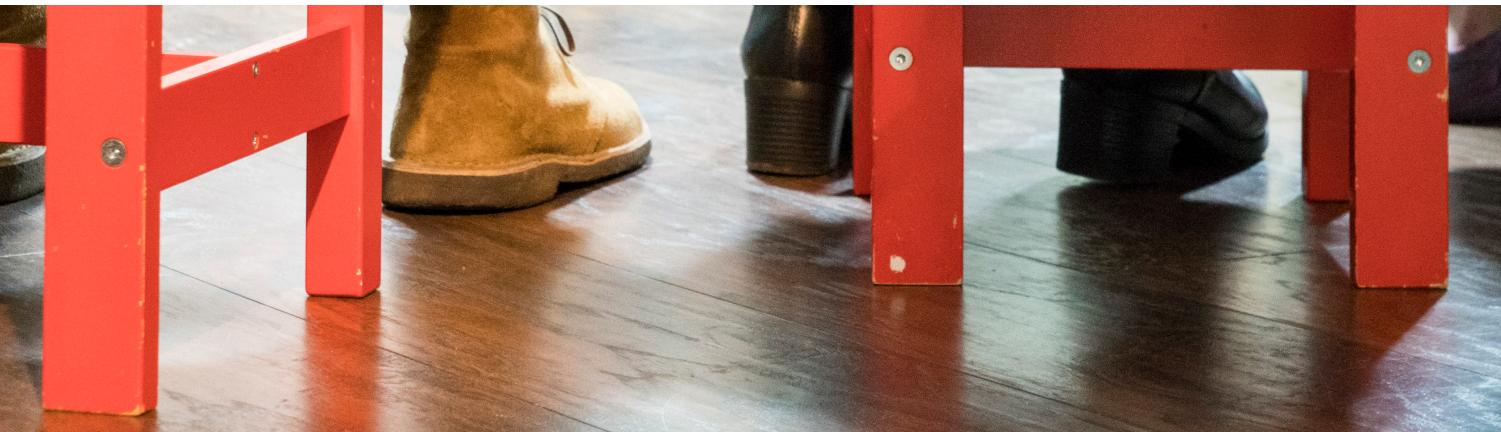
This kind of coalition-building was critical to the success of the contract vote. In the spring of 2017, AJC participated as an equal partner in a process to decide what the priority reforms would be for a new police contract. Using ranked voting, leadership from many groups weighed more than twenty different and important reforms and narrowed the campaign plan to eight reforms. This process resulted in strong commitments by all groups to stay focused on these reforms and not allow negotiators or police supporters to peel off civil rights support by offering other changes. These eight reforms became the baseline expectation by Council Members when negotiators went back to the bargaining table.

C coalitions can work well even without coming to an agreement, when everyone is pushing in the same direction. In the budget fight this summer, AJC led a coalition of groups supporting \$150 million in specific cuts and reorganizations. Meanwhile, another coalition led by Grassroots Leadership and Communities of Color United called for much larger cuts. That push for more helped AJC's proposal, with its specific list of divisions and dollar amounts, feel even more reasonable, actionable, and implementable for Council. Austin ended up with the largest real budget cuts to police in the nation.

TACTIC 4: GET INTO THE CONVERSATION

During the negotiation of the Austin police contract AJC was, of course, not invited to participate. So we took a cue from Shirley Chisholm and brought our own chairs, along with a list of priorities for changes to the contract. We packed chairs into the close-quartered Labor Relations conference room and took our seats around the periphery to closely scrutinize the negotiation. AJC occupied those seats for 18 months while the city and the police association bargained. We took meticulous notes to later cross reference with the previous contract and report back to our members, associates, the public, and City Council staffers.

We organized our members to participate in a rare public hearing at City Council on the night of the vote on December 13, 2017. This outreach led to a dynamic, powerful cross section of supporters. There were seven hours of testimony from more than 15 activist groups (150 activists, both local and national) police officers, and city residents. Near midnight City Council's unanimous vote rejected the five-year contract and sent it back to the negotiating table. City Council's main concerns were the absence of significant reforms to accountability, transparency, and police oversight. This was the first time that the city rejected a proposed police contract in Austin's history!



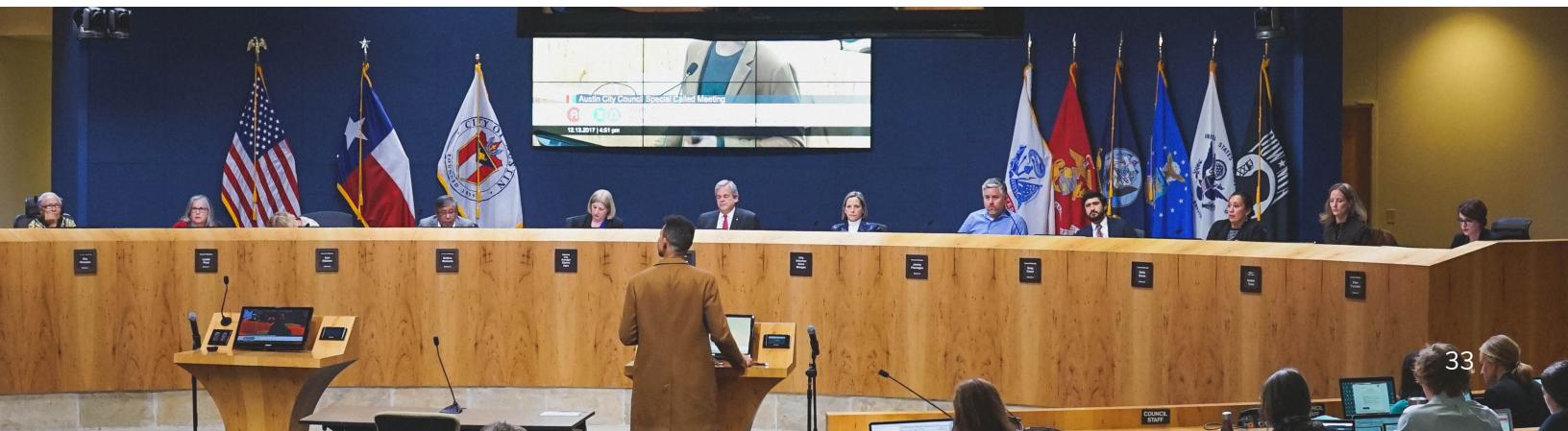
**"IF THEY
DON'T GIVE YOU
A SEAT AT THE
TABLE, BRING A
FOLDING CHAIR."**

— Shirley Chisolm

TACTIC 5: ALWAYS PROPOSE AN ALTERNATIVE

While AJC was working on recommendations to reform the Austin Police Department in 2016, APD requested millions of dollars from the city budget to increase the number of new officers. AJC countered by drafting the **Better Before More** campaign, which insisted that before hiring new officers, APD should make several significant improvements to its operations. AJC insisted that APD ensure that their department was best-suited to take in more officers with a modernized policy manual, a public process to define community policing, a better framework for body camera video release, community involvement in the meet and confer contract negotiation process, a resolution for the elimination of arrests for fine-only offenses, improved mental health emergency response, and updated training for new recruits and staff.

Because this was a viable alternative, **Better Before More** was included in a budget rider which made APD accountable to AJC and the city to show progress in operational efficacy before they would be granted the funds for new officers. AJC's success in getting **Better Before More** included in the city budget showed the police negotiators that the city and AJC were serious about reform and made it clear that these concerns must be addressed in the negotiations. Better Before More set the stage for budget discussions every year that followed and helped AJC build the confidence and the know-how to get to \$150 million in cuts this past summer.



TACTIC 6: BUILD AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE IN POWER

Success in creating change in oppressive systems requires advocates to build relationships with those in power, so the voices of those who are not represented are heard. AJC has developed working relationships with many city leaders including the Mayor, every Council office, legislators and staff at the Texas Capitol. During legislative sessions, AJC's volunteers contact legislators as we seek their support or inform them of our opposition to certain bills. Volunteers provide staffers with information about what other legislators are proposing, and assist legislators who need a co-author for a bill. These relationships are vital to our success, and our volunteer policy team allows us to build more relationships within the confines of allowable C3 advocacy.

When city and state leaders recognized that AJC was not going away, they took our perspective and our proposals more seriously. Efforts to make significant reform must include those who hold the power to make such reforms happen. Without ongoing communication among those mentioned above, AJC could not have achieved a police contract that included significant reforms on behalf of citizens like Delano. We engage with these leaders in a straightforward, persistent, and respectful manner as a voice for the powerless in Austin. Our agenda is clear.

TACTIC 7: FOLLOW THE MONEY

City budgets—which includes the police budget—are available to the public. AJC’s coalition downloaded the city budget and scrubbed every police expense line. We looked for areas of unexpended funds, and we pulled out entire divisions that could be led by someone other than the Chief of Police.

A key reason AJC was able to get a unanimous vote against the police contract was by showing how it locked up an additional \$80 million in new stipends and salaries for police officers for four years. After the four years, that increase would be the new starting point, tying the city to a higher police budget for the foreseeable future. At the same time, each Council office had something it passionately wanted to fund, from gun violence prevention to a family violence shelter, to rangers for city parks. Many influential people in the city finally spoke out as they saw the city’s investment



in their mission areas decline or stay flat while the police budget grew.

Prior to the 2020 vote on the APD budget, AJC released the city’s budget information to its community members, then asked them to decide and share how they would reallocate police department funds. Community members overwhelmingly chose health services and education as viable alternatives to policing, and this is currently the foundation for the reforms we will seek in 2021 and beyond.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

AJC intentionally works with an informal coalition of partners, affiliates, and community members. Each group we work with brings a necessary component to the reform process. Sometimes we find we are working with one group on one reform, but are on opposite sides of the aisle for another. This is the nature of our work and our methods. In all the work we do, who we align with is less important than accomplishing a greater reality of freedom and equality for the people we represent.



If you live in the Austin area and are interested in volunteering your time, learning about our current initiatives, or getting to know our platform better, attend our monthly General Meeting, the schedule for which may be found on our website at www.austinjustice.org or join our slack channel: [@austinjustice.slack.com](https://austinjustice.slack.com).

If you are outside of the Austin area and are interested in training on city budget processes, Better Before More training or negotiation strategies, contact info@austinjustice.org.

For interest in donations and financial support, contact francesjordan@austinjustice.org.

For press inquiries, contact:
press@austinjustice.org.

**“POLICE REFORMS
REQUIRE SUSTAINED
PRESSURE FROM THE
CITY’S POPULATION
AND LEADERSHIP.”**

— AJC Leadership

ADDITIONAL READING

- [AJC Reports](#)
- [Community Voices—AJC Community Survey on Policing](#)
- [NYT Opinion Piece authored by AJC Leaders](#)
- [Austin Police Department Policy Manual](#)
- [Those Who Stayed: The Impact of Gentrification on Longstanding Residents in East Austin](#)
- [APD Response to Mental Health Related Incidents \(2018\)](#)

