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Austin Chamber of Commerce launches ATX Helps for humane and temporary shelters

*New coalition seeks to raise \$14M to support
people experiencing homelessness*

AUSTIN, Texas—The Austin Chamber of Commerce today announced a new coalition, ATX Helps, that aims to raise \$14 million in private funds for an innovative approach to providing shelter and support services to Austinites living on the streets.

The coalition wants to construct and operate the city's first Sprung shelter, a concept that's proven successful in other cities to provide immediate—and temporary—safe, and clean shelter and other necessities. Leaders from Austin's business community, including representatives from the Downtown Austin Alliance, and faith-based organizations are serving on ATX Helps' steering committee.

"Homelessness in Austin has reached a critical level that's inhumane for those experiencing it," Brian Cassidy, chairman of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, said. "This is the answer for someone who wants to get off the street now, and this addresses the most immediate and visible gap in Austin's current efforts."

ATX Helps will set up the first Sprung shelter, which will serve as a housing navigation center. At its core, it will provide shelter, outreach and storage solutions for people who need it most. This type of shelter combined with navigation services will serve as a bridge to move people who are actively living on the streets into either permanent supportive housing or into private housing that will allow them to get jobs and find stable homes.

The \$14-million campaign goal includes funds for both capital and operational expenses to ensure that the shelter can be properly operated for at least two years. Each Sprung shelter costs approximately \$2 million in capital expense, which includes the structure and all furnishings. This is intended to be a temporary solution until more permanent facilities can be implemented.

ATX Helps aims to have the initial \$2 million in capital funds raised by the end of this year so that the first navigation center can be constructed during the first quarter of 2020. ATX Helps is currently scouting sites for this location, with the target area being within a half-mile to a mile of downtown Austin.

Sprung structures, which can be fully operational in just three months, typically hold about 150 bunk beds and can comfortably sleep 300. Another critical benefit ATX Helps will provide is storage for personal items. Plans include providing large, lockable bins for each person housed, as well as approximately 200 additional bins for people who need it but are not staying in the Sprung shelter. In addition to dining and sanitation services, the shelter will also offer comprehensive wraparound services to help mental health and drug/alcohol concerns.

The City of Austin has been trying to address the rising homelessness numbers by largely focusing on permanent housing solutions—which have waiting lists of up to two years. For many experiencing homelessness, access to immediate shelter and accompanying services can be the catalyst needed to take their next step, regain employment and pave the way to permanent housing.

ATX Helps invites all Austinites—individuals and businesses—to step up and help fund the critical missing component of immediate temporary shelter to get people experiencing homelessness off the street now.

For more information or to donate, please visit ATXHelps.org and @atxhelps on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES FOR ATTRIBUTION:

“The combination of adequate short-term shelter, long-term housing and wraparound services are all needed to successfully decrease the amount of people experiencing homelessness in Austin,” Dewitt Peart, president and chief executive officer of the Downtown Austin Alliance, said. “This action from ATX Helps will provide emergency shelter and will support a comprehensive housing-first approach.”

“Many of us recognize that the journey of those experiencing homelessness also intersects with our community—our residents, businesses owners and visitors, among others. People experiencing homelessness are in incredibly difficult circumstances, and they need to be the focus of this conversation,” Chris Turnley, chairman of the Austin Bridge Builders Alliance, said. “ATX Helps will allow all parties to come together, regardless of politics, and provide immediate help for those who need it most.”

“We know there isn’t just one solution to address homelessness, but one thing is for certain—everything we do needs to be done with the human being in mind. Our homeless neighbors deserve the same level of dignity as any other Austinite—if for nothing else, simply because they are human,” Alan Graham, founder and CEO of Mobile Loaves & Fishes, said. “When groups such as ATX Helps put forth potential ways

to help mitigate a homeless individual's dire circumstances, it demonstrates a level of compassion toward our fellow man or woman and sets a great example in our city for others to follow. We applaud the efforts of ATX Helps and the innovative ideas they are bringing to the table to help address the significant needs of our homeless brothers and sisters."

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About the Austin Chamber of Commerce

The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce focuses on how the Austin region works. We serve as the voice of business for our member organizations and their employees throughout Central Texas. Our mission is to provide leadership that facilitates the creation of a prosperous regional economy and effective advocacy for members.