



U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division

DJ 170-TXW-1

Employment Litigation Section – 4CON
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington DC 20530
www.justice.gov/crt/emp

September 18, 2025

Via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail

Mayor Kirk Watson
City of Austin, Texas
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767

c/o

Deborah Thomas
City Attorney, City of Austin
Deborah.Thomas@austintexas.gov

Re: Investigation of Employment Practices of the City of Austin Pursuant to Section 707 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Dear Mayor Watson:

The Department of Justice is opening an investigation to determine whether the City of Austin is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e, *et seq.* (Title VII). It is the responsibility of the Attorney General of the United States to enforce the provisions of Title VII with respect to state and local government employers. The Attorney General has delegated authority to investigate compliance with these provisions to the Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division.

Title VII prohibits an employer from discriminating against an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2. When the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a state or local government employer is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination in violation of Title VII, it is the Attorney General's responsibility to take appropriate action to eliminate that violation, including presenting the matter to the appropriate court for civil proceedings. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-6(a).

Our investigation is based on information that the City of Austin may be engaged in employment practices that discriminate against employees, job applicants, and training program participants based on race, color, sex, or national origin in violation of Title VII. Specifically, the City of Austin's Office of Equity and Inclusion, Equity Division expresses that it "works across all City departments . . . to build capacity and leadership in working from a racial equity lens," and

promotes a plan for how the City can “work using a racial equity lens.”¹ The plan’s guidance includes:


- “For managers, delineate clear racial equity expectations regarding hiring, incentivizing use of best practices within hiring processes to minimize bias, and incorporate equity throughout all phases of hiring processes.”²
- “Apply stronger racial equity criteria to the design and execution of executive-level searches as a part of an overall review of hiring and HR practices.”³
- “Collect and analyze demographic data in major job classifications to identify gaps in representation. Each department will identify a specific major classification not reflective of City demographics and develop and implement strategies to eliminate the gaps. Each department should develop specific targets for eliminating gaps using national best practice[.]”⁴
- “Racial equity tools . . . designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in decisions, including policies, practices, programs and budgets.”⁵

Accordingly, I have authorized a full investigation to determine whether the City is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination as set forth above. We have not reached any conclusions about the subject matter of the investigation. We intend to consider all relevant information, and we welcome your assistance in helping to identify what that might be. We would appreciate your cooperation in our investigation.

I have assigned Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Eric Sell to this investigation. Mr. Sell will be in contact with you shortly to set up a mutually agreeable date and time to discuss the parameters of this investigation, including the scope of information that we will be seeking from you. He may be reached by email at Eric.Sell@usdoj.gov.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Regards,



Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

¹ City of Austin Office of Equity and Inclusion, Equity Division, <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/equity-division>.

² *City of Austin Equity Office, Equity Assessment and Recommendations* 24, Government Alliance on Race & Equity, <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=268244>.

³ *Id.* at 14.

⁴ *Id.* at 24.

⁵ *Id.* at 28.

cc:

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