



**DIANE DAY**  
AUSTIN COUNTY CLERK

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## **COMMISSIONERS COURT MINUTES**

### **Order #25-172**

**August 1, 2025** Austin County Commissioners Court met in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Courtroom at the Austin County Courthouse with the following present:

Tim Lapham, County Judge  
Greg Mikel, Commissioner, Precinct 1  
Robert "Bobby" Rinn, Commissioner, Precinct 2  
Leroy Cerny, Commissioner, Precinct 3  
Chip Reed, Commissioner, Precinct 4  
Allison Gerik, Deputy Clerk

#### **9:00A.M. OPENING**

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

#### **ROLL CALL AND CERTIFICATION OF QUORUM**

#### **1. Discussion regarding salaried EMS employee compensation.**

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) explained that SETRAC (Southeast Texas Regional Advisory Council) is a nonprofit agency that is mandated by state law. It consists of 170 acute and specialty care hospitals, 200 EMS agencies, 67 free standing ER's, 63 NDMS designed facilities, 228 dialysis clinics, 986 special populations centers. SETRAC's primary function is to help guide clinical standards and best practices and to help provide preparedness and response.

Austin County EMS is part of the EMTF-6 (Emergency Medical Task Force, Region 6) Department of SETRAC. The EMTF-6 Department covers all counties between Colorado County to the Texas Border with Louisiana, from Nacogdoches County to all the coastal counties. This is approximately 25 counties. The assets available are 3 communications units, 4 ambus, special medical unit, 5 mobile medical units, 3 fatality management units, and a variety of support units. In 2024 SETRAC CMOC was activated 75 times, and 5 times from April to July this year.

After TDEM (Texas Division of Emergency Management) requested for assistance EMTF-6 dispatched 27 units on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Austin County EMS has been on site since July 12<sup>th</sup> and continues to remain on site today.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) stated, from his understanding, Austin County EMS is the only fully equipped MICU ambulance deployed.

Judge Lapham asked Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) to explain the difference between a MICU and other ambulances.

Per Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS), our MICU ambulance can assist with Drug Assisted Intubation and is equipped with a ventilator and IV pump. This has made our staff available 24/7 while deployed for critical transports/transfers. While deployed, Austin County EMS has been requested for "force protection" by multiple agencies, including the Texas DPS Dive Team. During this deployment, Austin County EMS has transported 2 responders.

EMTF-6 has provided reimbursement information packets for all Austin County EMS staff deployed. This paperwork will be collected by SETRAC/ EMTF-6 and processed. The reimbursement will come from SETRAC. Items eligible for reimbursement are deployed labor, backfill labor, travel expenses, equipment used, material used, and any rental equipment used. Austin County should also recover funds from the 2, first responders transported per standard billing practices.

Per EMTF Coordinator for our region, to obtain reimbursement for salaried personnel beyond 40/hr week, we would need to meet the following: 1) Complete the required excel forms for reimbursement. 2) Have a policy stating that salaried exempt personnel can be paid for hours over 40-hour work week. This is at a rate determined by the agency. While preferred to be in place prior to deployment, it is acceptable to establish one while deployed. a.) Pre-established policy in county disaster plan is ideal. b.) A policy in the department level policies is acceptable. c.) If required, the EMTF Coordinator can meet with the County Judge to obtain approval. 3) The first responder agency consultant we have used in the past also added that if none of the above is done, it would default to State policy for salaried responders.

After Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) met with Judge Lapham, Austin County EMS had developed a departmental policy and attached it to the packet presented. A letter stating what is required for reimbursement from SETRAC is also attached in the packet presented.

Regarding the SETRAC packet, Commissioner Reed inquired on the meaning of 30 days mentioned at the end of the page.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS), the 30 days is from time email is received requesting deployment. However, the forms will probably not be submitted until the last staff return from deployment so that only one packet is submitted.

Commissioner Reed expressed concern for if the county will for sure receive reimbursement.



Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) ensured the county will for sure receive reimbursement.

Commissioner Rinn stated salaried employees should expect to receive only their salary.

Judge Lapham asked Commissioner Rinn if job description was written out, would deployment be included in that description.

Commissioner Rinn believes overall this is unfair stating the communities lost everything and now we want to charge more to pay our first responders.

Judge Lapham stated this scope of work is state boundaries. When you are a state employee you have a broader stretch of work.

Commissioner Reed emphasized to not expect to get paid for internal help.

Commissioner Rinn is concerned because this is still tax dollars. He feels if we agree to this then we agree to give salaried employees more money and overtime.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) guaranteed his employees work 90 hours if not more.

Commissioner Cerny stated the county knows what they signed up for.

Commissioner Rinn asked if EMS staff volunteered or were told to go.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) asked for volunteers and had a group come forward. Two were assigned from that group based off availability to fill shifts back home.

Assistant Chief Rhonda Ritchey (Austin County EMS) expressed her thoughts while being deployed and why she does the job she does. Regarding salary, she knew what she was getting into when she took this job. She stated this is a 24/7, 365 day a year job. When the state has unplanned unnatural disasters, we go because that is our call. That is why I signed up. I volunteered because it is the right thing to do. I gave up 12 days of my life on a moment's notice to do it because it is about Texas and not just this county. This is not something new this is standard just new to Austin County. I want to set a precedence moving forward that this is what we do as a county and should do.

Dianna Grobe (County Judge's Office) emphasized that other entities get hazardous pay if on deployment.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) stated if the county decides not to pay the salaried employees while out on deployment then he will send the staff who were deployed home for 7 weeks to spend time with their families.

Commissioner Reed wants it seen and understood through the court's eyes. They were told about this last week and thought the paperwork was covered. Moving forward if no policy is in place Commissioner Reed request it be brought to the courts attention and not a select few individuals. These tasks take money, a motion, a second and vote.

Judge Lapham asked the court if a policy should be made by individual departments or make one policy for all departments.

Commissioner Reed request one policy be made for all departments.

Judge Lapham believes it should be a single policy to cover EMS, Sheriff Office, and Road and Bridge. Can use the EMS policy Chief Walter Morrow created and make it general to cover everyone.

Commissioner Reed asked if until policy is in place that in the event a deployment is needed and additional pay is required it be brought to court before a decision is made. He also commented hoping the 214 forms will pass.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) ensured the 214 form is acceptable and has been processed multiple times before.

Commissioner Reed personally thanked Austin County EMS personnel for going on deployment and believes they should receive the pay they deserve. It will always workout and 2 years from now we may need help money or not.

Commissioner Rinn asked if the 214 form shows daily operations.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) advised yes it does and he has all 214 forms in hand.

Assistant Chief Rhonda Ritchey (Austin County EMS) stated the 214 forms is all Austin County needs to submit.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) presented 214 forms to Billy Dougherty (County Auditor).

Commissioner Rinn asked if policy needs to be in place.

Assistant Chief Rhonda Ritchey (Austin County EMS) advised will still receive state reimbursement but need to put policy in our Emergency Management Policy.

Commissioner Cerny confirmed that hourly or salary does not matter for SETRAC to reimburse.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) stated they will reimburse at what rates will be submitted to them.

Commissioner Rinn advised it did not state anything about retirement reimbursement.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) advised everything that the county is out of cost will be reimbursed.

Commissioner Reed asked Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) what his request from the court today is.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) request the court approve the county to pay out salary employees for their time while deployed. Hourly Employees have been paid out already.

Commissioner Reed motioned to approve payment for salaried employees while deployed.

*Motion to Approve: Commissioner Reed, 2<sup>nd</sup> Commissioner Cerny, passed (3-1)*

Commissioner Cerny addressed Commissioner Rinn stating we take advantage of grants also but where does that money go.

Commissioner Rinn stated he has voiced his opinion and believes we are opening for issues.

Commissioner Reed stated if next group comes in and no policy is in place we have the risk of not getting paid.

Billy Dougherty (County Auditor) stated it is a little of all over the place and there is no consistency in the State of Texas. Just request proof stating they worked their entire time of deployment and he received that proof. However, if reimbursement is not received, he would like to know what the consequences will be.

Commissioner Cerny confirmed we are approving the reimbursement of overtime because the salary is already a set rate.

Commissioner Rinn asked what that dollar amount is.

Commissioner Cerny asked when we can expect to receive state reimbursement.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) advised he is not sure of an exact receiving time.

Commissioner Rinn asked why clinical position was changed from hourly to salary.

Chief Walter Morrow (Austin County EMS) answered stating was having difficulty finding the right candidate for the job based on hourly pay. The right candidate wanted more than



\$30/hr for at a 40-hour work week so he'd make less than the field staff he is managing so we presented to the court to have him change over to salary position.

Commissioner Rinn stated we need to start looking when we take our positions. When you take a job, you should do your job and you know what you are going to be paid. If you are really doing it out of your heart you will do it and not worry about the pay.

Kris Kehl (UTS Representative) spoke on the reassurance of reimbursement stating as soon as Chief Walter Morrow receives request for staff to deploy the time clock starts for them. A local entity has never not received reimbursement. The EOC finance section in Kerrville will collect forms and submit them to TDEM. EMTF-6 is a state deployed resource through the State Medical Operations Center at request of the State Operations Center. A 5% administrative cost on top of this covering the amount of time taken to prepare all the paperwork. Kris expressed his understanding for the courts concern and stated when taking resources from local communities the state sees it as those resources need to be paid. State and federal tax payers all put in for this just as any other services. It is believed that the county will be reimbursed in a timely manner. The state already has the money set aside for situations as such. Being a commissioner and spending tax money is hard but being a cooperative partner at a state level is vital.

Commissioner Reed confirmed stating he has also heard the state has funds set aside for situations like this.

Commissioner Rinn expressed that they should be paid their regular pay. He believes it is unfair when they go to a disaster where they lose everything and you want to get more money off that disaster.

Kris Kehl (UTS Representative) stated they are not asking for more money. This is the way the system is set up from federal to state level.

Judge Lapham questioned if any additional discussion was needed before voting.

No further discussion occurred. Vote passed 3-1. Commissioner Rinn opposed.

## 2. Budget Workshop

Judge Lapham presented a revised budget packet.

There were changes to voter approval rate due to the rate not being where it was expected. Amount added for the building of a new Precinct 4 barn. New fees were also added in and engineering cost was changed.

Will bring budget packet back to next court.

Motion to Adjourn: Commissioner Reed, 2<sup>nd</sup> Commissioner Cerny, passed (4-0)

Court adjourned at 9:52 a.m.

**ALL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS ON FILE WITH COUNTY CLERK AS PROVIDED  
BY  
COMMISSIONERS COURT**

**I, Diane Day, Austin County Clerk, attest to the minutes of the Commissioners Court proceedings for August 1, 2025.**

Date: August 13, 2025  
Diane Day, Austin County Clerk  
Clerk of Commissioners Court  
Austin County, Texas  
By: Allison Gerik  
Allison Gerik, Deputy Clerk



FILED

2025 AUG 13 AM 10:10