

# VIEWPOINTS

**WE SAY** POLICE TRAINING

## Austin police academy needs clear focus on guardian role

Austin police respond every day to unpredictable situations that could put themselves and others in harm's way. Sometimes deadly force is needed. But more often than not, officers can achieve a better outcome by responding with creativity, understanding and restraint.

Austin's finest – and the community they serve – deserve a training program that best equips officers with all of those skills.

However, the complaints recently aired by 10 former cadets have put a fresh spotlight on the techniques and tenor of the Austin Police Training Academy. Those complaints, according to reporting by the American-Statesman's Tony Plohetski, include allegations that instructors insulted trainees who expressed an interest in helping the public, mocked homeless people and prostitutes, and stoked feelings of fear and aggression toward people whom officers may encounter.

Those characterizations, which the Austin Police Department disputes as unfounded or taken out of context, tie into a long-running debate in the law enforcement community. Should police officers be warriors on high alert, ready to use force to subdue people perceived as threats? Or should they be guardians who first try to resolve problems through cooperation, with concern for the dignity of others, before using force as a last resort?

APD's answer is: Yes. Both. Officers should be guardians at heart but warriors when needed.

We worry this yes-to-both view overlooks key differences between these two distinct approaches to law enforcement. This response blurs the vision of an agency at a time when Interim Police Chief Brian Manley, himself in the spotlight as the lone finalist for permanent chief, needs to provide a focused outlook for the department he wants to lead.

We recognize law enforcement officers have extremely difficult and dangerous jobs, a fact underscored by this week's funeral of Round Rock

police officer Charles Whites, who was struck by a car while directing traffic, as well as a couple of instances this year in which suspects opened fire on Austin police. Several events in the coming week will honor 18 Texas peace officers who died in the line of duty last year.

Based on efforts like the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, law enforcement leaders across the country have also reached a strong consensus in recent years that the best way to protect officers and the public is with guardian-style tactics designed to slow down situations and establish rapport, whenever possible, with people in crisis.

Unfortunately we have seen too many appearances by warrior-cops on Austin streets, in the cases of three officers indicted this spring on charges of using excessive force; in the rough takedown of a suspected prostitute last fall by an officer who never gave the woman a chance to comply; in the fatal shooting of unarmed, naked teenager David Joseph in 2016; in a training academy instructor who defended that shooting at the time by saying officers "don't have a duty to retreat"; in the tackling of three people charged in 2015 with jaywalking; in the officer who slammed elementary school teacher Breiona King to the ground during a 2015 traffic stop; and in the other officer who told King that police are sometimes wary of blacks because of their "violent tendencies."

It should not be lost on APD that many of these incidents involved people of color, and that these tactics have undermined the department's efforts to improve its relationship with minority communities.

The de-escalation policy that Manley adopted in January is an important step forward, requiring officers to try to defuse situations before resorting to force. Assistant Chief Chris McIlvain told us that APD naturally draws guardian-minded recruits who want to serve and protect, and that outlook permeates the training at the police academy. Cadets learning de-escalation communications tactics

hear about the experiences of crime victims and spend time meeting residents in the neighborhoods they will soon patrol.

But APD sends an inconsistent message by layering that guardian ethos atop the military-style boot camp environment at the training academy, where some instructors yell and curse at camouflage-wearing cadets who are repeatedly warned that any call could become a deadly showdown.

Manley and others have defended the drill-sergeant-style abuse heaped on cadets as a kind of stress test that weeds out hotheads and prepares officers for absorbing the verbal taunts they may face on patrol. Unfortunately, there is also an implicit lesson being taught when instructors win cadets' compliance through aggression or humiliation: This tactic gets results.

The academy can do better. Instructors should model professionalism in the classroom and during physical training. They have ample opportunity to test cadets' emotional resilience during field-training scenarios, where trainees practice making traffic stops or arrests with combative actors. And instructors always carry the largest stick: Cadets who don't meet expectations won't graduate.

McIlvain said APD looked at its training academy practices in light of the former cadets' allegations and found no need for revision. But he also noted the law enforcement profession has been evolving. We urge the department to learn from others further along the curve, particularly on training to de-escalate situations with people who are on drugs or have mental health issues. Other departments have developed successful tactics to disarm knife- or bat-wielding people without officers firing their guns.

APD's leadership should take this opportunity to do what any officer arriving at a scene should do: Slow down. Ask questions. And develop a strategy to best protect the safety and dignity of everyone involved.

**OTHERS SAY** JULIETA GARIBAY

Special Contributor

## Once a Dreamer and now a citizen, my journey was long but fulfilling

Last week, I took the oath to become a U.S. citizen after 26 years of living in the U.S. – with more than 20 of those years as an undocumented immigrant. It's been an arduous journey for me and my family – but even now, as a citizen, I remain as committed as ever to fighting for the rights of immigrants, people of color, LGBTQIA, the working class and women.

As I took the oath, I began thinking of everything that led me to finally becoming a U.S. citizen.

I migrated with my mother and sister in 1992 to Austin. From seventh through 12th grade, my teachers told me I was college material, though my schoolmates teased me for my accent. I grew up thinking it was bad to be an immigrant – that it was something to be ashamed of. I was taught to disregard my mother's courage and bravery to migrate for the love of our family – and for survival.

Like the millions of undocumented immigrants, I too had a plan in case *la migra* – or immigration enforcement – ever showed up at my job or school. Thankfully, I never needed to use that plan, but it did mark my life.

I was waitressing to pay for college and become a nurse, my dream career. Back then, I didn't dare say I was an immigrant, much less undocumented. I lived a double life: I was trying to be a nurse and fit in, so that if immigration agents ever showed up, I'd be

able to get away. I'd pray to the Virgin de Guadalupe to make me invisible. I was undocumented and very scared – and unable to live out my dream.

I finally saw a glimmer of hope. It was January 2005, and I was about to earn my bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Texas that May. Depression, although not clinically diagnosed, was setting in. I'd lay awake at night crying, thinking about another beautiful frame with a diploma hanging on the wall – and knowing I would never get to practice nursing.

This reality led my sister and I to speak our truth – to share our story and demand the DREAM Act, a bill that would allow undocumented students like myself to work and live in the U.S.

We co-founded the first immigrant youth-led organization in Texas, then I co-founded United We Dream, the first and largest national immigrant youth-led network. United We Dream allowed me to witness the power of people organizing and speaking our truth as undocumented immigrants. I now feel proud of my heritage and my journey.

It was through that journey that began 13 years ago that my mission in life became clear. Although I started organizing because my dream was to practice nursing, I learned through the movement that being bilingual or professional – or being undocumented or a U.S. citizen – should not dictate if one is treated with dignity and

respect. It's the mere fact of being a human that mandates dignity and respect for everyone. I never got to practice nursing, but I get to practice a more fulfilling job: community organizing.

In November, I had my U.S. citizenship exam. Ironically, it was exactly seven years after I got married. Regrettably, my marriage was nothing close to my happily ever after. I actually call it my "lucky-unlucky break," as I ended up applying for the Violence Against Women Act after my spouse kicked me out of our home – and after making threats to call authorities on me because he knew I could get deported.

Last week, as I took my oath of citizenship, I also pledged with my heart to work for and with the young "Julietas" out there, who are too scared and feel lonely because they are undocumented – for the folks surviving domestic violence or abuse day by day, and for the courageous immigrants who are trying to survive and who should have every right to thrive with dignity and respect in this country.

I am Julieta Garibay, proudly Mexicana – and now officially adopted by the U.S.

And now I'm a voter. I plan to vote for my community – and to honor my journey and my truth. I will always salute my mother's courage and bravery for migrating in the name of love for our family.

Garibay is director of United We Dream.

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**YOU SAY** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### After voter checks audit, paper goes in ballot box

Re: April 27 letter to the editor, "Paper ballots not immune from hacks."

Hamilton Richards, you are right: I was misquoted in the "By 2020, Travis to have new vote setup" article.

Our new voting system will contain a paper audit trail for the voter to use in order to ensure that the selections they make on the electronic marking device match their intent. That piece of paper will then be deposited into a ballot box at the vote center, maintaining the anonymity of the vote, and allowing us to audit the election results at a later date.

This process will allow the vote to be secure and voter-verifiable, and is structured to avoid the very secrecy and coercion concerns that you expressed. Now, if we could just get people to stop taking ballot selfies!

DANA DEBEAUVOIR,  
TRAVIS COUNTY CLERK, AUSTIN

### Food stamps work law will hurt people of color

Re: April 29 commentary, "Why work requirements for public assistance are harmful."

Food assistance for communities of color is especially important. The poverty rate for African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native populations was two to three times higher than the poverty rate for whites in 2016. That same year, SNAP – formerly food stamps – helped 13 million African-Americans and 10 million Hispanics put food on the table monthly.

The proposed House Agriculture Committee farm bill imposes stricter guidelines on "categorical eligibility," which many states use to decide who can access SNAP, penalizing families for earning more. It also imposes harsh work requirements on SNAP benefits for those looking for work, families with children and older Americans.)

This will hit communities of color the hardest; African-American, Hispanic and Native households are more likely to face long-term unemployment than white households. These policies reinforce racist stereotypes that have continually denied communi-

ties of color full participation in the American economy.

MARTHA ROGERS, AUSTIN

### Parents, not teachers, must parent their kids

Re: April 26 commentary, "Help pre-K kids manage feelings instead of suspending them."

A comment in the article "Reduce Pre-K suspensions" is definitely on point: Children with behavioral problems continually take the teacher's attention away from the other students.

It is not the responsibility of the teacher to be trained in child psychology and to know how to work with behavioral problems. Our teachers are already overworked and underpaid. The root of the problem with children who continually act out lies with the parents.

Schools should refer the parents of these children to professionals who can help parents learn how to effectively parent. Let teachers teach.

DIANNE HARBESON, AUSTIN

### Electric scooter boom getting out of control

I'm writing to express my concern regarding the recent influx of electric scooters in Austin, particularly on and around the University of Texas campus.

As an environmentally friendly transportation alternative, the electric scooter has many appeals, but also generates significant concerns about safety and feasibility.

I urge the California-based companies, LimeBike and Bird, as well as the city of Austin to consider the safety of users as well as the negative impact of scooters on the aesthetic of the city. Police officers must enforce the use of helmets and adherence to local traffic rules. The city must take action to regulate parking guidelines to ensure the scooters do not impede pedestrian or motor traffic. Additionally, the companies must create a system by which users are penalized for not observing these rules.

Given the explosive growth of electric scooters in Austin, action must be taken immediately.

CHRISTINA FONDREN, AUSTIN



A man walks past campaign signs outside a Travis County polling place in March. The county's new voting system will have a paper audit trail for residents to check ballots. JAY JANER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

### BE A PART OF THE DISCUSSION

The Austin American-Statesman encourages feedback from readers. Please include a full name, address and daytime and evening phone numbers. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, style and clarity. Edited letters address a single idea and do not exceed 150 words. Anonymous letters will not be published. Letters become property of the Austin American-Statesman.

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views@statesman.com

**PHONE**  
512-445-1776