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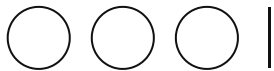
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San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg unveils agenda on police reforms, union contract



Joshua Fechter, Staff writer

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San Antonio Ron Nirenberg answers question following the San Antonio City Council meeting at the Municipal Plaza Building, on Thursday, June, 11, 2020.

Bob Owen, Staff-photographer / San Antonio Express-News

When a police officer commits an offense, San Antonio Police Chief William
McManus can't use prior misconduct to determine his or her punishment under the

current police contract.

Getting rid of that restriction could be a key part of a list of demands Mayor Ron Nirenberg is pushing City Council to put together for later this year, when the city and police union meet at the negotiating table ahead of the contract's expiration in 2021.

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Nailing down those demands is part of an agenda Nirenberg unveiled Thursday for tackling police reform in the wake of ongoing protests against the kind of police brutality seen with the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The mayor also charged a trio of council committees to tackle issues pertaining to police use of force, mental health and state laws dealing with public safety unions and officer discipline.

“Though the San Antonio Police Officers Association’s collective bargaining agreement is restrictive, the contract should not be an excuse for inaction,”

Nirenberg wrote in a memo sent to council members Thursday. “We must seek meaningful changes and provide for a foundation of material reform.”

Nirenberg didn’t list any specific changes he wants to the current contract – which he voted against in 2016, citing its price tag and disagreements with how it handled officer discipline.

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But the mayor is likely to draw on a list of priorities the city had when entering negotiations on the contract.

For one, the city wanted to get rid of a rule that said police supervisors can’t discipline an officer for alleged misconduct if they find out about the incident more than six months after the fact.

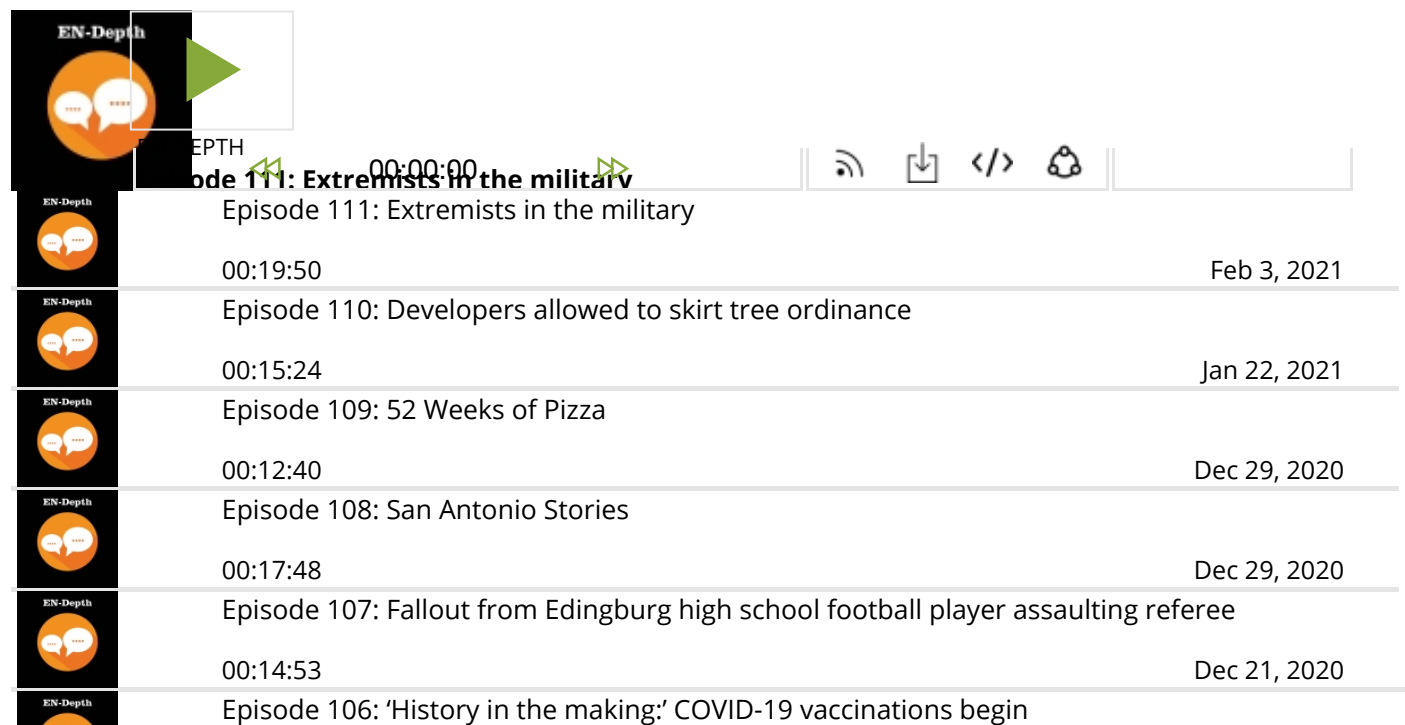
Another is taking into account an officer’s prior behavior. Police Chief William

McManus can't use that in deciding punishment for another offense. The city had wanted to take that out contract during the last round of negotiations to no avail.

Mike Helle, outgoing head of the union, was dismissive of Nirenberg's actions Thursday.

"He can have a wish list," Helle said. "It doesn't mean he's going to get what he wants."

Outside of the police union contract, Nirenberg asked the council's public safety committee to ensure SAPD adopts policies put forth by the "8 Can't Wait" initiative — started by Campaign Zero, a nonprofit aimed at police reform — intended to reduce police violence.



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- Episode 107: Fallout from Edingburg high school football player assaulting referee (00:14:53, Dec 21, 2020)
- Episode 106: 'History in the making:' COVID-19 vaccinations begin

McManus told council members Wednesday the department has adopted four of the policies — including a ban on chokeholds and a requirement that officers intervene if they see another officer engaged in potential excessive force — though he said he feels the department meets the "substance" of all eight policies.

But San Antonio police officers are still allowed to use chokeholds if the officer fears for his life or that of others.

Public safety will also review the city's community policing program, use-of-force policies and crowd dispersal tactics. McManus must now personally approve the use of projectiles like wooden and rubber bullets during a demonstration after police fired those projectiles on protesters at Alamo Plaza last week — a use McManus has said was justified.

Nirenberg also directed the community health and equity committee to review police practices aimed at promoting race and gender equity and de-escalation measures for those in mental health crises, Nirenberg said.

And he will have the council's intergovernmental relations panel put together a lobbying agenda with proposed changes to state and federal law pertaining to the powers of public safety unions, the transparency of officer personnel records and the qualified immunity for police officers, which basically makes it difficult to sue officers.

Joshua Fechter is a staff writer covering San Antonio government and politics. To read more from Joshua, become a subscriber. jfechter@express-news.net | Twitter: [@JFreports](https://twitter.com/JFreports)

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