

San Antonio Council Votes to Spend Biggest Share of Federal COVID-19 Funds on Workforce Training

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In a resounding win for **COPS/Metro Alliance**, San Antonio City Council voted Thursday to allocate \$75 million in its federal coronavirus recovery funds to workforce development.



COPS/Metro, one of the city's most powerful community organizing groups, vigorously lobbied the council to use the federal dollars to help workers who lost jobs during the pandemic to receive retraining. Under the plan, the city would partner with Workforce Solutions Alamo and **Project Quest**, allowing residents to access weekly stipends of \$450 and services such as childcare.

Council voted 10-1 to approve the plan, saying the training opportunities will allow the city to reshape its low-wage economy and residents to access work with better earnings, benefits and job security.

"It's time to stop changing out the Band-Aid," District 4 Councilwoman Adriana Rocha Garcia said of the job-retraining component. "This is about the wound."

However, other community groups — including some frequently allied with COPS/Metro — urged council to delay the vote, saying the city hadn't allowed enough time for community input on how to carve up the \$380 million in federal aid.

Activists argued that the \$50 million allocation for housing security wasn't enough to stave off a looming eviction crisis.

"This is about balancing the emergency and the long term, but you're rushing through this without ample community input," said Michelle Tremillo, executive director of Texas Organizing Project.

That concern weighed on District 1 Councilman Roberto Treviño, who asked staff to assure him

that the city could shift more funds into housing protection if needed.

"In a couple weeks, I think we're going to see a high rate of evictions, and it's concerning," he said.

The sole council member to vote against the plan, District 10 Councilman Clayton Perry, argued that federal funds — offered through the COVID-19 Community Recovery and Resiliency Plan — were intended as a short-term aid to small businesses not part of a long-term revamp of the city's economy.

"A lot of folks don't want to be retrained for a new job, they just want their old job back," he said.

Early in the meeting, activists from the Black Lives Matter movement filled the chamber, urging council to slash police funding. Nirenberg periodically struggled to maintain control of the meeting as audience members broke into chants of "Black lives matter" and occasionally shouted out grievances.

Speaker Jennifer Falcon called out council for approving the city's 2016 police union contract, which critics charge offers too much protection to cops who abuse the power of their position.

"You are complicit in the murder of black people," she said.

"There will be accountability for police and for all of you."