

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET January 28, 2022 | TTR not mapped yet | Kamran Anwar

Thompson Coburn announces historic settlement for sexual assault survivors with City of Austin, Austin Police Department

After a four-year legal fight, 15 sexual assault survivors who brought class actions against the Travis County District Attorney's Office and the Austin Police Department have reached a final settlement with the department and the City of Austin.

The case against the DA's Office was settled in June 2021 after District Attorney José Garza committed to comprehensive change in how sexual assault cases are managed and prosecuted in his office.

The City of Austin has now also agreed to sweeping changes in training, staffing, and policy to ensure that survivors of sexual assault receive trauma-informed services from law enforcement from their first contact to the conclusion of their case. The City also agreed to additional staffing and funding for detectives, victim services, technology, and administrative assistance to ensure cases and victims do not fall through the cracks.

The Austin Police Department has committed to public and private oversight, community involvement, survivor input at all phases of investigation, and better data collection.

The survivors first filed their lawsuit in Travis County in June 2018, alleging police and prosecutors in Austin and Travis County did not adequately investigate or prosecute the sexual assaults they reported.

The settlement reached with the City of Austin and approved by Austin's City Council today provides financial remuneration and apologies for the 15 survivor plaintiffs. Combined with the costs of the comprehensive changes to the police department's operations, the settlement includes a \$5 million commitment by the City to facilitate meaningful change.

"Today is a historic day for survivors of sexual assault," said [Jenny Ecklund](#), a partner with Thompson Coburn LLP who represented the survivors with fellow Thompson Coburn partner [Elizabeth Myers](#). "For the past three years, more than a dozen women have shared the most painful and vulnerable stories in a class-action lawsuit on behalf of sexual assault survivors in Austin. They hope that survivors who come after them will encounter law enforcement in a way that respects their experience and protects them, rather than re-traumatizing them.

The settlement represents a momentous agreement by the Austin Police Department to prioritize the emotional and physical experience of survivors by committing to ongoing trauma-informed training and policy changes. The plaintiff survivors are proud to be catalysts for change that will endure in Austin, and hopefully, extend to other communities as well."

Ms. Ecklund and Ms. Myers spearheaded the representation, with important assistance from Thompson Coburn attorneys [Mackenzie Wallace](#), [John Atkins](#), [Kamran Anwar](#), and too many other people to name.

About Thompson Coburn LLP

Thompson Coburn is a full-service law firm with 400 attorneys practicing in more than 50 areas of law, with offices in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Southern Illinois, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.

KVUE-ABC 8: [City of Austin settles lawsuit with sexual assault survivors](#)

KXAN-NBC: [City of Austin approves settlement with 15 sex assault survivors](#)

KEYE-CBS: [Austin City Council approves \\$875k lawsuit settlement with 15 sexual assault survivors](#)

KTBC-FOX: [City of Austin settles lawsuit with survivors of sexual assault](#)

Austin Monitor: [Austin spends nearly \\$1 million to settle lawsuits alleging it mishandled sexual assault cases](#)

Spectrum Local News: [City of Austin settles lawsuit with sexual assault survivors who claimed police mishandled cases](#)

Austin Chronicle: [Council Set to Approve Settlement for Sexual Assault Class Action Lawsuit](#)



From left: Mary Ruth Reyes, Angela Fielding, Heather Sin, Jenny Ecklund, Elizabeth Myers, Kelly McWilliams, Kristen Troken, Amanda Day



Elizabeth Myers and Jenny Ecklund



Mary Ruth Reyes, Heather Sin, Kristen Troken, Kelly McWilliams



Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza and Kristen Troken



Elizabeth opens a gift, a painting by our first client in the case, who used a pseudonym, "Amy Smith," in the lawsuit. She has since come forward under her real name: Mary Ruth Reyes.



Jacob Cottingham, former Chief Of Staff for Texas Rep. Donna Howard, and Elizabeth Myers





Mary Ruth Reyes and Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza



Amanda Day; Kristen Ylana, Executive Director of Women's Health Caucus; Jacob Cottingham; Kristen Troken

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Kamran Anwar