

Passed 15-6-2 2/25/2014

AR 27: In Support of Better Emergency Preparedness at The University of Texas at Austin

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WHEREAS, On January 28, 2014, the central Texas area experienced severe weather conditions¹ because of a winter storm and icy roads that caused over 300² vehicular accidents with some hospitalizations; and

WHEREAS, On January 28, 2014, Mopac Expressway experienced a twenty-car collision in the early hours of the workday³; and,

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WHEREAS, The students at The University of Texas at Austin reported being in car accidents and thus, incurring significant financial loss⁴; and,

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WHEREAS, The Austin Independent School District (AISD) announced the delay of district operations and the opening of schools on January 28, 2014, in a publicly issued notice at 7:59 P.M. (CST) on January 27, 2014, in order to account for the dangerous traveling conditions for students, faculty, and staff⁵; and,

WHEREAS, AISD announced the cancellation of all classes for the entire day of January 28, 2014, at 8:40 A.M. (CST) that same morning citing that conditions were too dangerous to risk the safety of students, faculty, and staff traveling to school⁶; and,

WHEREAS, While AISD was taking the responsible precaution of delaying operations due to extreme weather conditions in an effort to ensure the safety of its students, faculty, and staff; The University of Texas at Austin sent out notice stating, "The University [will be] open for normal operations," on January 28, 2014, at the same time⁷; and,

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WHEREAS, It was only at 8:14 A.M. (CST) the morning of January 28, 2014,⁸ that University officials sent out a second notice, after the first classes had already started⁹, warning that the conditions were dangerous for traveling to campus and delaying operations until noon in an effort to prevent the need of

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¹ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/01/28/weather-deep-south-ice-storm-snow-houston-louisiana/4957279/>

² KVUE News. (2014, January 28). More than 300 crashes reported in Central Texas. In KVUEabc. Retrieved January 31, 2014, from <http://www.kvue.com/news/local/EMS-reporting-crashes-in-Northwest-Austin-242369251.html>

³ KVUE News. (2014, January 28). More than 300 crashes reported in Central Texas. In KVUEabc. Retrieved January 31, 2014, from <http://www.kvue.com/news/local/EMS-reporting-crashes-in-Northwest-Austin-242369251.html>

⁴ Jessica Duarte (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

⁵ <https://twitter.com/AustinISD/status/427984245277982720>

⁶ Weldon, K. (2014, January 27). Update: Austin ISD cancels classes Jan. 28 in response to inclement weather. In Community Impact Newspaper. Retrieved January 31, 2014, from <http://impactnews.com/austin-metro/austin-isd-delays-classes-jan.-28-in-response-to-inclement-w/>

⁷ UT Alerts, utsafetvalert@austin.utexas.edu (email, 3:46 am, January 28, 2014)

⁸ UT Alerts, utsafetvalert@austin.utexas.edu (email, 8:14 am, January 28, 2014)

⁹ UT Alerts, utsafetvalert@austin.utexas.edu (email, 8:14 am, January 28, 2014)

students, faculty, and staff from traveling in dangerous conditions to get to campus; and,

WHEREAS, At 11:19 A.M. (CST) on January 28, 2014, after the third class period had already started, that University officials sent out a third notice warning that the conditions had become too dangerous for traveling to campus and closed university operations for the rest of the day¹⁰; and,

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WHEREAS, Numerous students reported injuries from slipping and falling on icy roads and/or sidewalks on the way to campus¹¹, and,

WHEREAS, Students living further off-campus were stuck in traffic due to numerous accidents and icy roads¹²; and,

WHEREAS, The University's *Emergency Preparedness Plan* states that, "The University of Texas at Austin will respond to emergency situations effectively and efficiently," and realizes, "rapid and timely communication of information to the university public during emergency situations is critical¹³," and,

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WHEREAS, University safety protocols have failed to timely address threats to the safety of students, faculty, and staff in the past; such as the September 17, 2012 bomb threat during which University administrators waited to alert campus to the potential threat to the point where many students only received the alert minutes before the bombs were threatened to detonate (if they received an alert before the threatened detonation at all)¹³; and, ¶

WHEREAS, After the shooting incident in 2010, "UT students [were] fuming about the Texas response time and information dissemination¹⁴," and, ¶

WHEREAS, The University's *Severe Weather Plan* requires, "all morning closures [must be] announced by 5 A.M.," and that, "closures after 2 P.M. be announced by 11 A.M.¹⁶," and,

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WHEREAS, The University's *Severe Weather Plan* states in the decision elements, "Has AISD closed?¹⁷," and,

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WHEREAS, On Saturday, February 8, 2014, The University of Texas at Austin alerted students via text message about a natural gas leak before any incidents had a chance to occur¹⁸; and,

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WHEREAS, The University of Texas at Austin notification policy states, "student's official e-mail address is the destination to which the University will send official e-mail communications;"¹⁹ and,

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WHEREAS, The official e-mail was sent out after other unofficial forms of communication, such as text messages, which were sent an hour later²⁰; therefore be it,

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RESOLVED, The University of Texas at Austin Student Government believes the University's emergency response to the severe weather on January 28, 2014, could have been made in a more timely manner, prioritizing the safety of students, faculty, staff and other affected members of the community to an acceptable degree as voiced by the wide-spread concern of students in light of the event; and be it

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¹⁰ UT Alerts, utsafetyalert@austin.utexas.edu (email, 11:19 am, January 28, 2014)

¹¹ Kristan Schiele (personal communication, January 30, 2014)

¹² Miranda Anderson Rivers (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

¹³ Emergency Management Plan. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Jan. 2014.

¹⁴ <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/plans/EmergencyManagementPlan2013a.pdf>.

¹⁶ UT Austin Severe & Inclement Weather Response Annex 2013

¹⁷ UT Austin Severe & Inclement Weather Response Annex 2013

¹⁸ UT Alerts, 411-911 text message, 1:12 pm, February 8, 2014

¹⁹ University Electronic Mail Student Notification Policy, February 9, 2014. <http://www.utexas.edu/cio/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy>

²⁰ UT Alerts, utsafetyalert@austin.utexas.edu (email, 2:23, February 8, 2014)

further,

RESOLVED, The University of Texas at Austin Student Government, on behalf of the student body whom it represents, calls on the University to better effectively promote and prioritize the safety of its students, faculty, and staff and update its emergency preparedness and response protocols accordingly; and be it further,

RESOLVED, That The University of Texas at Austin Student Government will support the University in its endeavor to update its *Emergency Preparedness Plan*, emergency response protocols, and begin the conversation to involve students in emergency preparedness; and be it further,

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RESOLVED, That The University of Texas at Austin Student Government will work with the University's emergency officials to help make emergency communications more effective and alerts to be distributed more timely; and be it further,

RESOLVED, That a copy of this legislation be sent to the President of the University, the office the Executive Vice President and Provost, the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, *The Daily Texan*, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, Campus Planning and Facility Management, *Executive Director of Division of Housing and Food Service*, Vice President of University Operations, Mr. Gerald R. Harkins, Associate Vice President for Campus Safety & Security, Director of Emergency Preparedness, Director of Parking and Transportation, and the Office of University Communications.

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