

TESTIMONY ON HB 470

BY **Judge Shepard**, Texas Public Policy Foundation
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Chairman King and distinguished committee members,

My name is Judge Shepard, and I am a policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I am submitting this as written testimony in favor of HB 470.

Public safety concerns are on the rise in Austin, prompting increased attention from Texans and their elected officials. In 2022, both the violent crime rate and the property crime rate in Austin were higher than the national average ([U.S. News & World Report, n.d.](#)). Further, Austin's homicide rate was "trending above the state and national average" as of July 2024 ([Velez, 2024](#)). "The last four years have definitely been the most murderers that we've ever had," the Austin Police Department reported ([Velez, 2024](#)). The challenges surrounding public safety have been compounded by Austin's management of its law enforcement resources. A key factor in this issue is the jurisdictional divide in the city. The area surrounding the Capitol, along with numerous other-owned buildings, does not fall solely under the City of Austin's authority. Instead, this region, known as the Capitol Complex, is under state jurisdiction.

Law enforcement and public safety within the Capitol Complex are managed by the Texas Department of Public Safety. The present boundaries of the Capitol Complex are to the north by Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard, to the east by Trinity Street, to the west by Lavaca Street, and to the south by 10th Street, and includes the William P. Clements building on West 15th Street ([Texas State Preservation Board, n.d.](#)). (See **Figure 1**).

HB 470 seeks to expand the current boundaries of the Capitol Complex. The new boundaries are as follows: the northern boundary at 10th Street, the eastern boundary at Brazos Street, the western boundary at Colorado Street, and the southern boundary at Lady Bird Lake. This proposed expansion would cover 0.12 square miles (see **Figure 1**). Similarly, the bill introduces measures for modern security management, such as the regulation of unmanned aircraft, and establishes an interlocal agreement with the City of Austin to delineate responsibilities, thus ensuring a seamless and effective approach to safeguarding this central governmental hub.

Furthermore, the interlocal cooperation agreement outlined in this bill helps foster collaboration between the Department of Public Safety and the City of Austin. This ensures that both entities can work together harmoniously to address any law enforcement challenges within the Capitol Complex. Lastly, the bill provides a clear mechanism for managing the financial aspects of these changes by establishing a fair and transparent process for allocating resources based on actual costs incurred. This financial accountability ensures that taxpayer money is used efficiently and effectively to protect our vital governmental hub.

Recently, Jackson, Mississippi, the capitol city of Mississippi, enacted their own creation of a capitol complex. Known as the Capitol Complex Improvement District (CCID; [2019](#)), this was created by Mississippi [House Bill 1226](#) in 2017. The CCID was initially created in order to provide regular funding for infrastructure projects surrounding the Mississippi Capitol, including numerous universities, state agencies, the Mississippi Supreme Court, the Governor's Mansion, a medical school, and several historic neighborhoods. However, the bill contained language authorizing the Mississippi Department of Finance & Administration (DFA) and/or the Mississippi Department of Public Safety (on behalf of the DFA) to "make arrests for any violation of any law of the State of Mississippi on those grounds of or within those properties" ([HB 1226, 2017, pp. 12-13](#)).

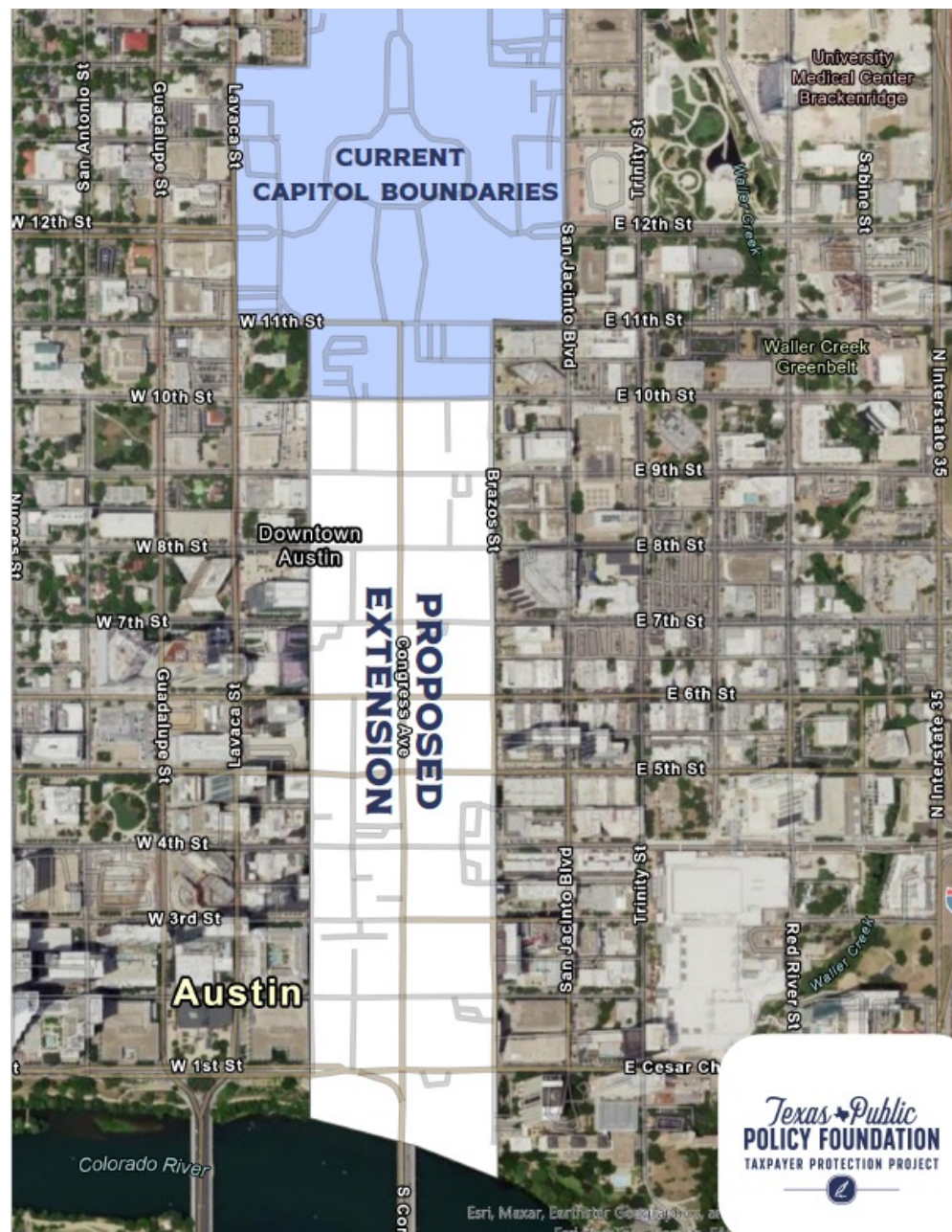
The CCID ([n.d.](#)) is much larger than the proposed Capitol Complex expansion, covering roughly 10 square miles. According to the Capitol Police, which is "a state-run unit of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, [the Police] will have primary jurisdiction as far north as Northside Drive and as far south as Raymond Road" ([Drape, 2024](#)). In 2023, the Mississippi Legislature again passed bills to increase the CCID area from 8 to 24 square miles ([Pittari, 2024](#)). In 2020, once the Capitol Police were moved under the umbrella of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety (DPS), the number of arrests by the Capitol Police increased from around three per year to 60 to 70 per year ([Pittari, 2024](#)). Mississippi allowing their Capitol Police (in conjunction with their DPS) to have primary jurisdiction over their Capitol Complex has eased the burden of public safety for the Jackson Police Department.

Commissioner Tindell of the Mississippi DPS stated, "some might look at it and say, 'Crime is up in the CCID,' but we look at it and say, 'We're actually doing a better job in catching criminals and charging them'" ([Pittari, 2024](#)). He added, "When you talk to the people out there you really feel the pulse of what the community is getting out of it and I think the community is loving what Capitol Police is doing" ([Pittari, 2024](#)). Similarly, with the Austin Police Department "still short of 340 officers," according to Chief Lisa Davis, allowing Texas DPS to have the lead jurisdiction in the 0.12 square mile expansion would help take pressure off an already under-staffed police department ([Shen, 2025](#)).

The 100 block of Congress Avenue all the way up to 10th Street is essentially the front porch of the Texas Capitol. Implementation of this bill will help to ensure that Texans can walk and play in the front yard safely. In conclusion, passing this bill will not only strengthen security and public safety measures but also demonstrate our dedication to protecting all who work in, visit, and pass through the Capitol Complex.

Figure 1

Map of the current and proposed expansion of the Capitol Complex



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