For more than 11 years, Cmdr. Tim Fuentes has worked at Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services, despite the agency’s shortcomings — and because of its great success. Working 24-hour shifts, as many paramedics do, takes a toll on the body. On a typical day, Fuentes said, a paramedic in Austin might respond to 35 calls and take just one hourlong nap. It wasn’t always that way. Since Fuentes started as a paramedic in 2008, the population of Austin has nearly doubled. EMS cases to supervise deployed to high-priority one respiratory Austin. Commanders are death priority one respiratory emergency medical services across the country have faced challenges, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. When you look at the health care system nationally and you ask, ‘Is this working?’ The answer is no,” Fuentes said. “A lot needs to change.”

Austin-Travis County EMS attempts to close service gaps as population outpaces staffing

Protests led UT to hire crisis consultant

University later cut back communications staff

Lily Kepner | Austin American-Statesman USA TODAY NETWORK

The University of Texas called a private strategic communications company the day after the April 29–Palestinian protests, held April 24 and 29 at UT in solidarity with protesters across the nation demanding universities divest from weapons manufacturers contributing to Israel’s bombardment of Gaza amid that country’s war with Hamas, resulted in mass media coverage often highlighting and sometimes questioning UT’s significant police response, which at one point involved officers deploying pepper spray and flash bang grenades. In total, 136 people were arrested, though most charges were later dropped. UT has recently aligned with or even exceeded high-pressure expectations from conservative lawmakers on how universities should squelch anti-Israel expression that they deem anti-semitic as well as end diversity, equity and related reputational matters,” according to documents obtained by the American-Statesman.

On May 4, UT President Jay Hartzell signed an agreement with FGS Global LLC at an initial $75,000 cost to have a team engage in “strategic communications work” at the university, including being available to join daily communications calls, forming a crisis working group and refocusing social media strategies. The agreement runs through at least December, according to the document, obtained through an open records request.

“We hired them to assist with communication following the protests in April,” UT spokesperson Mike Bolen told the Statesman in a statement. On June 3, about a month after the agreement was signed, 20 staff members in UT’s University Marketing and Communications — including seven people in university communications, eight in marketing and two in top leadership roles — lost their jobs due to ‘changing priorities for the University.” Sixteen of the 20 positions were completely eliminated. UT did not answer Statesman questions about why UT selected this firm or if the firm’s work is connected to the marketing and communications layoff, Bolen reported that the university said the layoffs were due to ‘managing reputational issues and crises.’

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