



City of Austin

Recommendation for Action

File #: 25-0763, **Agenda Item #:** 31.

5/8/2025

Posting Language

Approve the appointment of Desmar Walkes, M.D. as the Health Authority, and designation of Ming Tang, M.D. as the Alternate Health Authority, for Austin/Travis County. Funding: This item has no fiscal impact.

Lead Department

Austin Public Health.

Fiscal Note

This item has no fiscal impact.

Prior Council Action:

June 1, 2023 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Desmar Walkes as the Health Authority with two alternate Health Authorities.

May 20, 2021 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Desmar Walkes as the Health Authority and designation of Ming Tang, M.D. and Sharon Melville, M.D. as the alternate Health Authorities for Austin/Travis County.

March 25, 2021 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Mark Escott as the Interim Health Authority with three alternate Health Authorities.

September 17, 2020 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Mark Escott as the Interim Health Authority with three alternate Health Authorities.

March 12, 2020 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Mark Escott as the Interim Health Authority with one alternate Health Authority.

October 3, 2019 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Mark Escott as the Interim Health Authority with one alternate Health Authority.

February 2, 2019 - Council approved the appointment of Dr. Mary Ann Rodriguez as the Interim Health Authority with two alternate Health Authorities.

December 7, 2017- Council approved the appointment of Dr. Philip Huang as the Health Authority with two alternate Health Authorities.

For More Information:

Adrienne Sturup, Director, 512-972-5167; Christian Riley, Assistant Director; Juanita Jackson, Business Process Consultant, 512-972-6163.

Additional Backup Information:

This item requests Council's approval for the re-appointment of Dr. Desmar Walkes as Health Authority for Austin/Travis County. Dr. Walkes has designated Dr. Ming Tang as Alternate Health Authority.

Dr. Walkes has thirty-six years of experience in health care. She graduated from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1986 and completed her post graduate training at Baylor College of Medicine. Dr. Walkes served as the Local Health Authority for Austin-Travis County since 2021 after 14 years in the role for Bastrop County. Dr Walkes provided medical leadership for the county's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MPOX response, and the ongoing Measles response. This included leadership for the emergency response, guidance to Travis County residents, and guidance to local policy makers, schools, long term care facilities, and business. Dr. Walkes serves as a Co-Co-Principal Investigator for the CDC Center for Forecasting Analytics pandemic response team and has contributed to improve the public health emergency response locally and nationally, recently developing a measles calculator for schools to forecast the number of cases that may develop in schools based upon the vaccination coverage.

Dr. Walkes has spearheaded the opioid response activities in Travis County resulting in increased distribution of lifesaving naloxone, and increased awareness of substance use disorder mitigation strategies among medical providers and the public. Dr. Walkes is committed to children and youth in our community and has worked to elevate the mental health needs of children in the face of recovery from a once in a lifetime pandemic, and a changing climate working closely with community partners to craft the Children's Mental Health five year strategic plan for Travis County. She has served as Chair of the Travis County Medical Society's Public Health Committee and provides regular situational updates to the membership of the society, hosting webinars to raise awareness of public health issues such as Measles, HIV, Syphilis and food insecurity.

Dr. Walkes is founder of A+ Lifestyle Medical Group, Lincoln Clinic, Bastrop Sleep Lab and has served as medical director of Smithville Community Clinic and past chief of staff of Smithville Regional Hospital. As Medical Missionary for Shepherd of the Hills Christian Church, Dr Walkes has participated in worldwide medical mission trips to Central and South America, Asia, and Africa.

Dr. Walkes meets all the requirements of Chapter 121 of the Texas Health and Safety code to be designated as a Health Authority.

Under state law (Section 121.029 of the Texas Health and Safety Code), the Health Authority may delegate any power or duty imposed on the health authority to a properly qualified physician to act while the health authority is absent or incapacitated. The physician designated by the health authority must:

- Meet license and residence requirements.
- Be appointed as a designee in the same manner as the Health Authority; and
- File the Oath of Office, executed by a duly appointed Notary Public, with the Texas Department of State Health Services.

The delegation is effective during the term of the Health Authority making the delegation. The Health Authority is responsible for the acts of the physician to whom the powers have been delegated, and the entity that appoints the Health Authority must have procedures in place to prevent duplication of authority and provide notice to the Director of Austin Public Health (APH) when authority is transferred. APH has had a "Delegation of Back-Up Health Authority" in effect since July 1, 2000.