

Community Notice: Austin Hospitals Flagged for Price Transparency Violations

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Four Austin area hospitals were recently found **non compliant with federal price transparency rules**, according to a July 2026 review of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) enforcement data. These rules require hospitals to publicly post clear, accessible pricing for common procedures so patients can compare costs and make informed decisions about their care.

The facilities identified include:

- **Austin Oaks Hospital**
- **Dell Children’s Medical Center North Campus**
- **Northwest Hills Surgical Hospital**
- **Texas NeuroRehab Center**

CMS flagged these hospitals for failing to meet one or more federal requirements, such as providing a complete machine readable price file, offering an online price estimator tool, or ensuring posted prices are accurate and accessible. Non compliance can result in corrective action plans and financial penalties.

For Austin residents, this matters. Transparent pricing helps families anticipate medical costs, avoid surprise bills, and compare options across the city’s healthcare system. When hospitals fall short, it limits the community’s ability to make informed choices about care.

Community members who want to review hospital compliance status or compare procedure costs can visit the CMS Hospital Price Transparency website, which updates listings as facilities come into compliance.

Foster Grandparent Program Recruits Volunteers to Mentor Children

Texas Health and Human Services Commission



(AUSTIN, TX) —The Foster Grandparent Program is recruiting volunteers to mentor children while earning extra income.

As part of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, the Foster Grandparent Program provides an opportunity for people 55 and older with limited incomes to mentor children who have exceptional needs or are in circumstances that limit their academic, social or emotional development.

Unlike traditional foster parents, children don’t live with their foster grandparents. The program volunteers serve 15 to 40 hours a week and receive a monthly tax-free stipend.

“Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the Foster Grandparent Program,” HHS Executive Commissioner Stephanie Muth said. “Helping children work toward their potential and achieve better outcomes gives our volunteers a real sense of purpose during this chapter in their lives.”

Volunteers share their time and talents with the children they mentor, building personal relationships through trust and support. Both groups benefit from the social interaction.

George Lewis has volunteered with the program at the Lubbock State Supported Living Center for 14 years. The World War I veteran recently celebrated his 100th birthday. As the father of 11 children and a former pastor, he enjoys mentoring children and serving his community.

“I like getting out of the house and being able to interact with others,” Lewis said. “Everyone lets me know how much they enjoy having me here. It really makes my day.”

From July 2025 to June 2026, foster grandparents served 16,772 children and logged 347,581 volunteer hours.

Learn more on the **Foster Grandparent Volunteer Program webpage**, and see photos of volunteer foster grandparents. Visit hhs.texas.gov or dial 2-1-1 for more information about HHS programs and services.

Givens Park Pool Closure Sparks Outcry During Record Heat

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - As Austin endures one of the hottest summers on record, the closure of **Givens Park Pool** has ignited outrage among East Austin residents who say the city’s maintenance delays are endangering lives and deepening inequities in public access to cooling spaces.

The pool, a cornerstone of East Austin’s Black community since the 1950s, was abruptly closed in late June after city staff cited “mechanical failure and filtration issues.” The timing could not be worse: temperatures have hovered above **105°F for more than two weeks**, with the National Weather Service issuing repeated **excessive heat warnings**.

For residents who rely on Givens as one of the few free, walkable cooling sites east of I 35, the closure feels like neglect. “We’re told to stay safe in the heat, but the city shut down the one place we can cool off,” said *Angela Brooks*, a longtime East Austin resident and grandmother of three. “If this were Zilker or Barton Springs, it would’ve been fixed overnight.”

A Legacy of Unequal Investment

Givens Park Pool opened in 1958, named for Dr. George Washington Carver Givens, one of Austin’s first Black physicians. For decades, it served as a gathering place for East Austin families excluded from other city pools during segregation.

But residents say the facility has suffered from chronic underfunding ever since. City records show that Givens has received **less than one third the capital investment** of pools west of I 35 over the past decade. While Barton Springs and Deep Eddy have undergone multimillion dollar renovations, Givens has faced recurring closures for pump failures, leaks, and outdated filtration systems.

The latest shutdown follows a **\$1.4 million renovation completed in 2021**, which city officials said would “extend the pool’s lifespan.” Now, just five years later, the filtration system has failed again — and repairs are not expected until late August.

Community Response and City’s Explanation

At last week’s Parks and Recreation Board meeting, residents packed the chambers demanding answers. City staff explained that the pool’s filtration system “experienced catastrophic failure” and that replacement parts were delayed due to supply chain issues.

But activists and neighborhood leaders say the explanation rings hollow. “We’ve heard this story before,” said *Marcus Reed*, director of *EastSide*

Community Alliance. “Every summer, East Austin gets excuses while West Austin gets solutions.” The city has opened temporary cooling centers at recreation facilities and libraries, but residents argue those spaces are no substitute for a pool. “You can’t send kids to a library to escape 107 degree heat,” said *Brooks*. “They need water.”

Health and Safety Concerns

Public health experts warn that the closure could have serious consequences. East Austin neighborhoods already experience **higher rates of heat related illness and lower tree canopy coverage** than wealthier areas. With limited access to air conditioning and few shaded parks, pools like Givens serve as critical public health infrastructure. Dr. *Elena Torres*, an environmental health researcher at UT Austin, said the closure underscores how “climate inequity intersects with infrastructure neglect.” “When cooling resources fail in historically marginalized neighborhoods, the health impacts are immediate — dehydration, heat exhaustion, and even heat stroke,” she said.

City Promises Repairs — Residents Demand Accountability

City officials say repairs are underway and that Givens will reopen “as soon as safely possible.” But residents are skeptical. “We’ve been hearing ‘soon’ for years,” said *Reed*. “We want timelines, not talking points.”

Advocates are calling for a **dedicated East Austin Parks Equity Fund** to ensure consistent maintenance and emergency response for facilities east of I 35. They also want transparency in how repair priorities are set.

Council Member *Natasha Harper Madison*, whose district includes Givens Park, has requested a formal audit of pool maintenance spending across the city. “We can’t keep asking East Austin families to wait while they’re baking in triple digit heat,” she said.

A Symbol of More Than Recreation

For many, Givens Park Pool represents more than a place to swim — it’s a symbol of community resilience. “Our grandparents fought for this pool,” said *Brooks*. “It’s where we learned to swim, where we celebrated Juneteenth, where we built community. Closing it during record heat isn’t just poor planning — it’s a betrayal.”

As the heat wave continues, residents say they’ll keep pressing for answers — and for a city that treats East Austin’s public spaces as essential, not expendable.

Fake Money Circulating in Round Rock — Banks and Police Warn Residents

By Villager staff

(ROUND ROCK) - Round Rock police and local banks are warning residents and small businesses to be on high alert after a recent spike in ****counterfeit bills** — specifically “prop money” used for movies — circulating through retail shops, restaurants, and neighborhood markets across the city. The bills, which often look convincing at a glance, have already cost several small businesses hundreds of dollars in losses.

The problem surfaced in late June when multiple Round Rock businesses reported receiving **\$20 and \$100 bills** marked with faint disclaimers such as “*For Motion Picture Use Only*” or “*Copy Money*.” In several cases, the markings were partially obscured or folded, making them difficult to spot during busy transactions.

“This isn’t a one off incident anymore,” said *Officer Daniel Ruiz* of the Round Rock Police Department’s financial crimes unit. “We’re seeing a pattern — and we want residents and business owners to slow down and check their cash.”

Small Businesses Hit Hardest

The counterfeit bills have disproportionately affected small, family run businesses that rely on fast, high volume cash transactions. A convenience store off Gattis School Road reported losing nearly **\$300 in a single weekend**, while a food truck near Old Settlers Park unknowingly accepted multiple fake \$100 bills during a crowded evening event.

“We don’t have the margins to absorb this,” said *Priya Patel*, owner of a small grocery on Sunrise Road. “Every dollar matters. When someone hands you fake money, you’re the one who pays for it.”

Patel said she discovered the bills only after her bank flagged them during a deposit. “It’s embarrassing, but more than that, it’s scary,” she said. “You start wondering who you can trust.”

Banks Sound the Alarm

Local banks, including **A+ Federal Credit Union** and **RBFCU**, have issued public advisories urging customers to inspect cash more carefully. Bank managers say they’ve seen a noticeable uptick in prop money deposits — a sign that the bills are circulating widely, not just in isolated pockets.

“These bills are designed to look real enough to pass in a quick exchange,” said *Melissa Grant*, a branch manager at A+. “But once they hit the bank, they’re immediately rejected — and the customer is out the money.”

Banks are encouraging businesses to invest in **low cost counterfeit detectors**, many of which cost under \$20 and can identify fake bills through UV markings or magnetic ink tests.



Why Prop Money Is Showing Up Now

Police say the surge may be tied to online marketplaces where prop money is sold cheaply and shipped in bulk. Some versions are clearly labeled as fake, but others mimic real currency closely enough to fool an untrained eye.

Round Rock PD is investigating whether the bills are being passed intentionally or whether teens and young adults are using them without understanding the legal consequences. “Regardless of intent, passing fake money is a crime,” Officer Ruiz said. “We’re treating every case seriously.”

How Residents Can Protect Themselves

Authorities recommend several steps:

- **Check for texture:** Real currency has a distinct feel due to its cotton linen blend.
- **Look for color shifting ink:** On real bills, the numeral in the lower right corner changes color when tilted.
- **Inspect for watermarks:** Hold the bill up to the light to check for embedded portraits.
- **Watch for wording:** Prop money often includes phrases like “*Motion Picture Use Only*” or “*Replica*.”

Police also encourage residents to report any suspicious bills immediately. “Even one report helps us track patterns,” Ruiz said.

A Community on Alert

Round Rock’s rapid growth — and its busy retail corridors — make it a prime target for low level financial scams. But residents say the counterfeit surge feels like a violation of trust in a city known for its tight knit business community.

“We’re all trying to make an honest living,” Patel said. “When someone hands you fake money, it’s not just theft — it’s disrespect.”

Police expect the issue to continue through the summer and are planning public workshops with local banks to help residents spot counterfeit bills before they spread further.

For now, Round Rock’s message is simple: **slow down, check your cash, and report anything suspicious**.