

Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities
QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES
April 22nd & 23rd 2025
Tuesday 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
North Austin Complex Building
4601 W. Guadalupe St.
Austin, TX 78751

Call to Order/ Roll Call and Introductions Ellen Bauman, Chair called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m.

Approval of Committee Member Absences as Submitted Benjamin Willis was absent Day 1 and Day 2. Kristie Orr was absent Day 1 only. Absences were unanimously approved. Committee member Chelsea Elliott was absent without an approved excuse.

Approval of Summary Minutes for January 2025 A motion to approve the January Meeting Minutes was made by Mr. Blanchard, seconded by Ms. Rudkin. Unanimously approved.

Election of GCPD Vice Chair

Ellen Bauman, Chair, conducted the election. Neva Fairchild and Kori Allen were the two nominees. Ballots were submitted and the initial vote ended in a tie. Chair Bauman cast the tie-breaking vote and Kori Allen was elected Vice Chair.

Listening to the Austin Disability Community

Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities (Austin)

Conor Kelly, Chair, presented his committee's best practices recommendations on mitigating the negative impact of micro-mobility devices, primarily scooters, on individuals with disabilities, particularly those with mobility and vision impairments. Scooters block sidewalks, creating tripping hazards and forcing pedestrians with disabilities into unsafe paths, such as streets or bike lanes.

Efforts that have failed to reduce hazards in Austin include issuing fines for improper parking due to lack of funding in the Austin Police Department, and self-regulation by micromobility providers. Data is controlled by providers and ridership prioritized over compliance unless incentivized.

In Austin, actions that have helped mitigate hazards include limits on the number of scooter providers permitted in the City. One company, Lime, has been cooperative with The Mayor's Committee by sharing data, messaging campaigns, and removal of obstructive scooters within two hours of reporting. The scooter company, Bird, has been non-responsive.

The Mayor's Committee emphasized promoting dialogue between residents, providers, and city departments to address micro-mobility concerns. Successful outcomes include providers receiving warnings or suspensions due to community reporting. The preferred strategy is "Engagement Over Enforcement," which involves collaboration with providers, public education, budgeting for signage, exploring incentives for proper parking, and investing in infrastructure and personnel. The GCPD may host a statewide

webinar to share effective practices. Mr. Kelley concluded by encouraging ongoing collaboration.

Austin Civil Rights Office Fair Housing Act Issues and Best Practices – Enrique Serrano, Equal Employment Fair Housing Manager-City of Austin office of Equity and Inclusion

Mr. Serrano highlighted fair housing issues, enforcement practices, and local protections offered by the City of Austin's Civil Rights Office. The presentation coincided with Fair Housing Month and aimed to educate stakeholders on rights, responsibilities, and ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable access to housing.

Fair housing ensures equal access to housing opportunities regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, or disability. The City of Austin covers additional protections such as student status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status. The Civil Rights Office handles complaints within Austin city limits; outside jurisdictions fall under the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

Austin Resource Center for Independent Living (ARCIL) – Del "Don" Martinez, Deputy Director

Mr. Martinez provided an overview of ARCIL: it was founded in 1979 and is a consumer-driven, community-based nonprofit led and operated by individuals with disabilities. ARCIL's mission is to Promote independence, informed choice, and community integration for people with disabilities.

The core services are tailored to individual needs and capabilities.

Personal empowerment is developed through self-determination: consumers make their own choices with ARCIL's support. Their programs focus on daily living skills, advocacy, employment support, and community transition.

Program areas are Independent Living Services (ILS), Home by Choice (HBC), and Work Incentive Planning and Assistance, assistive technology & equipment (includes hearing aids, vision services, home/vehicle modifications), advocacy & support (help with benefits applications, social services and healthcare navigation), community engagement & accessibility.

Mr. Martinez shared an example of how their services helped a homeless family secure housing, employment, and school enrollment for their children, showing ARCIL's holistic approach to independent living.

Public Comment

Mr. Bland, a recurring attendee at GCPD meetings, shared his ongoing struggles with being denied accommodations, medical care, employment, and essential services due to his disability and dyslexia. He described agencies' failure to provide reasonable supports, such as verbal communication or help with forms, and detailed the severe emotional, financial, and physical toll this has taken. He requested direct intervention with USAA, which he claims has withheld his funds for seven years without providing necessary accommodations. Ms. Rudkin offered to follow up directly with USAA as a starting point. She also suggested using the Multi-Assistance Center or Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio as resources for Mr. Bland. His advocate, Dr. George Patron, stated those programs do not work. He emphasized systemic failures in supporting individuals with communication-related disabilities like Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, calling for greater

accountability and staff training. He likened the lack of support to denying mobility access. The committee acknowledged the broader need for consistent, accessible accommodations across agencies, better interagency coordination, and person-centered services. They discussed gaps in eligibility and transition services, and supported Dr. Patron's proposal for a trained disability navigator role to help individuals manage appointments, documentation, and communication barriers.

Ms. Gooch shared her experience in securing accommodations for her college application at Concordia University in Austin. She was instructed to have costly mandatory neuropsychological testing despite already having valid IEP/ARD documents from high school. She advocated for HB 5608 to allow students to use existing high school documentation for accommodations at colleges. Ms. Gooch expressed concern for future students facing similar barriers and encouraged the committee to support the bill. Three issues were identified: Clarification: Transition documentation (IEP/evaluations) *should* be sufficient for disability services in college, yet policies vary between private and public institutions.

Systemic Gap: Students and families often face confusion, delays, or denials despite legal protections under Section 504.

Dual Credit Gap: Dual credit courses currently are *not* required to provide special education accommodations.

Recommendations included urging a hearing for HB 5608, exploring potential policy proposals for future legislative sessions if the bill doesn't advance and strengthening interagency collaboration and data sharing for smoother transitions.

Mr. Smither, a Houston advocate and founder of the Frederick Liberty Alliance, spoke passionately about his dual identity as a person living with a disability and a descendant of American Freedmen. Drawing from personal experience, he emphasized how individuals from both communities often face systemic neglect and policy oversight — realities that fuel his commitment to advocacy and community development.

Mr. Smither asked for support on two key initiatives: the **Freedmen Status Bill**, which seeks historical recognition and the creation of an Office of Freedmen Affairs to connect descendants—many with disabilities—to essential resources; and the **Empowerment Academy**, a Houston-based program offering entrepreneurial training and wellness support to low-income individuals with disabilities. Framing his work as "empowerment, not entitlement," Mr. Smither called for collaboration to sustain and expand these efforts, expressing his willingness to work with anyone committed to uplifting underserved communities.

Reports from Invited Ex Officio Agency Representatives

a. Department of Family and Protective Services – Brock Boudreau

Mr. Boudreau provided an update on efforts within Texas' Adult Protective Services (APS) and Child Protective Services (CPS) to support individuals with disabilities and older adults. APS continues piloting specialized units for individuals 65+ and people with disabilities. CPS is collaborating with contractors through the Single Source Continuum to ensure youth with developmental disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, are identified and connected to services. Identification relies on cross-referencing Medicaid claims and caseworker data, although there are known gaps due to underdiagnosis and limitations in Medicaid provider access.

Mr. Boudreau noted ongoing work with developmental disability specialists to assist with waivers for IDD services and emphasized improvements in internal processes to ensure accurate and timely documentation.

Mr. Boudreau updated the committee on the status of the FTE staff position focused on deaf and hard of hearing services. The posting of this position has stalled due to Human Resource classification audits.

The discussion shifted to growing concerns over guardianship abuse, especially financial exploitation and family separation. Boudreau agreed to follow up with Adult Protective Services and help find a Subject Matter Expert (SME), for a subcommittee on the issue. The committee also raised issues with how deaf youth are misclassified and overlooked in adoption databases, stressing the need for better data and provider access.

Additionally, gaps in Medicaid waiver programs were discussed, particularly the lack of compensation for caregivers of deafblind individuals with intellectual disabilities. Mr. Boudreau committed to reviewing related state laws and policies. The discussion underscored the need for interagency collaboration, better data integration, and policy changes to ensure equitable care and protections for Texans with disabilities.

b. Marsha Godeaux from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) outlined the agency's role in overseeing 38 licensing programs focused on public health and safety, with an emphasis on accessibility through the Elimination of Architectural Barriers program. She noted TDLR's legislative monitoring, particularly bills related to accessibility standards, such as adult changing tables, beach and RV access, and Senate Bill 2669, which could expand podiatric care. TDLR is also engaged in outreach and plans to update the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS) this year. Discussion addressed how federal and national standards like the ADA and ANSI A117.1 influence local codes, revealing challenges in achieving consistent accessible design across jurisdictions and the need for clearer national guidelines, particularly for adult changing tables and sensory-friendly spaces.

c. Texas Education Agency – Elyse Lieberman

Dr. Lieberman shared several key updates from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), highlighting expanded support for students with visual impairments through the statewide purchase of 338 braille-integrated devices with tactile graphics. These, along with braille books for younger students, will be distributed via regional service centers, supported by teacher training and improved resource inventory management. Efforts are underway to make braille STAAR test materials more accessible and affordable. TEA is considering allowing districts to emboss digital braille-ready files locally to avoid costly shipping, and may revise current policies, including evaluating the use of the federal "Free Matter for the Blind" exemption.

TEA is also implementing changes to special education eligibility by phasing out the "non-categorical early childhood" category in favor of "developmental delay" by the 2025–26 school year. Certification reforms are in progress to make it easier and more affordable for educators to obtain both general and special education endorsements, including new bilingual special education standards.

Serious concerns were raised regarding outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students. Data shows that 74% of deaf and deafblind children ages 0–8, are not meeting language

acquisition benchmarks. The committee called for stronger early intervention, better staffing, and more consistent ASL instruction across the state, while also criticizing outdated educational models and inadequate on-campus support.

Staffing shortages continue to challenge special education services, particularly for deaf students. The committee noted increasing retirements, low interpreter pay, and recruitment difficulties, urging TEA to reflect these systemic issues in its next Legislative Appropriations Request.

Lastly, concerns were voiced about IEP transition software defaulting to guardianship as the only post-18 option, potentially leading to uninformed and irreversible decisions by parents. While TEA stated the software is compliant, they acknowledged issues in local implementation and training and committed to involving the vendor, Frontline, in the next meeting to address these gaps.

d. Texas Workforce Commission – Claudia Peden

Ms. Peden highlighted updates on various disability-related programs and services across Texas, focusing on accessibility, participation, service expansion, and systemic challenges. Ms. Fairchild raised concerns about barriers faced by people with disabilities, especially those with sensory loss and those aging into disability. Key points highlighted were concerns over low participation of people with blindness and low vision in employment programs and the surging need to better serve Texas's growing population of seniors experiencing vision loss. Efforts to improve vocational rehabilitation access were clarified, emphasizing that clients can return for ongoing support despite changes in their employment or disability status. Transportation challenges, especially in less urban areas, remain a significant barrier to employment. TWC is piloting efforts to streamline referrals between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and workforce boards, while also testing a new training module for counselors serving the deaf and hard of hearing in Region 5, with plans for statewide rollout by the end of FY 2025. Increased contact requests through the Start My VR portal and OIB helpline reflect growing demand for services, prompting continued efforts to enhance public engagement and system coordination.

TWC is also actively monitoring legislative developments that could impact VR and OIB programs, with updates to follow in future meetings. Key discussions included concerns about service gaps for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Neva highlighted particularly low participation rates in the Supported Employment Pilot and Summer Earn and Learn programs, with a lack of clear data prompting a follow-up commitment from Ms. Peden. There was strong emphasis on the urgent need to expand the OIB program's reach, as current services support only 2,500 individuals compared to an estimated need of over 300,000 among Texas's aging population with vision loss.

e. Health and Human Services Commission – Clair Benitez

Ms. Benitez provided updates on the Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP) showcased improved processing efficiency and growing demand for assistive devices, alongside outreach efforts to boost public awareness through state resources. The Promoting Independence Plan continues to prioritize outreach to those with vision loss and emergency coordination among agencies.

HHSC established a State Emergency Operations Center (SOC) to ensure coordination among state agencies during natural disasters. Web resources like Navigate Life Texas continue to support families with children with disabilities. She shared a success story about how transportation support helped a woman pursuing higher education through ILS. The Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services Program (CRS) has eliminated their

waiting period, resulting in processing applications and assigning a social worker within 30 days. Ms. Benitez provided an update on the Prader Willi Syndrome and the dedicated waiver supports inquiry from the previous quarterly meeting. The center for Medicaid and Medicare does not allow states to establish a separate service package for specific subgroups within a single waiver. All people must meet eligibility requirements for waivers to access to all services. People with Prader Willi Syndrome may qualify for the Community Living and Assistance and Support Services (CLASS) waiver

Questions arose regarding proposed rule changes for Independent Living Services that may inadvertently exclude unhoused individuals, and the implementation of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) raised concerns about mandated time-tracking increments. Additional issues included Medicaid coverage gaps for adopted youth aging out of eligibility, oversight and investigations into managed care organizations, and delays in disability determinations partly tied to federal processes. Ms. Benitez addressed inquiries regarding Medicaid policy for individuals adopted at age 18. She will seek clarification and indicated awareness of potential policy changes to ensure continuous coverage for these youth. It was emphasized that coverage gaps must be avoided, as not all adopted youth have ongoing support. Ms. Benitez confirmed that MCOs contract directly with HHSC. Due to ongoing investigations and procurement processes, detailed discussion on MCO oversight was tabled for a future meeting.

Positive feedback was shared by Emma Faye regarding the recent STAP program webinar. Participants reported improvements in client outcomes, and appreciation was extended to the program team for their work.

f. State Independent Living Council (SILC) Update

Ms. Sharkis, SILC Director, provided an overview of the council's role in collaborating with Centers for Independent Living and related organizations to develop and review Texas's State Plan for Independent Living. The council is currently evaluating the plan considering emerging federal and state legislative changes affecting people with disabilities. Ms. Sharkis highlighted concerns over a recent leaked memo outlining proposed funding cuts affecting long-term care programs, disability rights organizations, university centers, and other critical services. She stressed the potential negative impact on individuals with disabilities and underscored the importance of advocacy and legislative engagement, especially during congressional recesses. Ms. Sharkis highlighted DOJ-funded research addressing sexual assault among people with disabilities, emphasizing the heightened risk this population faces and the need for disability-informed crisis services. She noted funding uncertainties.

The SILC supports emergency services planning; advocating for more inclusive disaster responses that accommodates specific needs of people with disabilities. Mr. Lucey asked about accountability of centers for independent living in adhering to the State Plan, which is legislatively mandated and linked to funding. Ms. Sharkis explained that while centers are responsible for implementing the plan, limited resources and legislative changes have complicated enforcement and execution.

She acknowledged that the plan is currently too complex and not sufficiently action oriented. A revision process is underway to streamline the plan into clear priorities with measurable outcomes.

Electric Vehicle Chargers and Accessible Parking – Marsha Godeaux, Texas Dept of Licensing and Regulation

Ms. Godeaux provided an in-depth overview of new accessibility standards proposed by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) for electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. The key message was that EV charging stations, though often located in parking areas, are not considered parking—they are classified as motor fuel dispensers. This distinction is central to understanding how accessibility requirements will apply differently compared to traditional parking spaces. Ms. Godeaux outlined proposed Texas regulations to improve accessibility at EV charging stations. The proposal mandates that all chargers meet communication and usability standards, while only a portion of charging spaces must be physically accessible, based on charger type and quantity. Accessible spaces will be located near charger clusters, not necessarily building entrances, and exceptions apply for fleet and delivery stations. Technical specs include reach, operability, and cable limits. The goal is to ensure inclusive, well-planned EV infrastructure across Texas. The discussion emphasized the need for careful planning and installation by EV charger manufacturers and developers to meet accessibility expectations and avoid physical or usability barriers.

ASL Interpreter Subcommittee Report and Recommendations – Matt Dickens & Alaina Webb reported the results of the subcommittee meetings. Recommended policy proposals are presented in three topic areas:

Educational Interpreters

1. Recommend TEA and BEI explore options to expand the pool of qualified, certified educational interpreters in Texas. This could be achieved administratively by TEA and BEI researching NAIE and Language Access Teams to develop rules for use in the classroom. Set a deadline to assist for implementation. A motion was made by Ms. Rudkin to adopt this policy recommendation, seconded by Mr. Lopez. No opposition, motion passed.
2. Require TEA to define Communication Facilitator responsibilities and how they are different from Certified Interpreters. In response to the interpreter shortage, schools have been employing “communication facilitators” inappropriately to fill the gap. Qualifications need to be clearly defined. This can be resolved by the rulemaking process of State Board of Education (SBOE) and TEA. Ms. Rudkin motioned to adopt this proposal, seconded by Ms. Allen. Motion passed.
3. Require schools to inform parents about student rights and when they use communication facilitators or non-certified interpreters during every IFSP, IEP, and 504 meeting. Parents do not always know the rights of their children to have a certified educational interpreter. And require TEA to partner with the Texas School for the Deaf Statewide Outreach Center to create a guideline document for schools to share with parents in ASL, and other languages as needed. This could be implemented administratively. A motion to adopt this policy recommendation was made by Ms. Rudkin, seconded by Ms. Cano. Motion passed.
4. Require TEA to provide a formal complaint process for families when the interpreters provided are not meeting qualifications. Ms. Treleven motioned to adopt this recommendation, seconded by Ms. Cano. The motion passed.

Interpreter Support Services

5. Require collaboration of DHHS, BEI, and DHHS Consumer Education to update webpages to create centralized pages for resources and training. This can be resolved administratively through creative collaborations. Additionally, include

business support to ensure access to resources for contract interpreter services. Ms. Rudkin made a motion to adopt this policy, seconded by Ms. Cano. The motion passed.

6. Recommend DHHS Consumer Education increase training offerings for interpreters in high need fields such as the courts, medical and education and across all regions. Recommend DHHS Consumer Education offer CEUs and mentorship efforts. This can be resolved by expanding more specialized trainings and collaborating with the TEA and the Office of Court Administration. A motion was made by Ms. Treleven to adopt this policy proposal, Ms. Cano seconded. The motion passed.
7. Request the Governor's Office or Texas Workforce Commission to identify ASL interpreters as a targeted industry for the High Demand Training Program. Designation as a target industry will give more support to Interpreter Training Programs and students. A motion was made by Ms. Allen, seconded by Ms. Cano. The motion passed.

BEI Process & Services

8. Require DHHS to establish a finite timetable for updating BEI exams, in order of complexity, to new standards to reflect current changes in language and interpreting settings. This can be implemented by starting a pilot program for BEI performance tests in West Texas and/or the Rio Grande Valley while mandating similar setting conditions to maintain validity and reliability of the test. Previous travel to these areas has subsided due to cost and time expenses. Ms. Webb mentioned a potential two-year timeline to prepare the request for funds. Mr. Lucey recommended that HHSC include this in their funding request. Ms. Rudkin motioned to adopt this policy proposal, seconded by Mr. Blanchard. The motion passed.
9. Require DHHS Consumer Education to work with BEI to utilize a learning management system/programming to automate the approval of BEI CEU credits for training events. This automation will help with coordinating the approval process, preapprovals and tracking. An example of information technology could be a QR code, bar code, or training number. Ms. Allen motioned to adopt this policy proposal, seconded by Ms. Rudkin. The motion passed.
10. Address the discrepancy of pay rates in urban and rural areas. Require HHS to eliminate regional rates from Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA) to advance equal pay for agencies and interpreters in rural areas and reduce confusion between regions. Review CSSA more frequently to allow state agencies more flexibility for budget rate adjustments. Ms. Rudkin motioned to adopt this policy proposal, seconded by Ms. Allen. The motion passed.

Executive Director Report

Mr. Lucey summarized March and April Proclamations by Governor Abbott: Developmental Disability Awareness Month, Brain Injury Awareness Month, Autism Awareness / Acceptance Month, and Limb Loss Awareness Month.

GCPD Outreach activities included Capitol Day Experience for students from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Giving Welcoming Remarks at the Capitol for ALS Society Capitol Day, Legislative Presentations to local committees and stakeholder

groups, LFEA Awards Planning and NDEAM Poster call for art, ADA 35th Anniversary Planning, and the relaunch of the TechLunch Digital Accessibility Meet-up.

Update on 89th Texas Legislature and Bills of Interest – Rebecca Lopez provided updates on

1. House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 1- Personal Care Attendant Wages. HB 1 – increased the personal care attendant rate to \$14.28 across the board, and additional increase to \$17.50 for HCS ,TXHML, ICF
The SB 1 had an increased attendant rate of \$12.44 per hour.
 2. House Bill 2938 - Paid Family Caregivers, included a base pay rate of \$20.00 per hour
 3. Senate Bill 568, Intensity Based SpEd Funding. Passed the Senate and was received by the House.
 4. House Bill 3312 – Expands the Cameras in Classrooms Law. The bill was referred to committee.
 5. House Bill 645 and Senate Bill 1653 (Companion) - Co-Navigator Program – This bill voted favorably by the house and was on the General State Calendar.
 6. House Bill 4754, and Senate Bill 2326 - Adult Changing Tables at large places of public accommodation. These bills are in committee. Note: SB 1680 adds an adult changing table to the Capitol Complex.
 7. House Bill 2292, Informal Suspensions – This bill was in committee.
 8. House Bill 2096 and Senate Bill 680 – Driving with Disability(expands list of providers who can verify disability). These bills were in committee but had not received a hearing.
 9. House Bill 466 and Senate Bill 58 - Educational Representatives for students with disabilities. These bills were in committee.
 10. House Continuing Resolution 110 and Senate Continuing Resolution 32 – Naming the transit station at the Capitol in honor of Justin Dart's legacy, Lead On! Transit Station
 11. House Bill 1936 – Edit Accessible Parking Law (removal of section f-2) which allows a peace officer to issue a warning and not a citation for accessible parking law violations.
 12. House Bill 1996 and Senate Bill 2526 – Disability Pathway to Pre-K. In committee.
 13. House Bill 3048 and Senate Bill 2612 – Texas Disability History (adding to 7th grade Texas history social studies curriculum). In committee.
- Ms. Lopez added an update on Riders, amendments on the budget bill that align with our policy proposals. These are Older Individuals who are Blind Senior Keys to Independence Program, Medicaid Waivers Interest List reduction, Deaf Resource Specialist funding, and backup Power for Durable Medical Equipment.

Ellen Bauman, Chair, recessed at 5:00 p.m.

April 23, 2025, Chair Ellen Bauman reconvened at 8:36 a.m.

Roll Call:

GCPD Members: Kori Allen, Neva Fairchild, Lisa Treleaven, Evelyn Cano, Juan Carlos Lopez, Billy Blanchard, Ronnie Browning, Emma Faye Rudkin
Absent: Benjamin Willis, Chelsea Elliott

GCPD Staff: Ron Lucey, Rebecca Lopez, Melinda Crockom, Matt Dickens, Carolyn Saathoff

ExOfficio Representatives: Clair Benitez, Claudia Peden, Brock Boudreau, Marsha Godeaux, Janet Sharkis

Public Comment

Mr. Chase, Jr. shared his personal story to oppose Attorney General Paxton's lawsuit to repeal Section 504. Mr. Chase has had multiple disabilities since he was a child, and most recently, acquired blindness. He noted that accommodations he received through Section 504 throughout his education were instrumental in his academic success, earning multiple degrees and honors. This is vital for thousands of people across all disability groups.

Ms. Hartmann addressed concerns around the denial of services under the DBMD (Deaf Blind with Multiple Disabilities) waiver. She highlighted how cost-cutting measures are leading to unnecessary remands and service denials, particularly affecting access to intervenor services—critical for communication and independence in the deafblind community. Ms. Hartman emphasized the importance of consistent, skilled support and urged officials to uphold the intent of waiver programs and consider inflation costs.

Ms. Lewis brought attention to guardianship issues within the Department of Family and Protective Services, covering both child and adult cases. She stressed the importance of timely and transparent communication to the public regarding hearings and requested better notice for families impacted by guardianship-related matters.

Ms. Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent spoke about the challenges of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) for family caregivers living with those they care for. She criticized Texas' decision to maintain stricter logging requirements, especially during overnight care, which federal rules exempt. Her comments sparked broader discussion about whether state policy is being driven by software limitations rather than the needs of caregivers and recipients. The comments collectively highlighted critical gaps in support, data collection, and communication—calling on Texas officials to preserve disability rights, adjust outdated policies, and prioritize the lived realities of those directly affected.

Mr. Cote provided an update on efforts to launch a Power Outage Partners program in Texas, aimed at protecting individuals with disabilities who depend on electric-powered durable medical equipment (DME)—such as ventilators and oxygen concentrators, during emergencies like hurricanes or blackouts. He outlined key developments since presenting the initiative at the GCPD January meeting, including:

- **Legislative progress:** State Representative Davis filed a proposed budget amendment to allocate funds from the Texas Energy Fund, which would help DME users purchase backup power supplies.
- **Data collaboration:** Mr. Cote has partnered with Texas DME suppliers to access critical information—like device types, usage frequency, and existing battery capacity—that no government agency currently collects. This data can help

emergency officials prioritize aid to the most vulnerable individuals during outages.

- **Legal framework:** Progress has been made in navigating HIPAA regulations to allow DME suppliers to share limited personal health data with state or local authorities without individual consent, under provisions that allow such sharing to prevent injury or disability.

Mr. Cote noted that while inclusion in the disaster registry doesn't guarantee aid, it enhances emergency planning for first responders. Concerns about data privacy, third-party access, and destruction policies were acknowledged, with assurances of strong safeguards. A key initiative involves obtaining external battery systems for home medical devices, inspired by a \$30 million California program. The Texas plan would offer similar support, especially where insurance fails to cover this critical need. Mr. Lucey encouraged public advocacy, particularly in disaster-prone areas like Houston, to push for legislative backing before the session ends. The effort combines policy, data, healthcare, and energy to strengthen disaster resilience for medically vulnerable Texans.

Ms. Ruiz shared public comment about fraudulent guardianships, probate courts and our judicial system. She requests that the committee look deeper into how guardianships are done. She raised the question of true impartiality on the part of judges and the guardians they appoint. Ms. Ruiz stressed that courts look at the appropriateness of the guardianship. Review of complaint processes and oversight is needed.

Mr. and Mrs. Degollados, parents of a 21-year-old daughter with intellectual and medical disabilities, shared a harrowing account of systemic failures in law enforcement, education, and guardianship in Texas. Their story revealed deep concerns about exploitation, abuse, and lack of protection for vulnerable young adults, particularly after they turn 18. Adult Protective Services (APS), HHSC (Medicaid), the Governor's Office, and numerous advocacy groups were contacted, with no resolution. The GCPD Executive Director, Mr. Lucey, encouraged the ExOfficio representatives of APS, HHSC, and TEA, to follow up and re-investigate this case.

Ms. Singleton, who provided public comment at January's Quarterly Meeting, called in to again share testimony. She gave an account of abuse and exploitation through the guardianship system, calling out widespread corruption in the courts, law enforcement, and legal system. This testimony adds to a growing body of allegations against Texas's guardianship system, suggesting it may be misused to exploit, silence, and control capable individuals. Her described experience raises serious concerns about due process violations, medical fraud, physical abuse, financial exploitation, and systemic retaliation, and further underscores the urgency for external oversight and structural change in how guardianships are handled statewide.

Ms. Smith, mother of a 20-year-old DeafBlind and cognitively disabled daughter, advocated for continued support through the DBMD Medicaid waiver, highlighting the irreplaceable role of trained interveners in her daughter's communication and community access. She raised concerns about service denials and reductions, calling for greater transparency beyond clerical error explanations. HHSC and committee members acknowledged the issue's importance, noting that while some denials align with policy,

they committed to deeper analysis of data to better understand trends and improve service delivery under the DBMD waiver.

Ms. Letty, parent from the DFW area, provided comment on guardianship in Texas. She related how families are facing fraud, retaliation, and forced into costly legal battles trying to protect their child's rights. She highlighted issues of predatory exploitation by guardians for Medicaid entitlements, failure of APS and law enforcement to investigate abuse or fraud thoroughly, and conflicts of interest among service providers and judicial officers. Ms. Sharkis suggested the establishment of a cross-agency case coordination team, like models used in other states like Connecticut. Ms. Letty emphasized the need for proper referrals to District Attorneys, and better training for APS and law enforcement to properly handle cases involving vulnerable individuals.

Ms. Knapp shared concerns from the DeafBlind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT), to HHSC regarding the review department's misunderstanding of the needs of individuals who are deafblind. Specifically, she addressed the requirement to document services in 15-minute increments, which fails to reflect the unique and continuous support required by deafblind individuals. Interveners, who are communication facilitators, must be available full-time and possess specialized skills to ensure effective communication in accordance with ADA requirements. The review staff shows lack of understanding of the role and necessity of intervenors. DBMAT suggests that training from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) could resolve this. They request HHSC's immediate support in coordinating such training.

Mr. Adkins, from Michigan noted comparisons to guardianship in Texas. He described it as essentially racketeering, financial resources and assets are stolen from the ward. Young disabled children and elderly individuals are the victims. He said the guardians keep the ward isolated from friends and family, therefore, accessing accounts and depleting assets. Additionally, often the parent is prevented from knowing the location where their child is housed. The racketeering operation of fraudulent guardianship is nationwide.

Ms. Bauman stated the GCPD subcommittee on guardianship is grateful to hear this information.

Ms. Jaclyn, a board member of multiple national and state deafblind advocacy organizations and the mother of a 37-year-old deafblind woman, shared her concerns about the increasing scrutiny and burdensome documentation requirements imposed by HHSC's utilization review process. She emphasized that requiring 15-minute increments for intervenor services is not only unnecessary and unaligned with the Texas Administrative Code but also disruptive and unjustified. These administrative hurdles result in the reduction or denial of crucial services, despite unchanged and well-documented needs. She stressed the essential role of intervenors in enabling communication, safety, and community engagement for deafblind individuals. She asked HHSC to trust provider contracts and eliminate inefficient oversight practices that do not reflect legal or practical service standards.

Ms. Miller, a 67-year-old wheelchair user and community advocate with the Austin Transit Partnership and the Austin mental health community, (peer support), shared strong concerns about systemic failures affecting seniors and people with disabilities. A

key issue is extremely long delays in accessing essential mobility device repairs and approvals through Medicaid. Examples are six months to get a wheelchair tire replaced. Current policies, shaped during the pandemic, assume people with disabilities will remain indoors, leading to unsafe or inaccessible equipment for outdoor use. Ms. Miller recommended practical solutions, including creating a roadside assistance-style service for mobility aid users, supporting mobile device insurance for outdoor use, and prioritizing housing for people with disabilities near transit hubs to reduce transportation costs. She also emphasized the growing digital divide, noting that app-based transit systems exclude many seniors. She urged policymakers to shift focus from reactive emergency support to proactive, inclusive planning that fosters independence and opportunity for all.

GCPD Administrative Policy Recommendations and Recommendations to the 90th Legislature.

Policy Discussion from Past Public Comment, Discussions, and Meetings

The committee revisited a proposal previously raised by Ms. Roth concerning the installation of evacuation chairs for buildings with two or more floors at Texas colleges and universities. These devices will aid individuals with mobility impairments during emergencies and are considered an affordable safety measure. It was decided to “monitor the legislation, with a commitment to act if it fails. Texas A&M related committee members, Kristie Orr and Benjamin Willis will work to modify the policy language to a more feasible proposal.

Another update was given on a separate issue regarding a foster care position focused on ASL and deaf culture—still pending internal approval and expected to be posted by July.

GCPD Staff Activities – Ron Lucey introduced new GCPD staff member, Melinda Crockom, Community Outreach and Information Coordinator, highlighting several projects and activities she has already accomplished in the first month of joining the team. She is also working to increase our social media presence.

GCPD Subcommittee and Workgroup Reports

Guardianship Subcommittee - Evelyn Cano and Ellen Bauman are planning a strategy on how to help with the tragedy of the guardianship crisis.

Backup Power DME Taskforce – Ron Lucey commented there will be a Meeting in May with the Department of State Health Services to look at HIPPA matters for data sharing by DME suppliers for use during a disaster

Adaptive Sports and Recreation Subcommittee is paused until after Legislative Session.

New **DME Repair Subcommittee** needs a volunteer and chair.

Future Agenda Items and Meeting – Corpus Christi was mentioned for the July Quarterly Meeting. The LFEA Awards and Fall Quarterly Meeting will be in San Antonio in early October.

Chair Ellen Bauman adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Follow up items:

Issue	Action	Person Responsible
Mitigating hazards to people with disabilities caused by micromobility devices/scooters.	Next Steps: Staff to follow up with Conor Kelly for collaboration on webinars and best practice dissemination.	Matt Dickens, Ron Lucey
	Ensure ARCIL's contact info and materials are made available to participants.	GCPD Staff
Ongoing service issues with Mr. Bland.	GCPD member to contact USAA about George Bland's unresolved case.	Emma Faye Rudkin
Supporting people with severe Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and other communication barriers with interagency and medical services.	Dr. Patron offered to assist in drafting a navigator job description. Explore staff training improvement methods for serving people with Dyslexia and other communication disabilities.	Dr. Patron and GCPD staff
Locating a Community Resource Coordinator Group (CRCG) that serves adults.	Share CRCG San Antonio resource with Mr. Bland and Dr. Patron: https://crcg.hhs.texas.gov/find-resources-near-me/	Ron Lucey
Expansion of community awareness of ARCIL services.	Consider further discussion or partnerships with ARCIL regarding housing and independent living initiatives.	GCPD Staff and Committee Members?
Transition services for students in high school special education.	Invite guest presentation from Elizabeth Danner, State Transition Coordinator	Elyse Lieberman, TEA
TWC Summer Earn and Learn Program – low enrollment of	Get data on participation of blind/low vision individuals in employment programs.	Claudia Peden, TWC

students who are blind or low vision.		
Rule status for ILS address/disability proof.		Clair Benitez, HHSC
DDS processing wait times and clarifications	HHSC to report on at next Quarterly Meeting	Clair Benitez, HHSC
-SNAP eligibility applications at 30 days pre-release from incarceration.	HHSC to report on at next meeting.	Clair Benitez, HHSC
-Medicaid coverage gap for adopted youth.	HHSC to report on at next meeting.	Clair Benitez, HHSC
-EVV 15-minute increment origin (state or federal).	HHSC to report on at next meeting.	Clair Benitez, HHSC
Evacuation chairs at colleges and universities.	Monitor (SB 752 and HB 5275). If fails, re-work the policy language.	GCPD Committee members Kristie Orr and Benjamin Willis
ASL/Deaf Culture POC in Foster Care job posting	Determine if the position has been posted?	DFPS – Hector Ruiz, ExOfficio filling in until Brock Boudreau replaced.
Shortage of qualified ASL interpreters.	Request CAC report with recommendations on RDSPD/Ed Terp Pay.	Ask Elyse to present in July on why those recommendations were not carried.