

Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

QUARTERLY MEETING Minutes

October 1st, 2025
Wednesday 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Education Service Center – Region 20
1314 Hines Avenue
San Antonio, Texas 78208

October 1, 2025

- 1. Call to Order/ Roll Call** Ellen Bauman, Chair called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.
Present: Kori Allen, Ronnie Browning, Neva Fairchild, Evelyn Cano, Chelsea Elliott, Juan Lopez, Kristie Orr, Lisa Treleaven, Billy Blanchard, Ellen Bauman
Staff: Ron Lucey, Melinda Crockom, Carolyn Saathoff, Matt Dickens
Ex Officios: Clair Benitez, Lisa Givens, Marsha Godeaux, Elyse Lieberman, Maria Salazar (for Janet Sharkis)
- 2. Approval of Committee Member Absences as Submitted**
Dr. Kristie Orr recommended approval of Benjamin Willis' absence due to school obligations. Unanimously approved.
Emma Faye Rudkin had a last-minute unexcused absence.
- 3. Approval of Summary Minutes for July 2025** – Mr. Blanchard motioned to approve, seconded by Ms. Cano. Minutes unanimously approved.
- 4. Listening to the San Antonio Disability Community**
Deborah Scharven, Accessibility Compliance Manager for the City of San Antonio, highlighted major accessibility and inclusion initiatives since 2019. These initiatives include integrating universal design into housing projects through a \$150M affordable housing bond and the San Antonio Housing Trust's new multifamily standards, advancing digital accessibility with a full website update to meet Section 508 and WCAG 2.1 AA standards, and improving emergency preparedness through community partnerships and outreach events. The City now hosts an annual emergency preparedness event and provided a starter kit to participants. Citywide training on ADA compliance, Deaf culture, and upcoming DOJ/TDLR updates further strengthen accessibility compliance. Ms. Scharven highlighted the new 800,000 sq. ft. San Antonio International Airport Terminal C, stating that addressing barriers was the common denominator. The project addressed many needs, including service animal relief areas and accessible restrooms. Through strong collaboration among city departments, the Disability Access Advisory Committee, and community partners, San Antonio has become a national leader in universal design and accessibility inclusion, receiving international recognition.

Ms. Scharven introduced Rich Stinson, Chief Programs Officer at San Antonio International Airport, who presented on the Universal Design Task Force and the San Antonio Airport's Accessibility Focus Group, which was created to ensure the

new 800,000-square-foot terminal exceeds accessibility standards. The Task Force examined the entire passenger journey—“bedside to planeside”—to identify and remove barriers through design, technology, and customer service improvements. Rather than focusing on disabilities, they targeted the barriers themselves, including physical, attitudinal, and systemic ones. This Task Force produced over 160 recommendations, most incorporated before construction began, with some previously implemented in existing terminals, such as curb less entrances and improved restroom designs. The initiative has gained international recognition, influencing accessibility practices at airports worldwide, such as in Singapore and Madrid. Mr. Stinson emphasized collaboration with community members involved in the planning of this project, noting that 25 out of 35 focus group members either had a disability, lived experience, or a medical service background. Mr. Stinson expressed pride in how the project is setting a national and global standard for inclusive airport design.

b. **disABILITYsa – Melanie Cawthon, Executive Director**, shared the organization’s efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities in San Antonio. With a small team, DisABILITYsa focuses on education, advocacy, leadership development, and community engagement, aiming to make San Antonio the top community for people with disabilities to live, work, learn, and play. Key programs include the Royal Court Program, the annual AccessibilityFest, and advocacy for universal design in housing. The Royal Court Program, which is part of the annual Fiesta in San Antonio, is a leadership and life skills development program for individuals with all types of cognitive, physical and sensory disabilities. Ms. Cawthon noted that The Royal Court Program has raised over \$500,000 that has been implemented into the disability community over the last 12 years. This program collaborates with museums, train docents, and supports classroom educators, while also guiding researchers on including people with disabilities in planning and advisory roles rather than just as research subjects. A major focus of the Royal Court Program’s work is civic engagement: they serve on numerous committees and planning teams related to disability access, housing, transportation, and community planning.

DisABILITYsa also provides a Mobile Changing unit and portable sensory rooms to improve accessibility at public events. Through partnerships with local organizations and city committees, DisABILITYsa works on initiatives to create more inclusive spaces, train businesses, and advocate for disability-friendly policies. Their work is expanding with a collective impact initiative to debut in 2026, aiming to strengthen the disability community through collaboration and involvement.

c. **San Antonio Independent Living Services (SAILS) – Abel Zamora, Program Director** Abel Zamora from SAILS (Service Advocacy and Independent Living Services) presented an overview of the organization’s work serving 28 counties in south-central Texas, based in San Antonio. SAILS advocates for and empowers people with disabilities through programs promoting independence, consumer choice, and accessibility. Core services include advocacy, independent living skills training, peer support, information and referral, and youth transition to adult services. SAILS also operates a complex rehabilitation technology program providing durable medical equipment and assistive technology for eligible consumers. Mr. Zamora highlighted the organization’s outreach to rural

and underserved communities and its responsiveness during recent floods in Kerr County, where SAILS checked on clients, provided support, and coordinated with state response partners despite staffing and budget constraints. He emphasized the need for stronger infrastructure and preparedness to protect vulnerable residents in future disasters.

5. Public Comment

Public comments and testimony summarized in these minutes reflect the views of the individual speakers and do not represent findings, conclusions, or endorsements by the Committee.

Dr. George Patron emphasized the urgent need for better case management and coordination of care for adults with disabilities, especially those with communication, cognitive, or mental health disorders. He commented that many organizations fail to provide effective “warm hand-offs to organizations,” leading, in his view, to a “boomerang effect” where clients return for help without progress. Dr. Patron called for clear designation of responsible case managers, such as nurses, social workers, or administrators, who are properly trained, resourced, and able to track improvement through regular reassessments. He emphasized the need for funding of case navigator positions, stronger oversight of service providers, and better training for front-line staff to recognize and assist individuals with disabilities. Dr. Patron highlighted gaps in continuity of care after hospital discharge, particularly for individuals without Medicaid or Medicare, and stressed that current systems rely too heavily on referrals instead of hands-on coordination.

Steven Aleman from Disability Rights Texas addressed education issues for students with disabilities in the public school system, highlighting recent legislative efforts, including the passage of HB8, which reformed state testing. He noted that much work remains in implementing this legislation, particularly around Senate Bill 57, which focuses on improving safety planning for students with disabilities during emergencies. Mr. Aleman emphasized the importance of upcoming efforts, such as developing new guidelines from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), for emergency drills, and mentioned that planning for the next legislative session is already underway, with a focus on addressing the needs of students with low-incidence disabilities. He expressed support for future legislation on visual impairments and braille instruction. Mr. Lucey, GCPD Executive Director, commended the passage of special education funding reforms and suggested that the committee consider collaborating with the Texas School Safety Commission to improve IEP emergency plans for students. Mr. Aleman confirmed the TEA is now working on guidance for Senate Bill 57 and welcomed input from experts.

George Bland expressed deep frustration over ongoing struggles obtaining adequate support for his disabilities. Despite engaging multiple agencies, he has repeatedly been denied effective assistance. He explained that he cannot read or write due to a legitimate learning disability, yet agencies require written communication, causing him to lose access to jobs, benefits, and housing. Mr. Bland described being dismissed, misunderstood, and treated disrespectfully by officials, including a housing 504 coordinator and representatives from USAA. He stressed the need for accountability for agencies that, in his experience, fail to accommodate individuals with disabilities and

emphasized his fear of becoming homeless due to systemic neglect and communication barriers.

Gavin Phelen, a high school student from Vermont, provided testimony on emergency help for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. He introduced *ALRM*, an AI-based mobile and smartwatch app he developed to improve emergency accessibility for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Motivated by personal experiences and incidents such as school lockdowns, school shootings, and undetected carbon monoxide poisoning deaths. Mr. Phelen created ALRM to detect critical sounds, like fire alarms, gunshots, and carbon monoxide detectors, and alert users through vibrations and visual warnings. The app also uses geofencing, automatically activating in designated “alarm zones” such as homes, schools, or airports. Mr. Phelen intends to pilot ALRM with the Texas Travel Alliance and seeks to raise awareness and expand its use across public spaces. Committee members applauded his advocacy and encouraged him to consider new school policies restricting phone use in Texas, suggesting that accessibility accommodations be added to students’ IEP or 504 plans. Since he is a resident of another state, he was unaware of the Texas policy on cell phones.

Sue Burek, a volunteer advocate with Texas Parent to Parent, updated the committee on ongoing issues with the STAR+PLUS Medicaid waiver program. She reported repeated assessment errors, over 40 per case, by Managed Care Organization (MCO) nurses, which she stated led to service denials she believes were incorrect, along with similar problems now affecting seven families. Despite initial contact from HHSC in 2024, no follow-up occurred, and Ms. Burek is now proposing a joint meeting between HHSC, UnitedHealthcare, the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities, and advocacy groups to address what appears to be systemic assessment and accountability issues. She also recommended policy changes, including granting applicants’ access to their assessment forms to check for errors, aligning STAR+PLUS with the STAR Kids program, and revising incentives to discourage erroneous denials and improve healthcare transparency and outcomes.

Linda Litzinger, Advocacy Director for Texas Parent to Parent, requested the creation of two new workgroups to address systemic issues affecting people with disabilities and their caregivers. She supported Sue Burek’s proposed workgroup on STAR+PLUS waiver assessment errors and added a second proposal to tackle delayed payments for attendants, which often result from late or incomplete waiver renewal paperwork. These delays cause months-long payment gaps, forcing families into financial hardship and jeopardizing SSI and Medicaid eligibility when back pay is issued. Ms. Litzinger detailed the issue in this summary: The sequence which causes the problem of attendants not being paid begins with an annual process of renewing the waiver. Either the case manager turns the paperwork in late or it’s submitted in an incomplete package causing remands, then resulting in Utilization Review to finish it two or three months late. Next, the FMSA cannot load the Me Save financial management account, and paychecks are withheld from the attendant worker. These delays are not the fault of the worker or clients, and both are usually receiving SSI. It is illegal to pay cash to tide them over, therefore making a financial hardship.

When the worker is finally paid with backpay it messes up their family's SSI and Medicaid because it looks like they suddenly have a higher salary, which muddles their accounts. Ms. Litzinger emphasized that these problems drive workforce shortages

among attendants and called for a task force including HHSC, the Texas Workforce Commission, and nonprofit stakeholders to create systemic solutions. She committed to submitting a formal policy recommendation to GCPD Chair by Friday, October 3rd.

Roger, an advocate for vulnerable and disabled individuals, spoke about widespread alleged abuse within the guardianship system, describing it as a “billion-dollar industry” that often strips disabled people of their rights and exposes them to fraud and exploitation. He asked the committee to make a verified criminal complaint to law enforcement and the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, citing a specific guardianship case (Dellogado case), which he alleged involved fraud, due process violations, and exploitation of a disabled adult. Roger stated that his investigation uncovered what he believes to be judicial misconduct, conflicts of interest, and violations of state and federal laws protecting civil and human rights. He commended Governor Abbott’s efforts to safeguard vulnerable Texans and pledged to submit his detailed findings to the GCPD for further action, urging systemic reforms and accountability in guardianship proceedings.

Ms. DeMoss gave public comment about fragrance sensitivity. She noted examples that fragrances in courtrooms and public buildings limits civic participation and poses health risks, citing studies and materials that she stated indicate certain fragrance chemicals may be toxic or carcinogenic. She advised Texas agencies to adopt fragrance-free policies across health facilities, emergency services, schools, and public buildings; including staff training and public guidance, to ensure true disability inclusion. Mr. Lucey and the committee acknowledged the importance of the issue, noting it falls between environmental design and human behavior, and agreed to revisit it for further discussion and potential policy development, possibly referencing hospital models from other states.

6. Reports from Invited Ex Officio Agency Representatives, includes follow up topics from previous meetings

a. Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation– Marsha Godeaux

Marsha Godeaux from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) provided an update on several key developments. The agency recently absorbed the Lottery Commission, significantly expanding its size. TDLR is also focusing on improving its human trafficking identification efforts, particularly in facilities where trafficking is prevalent. In healthcare, TDLR is working with the orthotics and prosthetics advisory board to increase access to these services. A major update was made to the Texas Architectural Barriers online registration system. County appraisal district records are now required to ensure more accurate enforcement and improve compliance. Ms. Godeaux also shared that 150 architectural barrier cases were addressed in the last fiscal year, noting that the relatively low number of complaints might indicate either effective enforcement or insufficient staffing to handle all issues.

b. Texas Education Agency – Elyse Lieberman

Dr. Lieberman provided updates on education policy changes from the 89th legislative session, highlighting major funding increases for special education evaluations, transportation, and Regional Day School Programs for the Deaf, along with expanded flexibility for dyslexia services and waived certification fees. There are new

requirements for school boards to review special-education student outcomes annually, changes to community-based support grants, and expanded opportunities for students with disabilities to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement. Additional updates are accommodations for communication devices; to include limited exceptions to the ban for students with certain disabilities during emergency drills for Senate Bill 57, to be included in the IEP. Dr. Lieberman mentioned that there will be a lot of rulemaking around special education student discipline that will evolve during the remainder of the school year. She will provide additional information to the committee at future meetings. Additionally, student absences have been updated to temporary absences due to mental health appointments. There is upcoming statewide planning for Deaf and hard-of-hearing services. Dr. Lieberman mentioned new resources such as the updated Transition and Employment Guide. Additional good news she shared was the work at Texas State University on school safety. Dr. Lieberman will report back at a future meeting on developing guidance for emergency-preparedness, including when special education representation needs to be part of a threat assessment team.

c. Texas Workforce Commission – Lisa Givens presented updates on vocational rehabilitation (VR) and related programs. In FY2025 Q4, the VR program served 71,527 participants, with 10,490 achieving employment outcomes; the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind program served 3,723 customers with 1,501 successful closures; and the Business Enterprises of Texas managed 107 food service sites employing 158 Texans, including 140 with disabilities. Committee members requested multi-year trend data and specific breakdowns for blind and low-vision participants. Ms. Givens also reported on new Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff training efforts, development of peer support specialist programs, and employer partnerships, including the Summer Earn and Learn and Project SEARCH initiatives, both of which provide work experience for students with disabilities. Legislative updates included new and ongoing initiatives to expand senior and disability employment programs and improve reporting. Ms. Givens stated she would explore providing additional historical and disability-specific data and would examine potential long-term expansion goals for Project SEARCH.

Ms. Bauman shared the story of a 33-year-old man with autism who teaches computer classes and has successfully worked in multiple roles but is now struggling to financially support himself. After vocational rehabilitation assistance, he secured a part-time contract position at a community college earning \$1,400 per month, forcing him to move back home and leaving him without health insurance. Ms. Bauman questioned whether qualifications or hiring practices in higher education could be adjusted to create better employment opportunities for individuals in similar situations. Ms. Givens affirmed that VR's goal is full time employment and offered to follow up on the case to explore possible solutions.

d. Health and Human Services Commission – Clair Benitez

Ms. Benitez Introduced the new Director for the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Aaron Mowell, who provided greeting remarks and offering his support to the GCPD. Mr. Lucey proposed scheduling a follow-up agenda item regarding recommendations from the interpreter subcommittee about improving interpreter

certification and overall access. Mr. Lucey suggested this item for a future quarterly meeting, perhaps in July 2026. The purpose of this agenda item will be to explore past American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter subcommittee recommendations from our April 2025 quarterly meeting. Mr. Mowell agreed to this suggestion.

Ms. Benitez provided an extensive update highlighting recent federal and state policy changes affecting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), including new eligibility rules, reduced Medicaid retroactive coverage, and enhanced address-verification requirements. HHSC raised awareness about the 9-8-8 suicide prevention and created a new webpage: Texas988.org. Additionally, MS. Benitez highlighted GCPD's interest in the cross-section of mental health support and services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. HHSC received \$4.8 million in funding from the 89th Legislature to expand the Outpatient Biopsychosocial Interventions (OBI) program, increasing contracted sites from 5 to 13 and enabling local I/DD authorities to provide targeted outpatient mental health services for individuals with developmental disabilities who have mental health needs. HHS announced renewed federal funding for the No Wrong Door system, upcoming stakeholder engagement for the 2026 Promoting Independence Plan, expansion of adaptive sports programs for blind children, and a major legislative investment to grow outpatient mental-health services for people with I/DD. Additional updates include progress on a cross-agency employment conference, a successful media campaign promoting Independent Living services, implementation of attendant-wage and waiver cost-limit increases, expansion of habilitative services through the preadmission screening and resident review program, and ongoing improvements in Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP) processing times. HHSC also highlighted the Community Partner Program. GCPD members applauded the agency's progress and requested future updates on statewide coordination of information-and-referral systems.

- e. **State Independent Living Council – Maria Salazar**, speaking on behalf of the Texas State Independent Living Council, announced a new \$265,000 Moody Foundation grant to strengthen disability-inclusive disaster preparedness across the Gulf Coast in partnership with Independent Living Centers, Disability Rights Texas, and Disability Access Solutions. The project includes hiring a coordinator and may inform statewide efforts. She also reports progress on a Department of Justice-supported initiative to improve services for people with disabilities affected by sexual assault or family violence, noting a second grant application submitted with the Texas Council on Family Violence. Additional updates include the formation of new SILC subcommittees, an upcoming board meeting with elections and opportunities for public input and plans to keep GCPD informed of strategic plan updates.

7. Access to Special Education Healthcare Transition Planning – Ivy Goldstein & Amy Litzinger

Ms. Litzinger and Ms. Goldstein described how poorly planned healthcare transitions from pediatric to adult care leave many youths with disabilities displaced. Ms. Litzinger shared her experience as being abruptly "aged out" of her pediatric specialty care at 18 with no guidance on next steps, prompting broader discussions among parents who shared similar experiences. Healthcare transition—shifting from child-centered to adult-

centered care—often lacks communication, leading to gaps in services, insurance changes, and reduced benefits after age 21. Because these problems persist, they stated that schools must address healthcare transition during IEP planning starting at age 14, helping students develop self-determination skills and preparing families to communicate with providers early. They highlight existing resources such as readiness assessments, sample goals, and national transition guides, emphasizing that proactive planning, individualized support, and clear information can prevent crises and empower youth and families as they navigate lifelong healthcare needs. Ms. Litzinger and Ms. Goldstein concluded their presentation by emphasizing the urgent need to improve healthcare transition planning for youth with disabilities, highlighting personal experiences of inadequate support and the sense of betrayal families often feel. They presented a policy recommendation to the committee, outlining a proposed rule change and the creation of a diverse healthcare transition task force that includes parents, self-advocates, educators, healthcare professionals, and representatives from both rural and urban areas. The focus will require healthcare transition planning to begin at age 14 by the 2029 school year, with sufficient time for state agencies to develop training, resources, and implementation guidelines.

Dr. Lieberman asked Ms. Goldstein what role the Transition Employment Designees (TEDs) would have in the proposed healthcare-transition policy, noting that their current responsibilities for training school districts are unclear. Ms. Goldstein agreed that clearer, more specific expectations for TEDs are needed and welcomed collaboration with education experts to refine the policy. Mr. Lucey suggested taking additional time to refine the policy recommendation, about 10% more work, before a final vote, ensuring it is ready for legislative consideration in 2026. The committee agreed to reconvene a small working group, including key stakeholders, to strengthen the proposal and give it the necessary “teeth.” A motion was made by Mr. Lopez to postpone the vote on the healthcare transition proposal, seconded by Ms. Fairchild. There was no opposition. Motion approved. Ms. Litzinger requested that Senator Zaffirini and William Montemayor, Legislative Aide, be invited to participate in policy proposal discussions. Mr. Lucey recommended Ms. Litzinger and Ms. Goldstein invite Senator Zaffirini and Mr. Montemayor for a policy proposal discussion meeting, then agreed that GCPD can host the meeting to accomplish the proposal revisions for the 90th Legislative Session.

8. Higher Education Campus Safety Policy – Dr. Kristie Orr and Benjamin Willis

Dr. Orr and Mr. Willis presented a policy proposal requiring all postsecondary institutions—including universities, community colleges, and private schools—to provide students with clear, accessible information on emergency procedures, especially for those with disabilities or health conditions. It was noted that because many students do not register with disability services and may be in different campus locations at any time, safety information must be shared universally during orientation, posted on a dedicated website, adding a campus contact for assistance with individual planning, and reinforced through regular campus-wide notifications. The discussion explored avoiding overly prescriptive requirements, which would allow more expansive information reach, ensuring individualized planning, adding campus contact information (such as ADA coordinators), and potentially standardizing placement of safety links on institutional websites. Both presenters and committee members agree the proposal balances student responsibility, flexibility, and broad

accessibility. Dr. Orr made a motion for the Committee to accept this proposal, seconded by Mr. Willis. No opposition, motion passed.

9. K-12 Braille Literacy Policy Recommendations –The Braille Literacy Subcommittee, led by Ms. Fairchild, met in summer of 2024. This workgroup consisted of experts on blindness across Texas. The team made recommendations for improving Braille Literacy in Texas. Background information is that out of 11,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, only 400 are primary Braille readers; less than 4% are being taught Braille in Texas. Ms. Fairchild made a motion that the committee wait to vote until after all proposals were read. This was seconded by Mr. Blanchard. The recommendations are detailed as follows:

Recommendation 1: - As braille literacy is so important to the success of students with visual impairments, the decision by an ARD committee to not utilize braille as a medium for a student who is visually impaired must be a unanimous decision. Amend Chapter 30 Education Code Sec. 30.002(c) by requiring the decision that braille is not an appropriate medium to be unanimous.

Recommendation 2: To truly support the goal of emergent literacy development for students with visual impairments, the prekindergarten guidelines should be updated to create specific guidelines for students to practice literacy skills through access to braille. At the prekindergarten level, there are tools such as braille blocks or bricks that can be used during play to achieve emergent literacy milestones such as are outlined in the Prekindergarten Guidelines.

Recommendation 3: Braille books for Pre-K through 2nd grade have been purchased for school districts to check out through the Education Service Centers. The Texas Education Agency needs to increase funding for these books to ensure every child with a visual impairment has accessible reading materials that support literacy development through braille.

Recommendation 4: There should be an investment by the state into “twin vision” books that have a clear braille overlay on the printed English, allowing students with visual impairments to read with their parents or sighted peers. To accomplish these braille literacy goals for students, educators need to be trained to teach literacy in braille. By doing so, the collaboration between Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) and classroom teachers will improve through the common understanding of literacy development and the use of a common lexicon for literacy.

Recommendation 5: TVIs should also be required to take the Reading Academies that were mandated for K-3 teachers in Education Code Chapter 21 Section 21.4552.

Recommendation 6: TEA should also establish tactile proficiency guidelines for both early childhood and learners in the secondary grades who need to learn braille.

Recommendation 7: the State Board of Education (SBOE) should adopt a set of supplementary standards for braille instruction that align with the English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This supplement would delineate what to teach and when to match braille instruction to TEKS. Braille is

key for students with visual impairments when learning grammar skills, such as spelling and punctuation.

STEM Instruction for Braille Users emphasizes that students who are blind or visually impaired often lack early exposure to numeracy and mathematical concepts, which can place them behind their sighted peers. Braille literacy is essential because it provides the written medium students need to work through math and science step by step, reducing cognitive load and enabling true independence. Without braille, educators may unintentionally complete parts of the work for students, limiting learning opportunities. Hard-copy braille materials are critical at every level for accessing mathematical vocabulary and concepts. Both students with no vision and those with low vision need timely braille instruction, as advanced subjects—such as algebra, physics, chemistry, and even music—cannot be learned effectively through oral methods alone. Ultimately, braille literacy is fundamental for equitable participation in STEM education.

Recommendation 8: the State Board of Education (SBOE) should adopt a set of supplementary standards for braille instruction that align with the mathematics, science, and music Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). These supplements would delineate what to teach and when to match braille instruction to TEKS. Without these foundations in tactile, graphic, and braille (including Nemeth in the UEB context) – literacy, students with visual impairments will fall behind their sighted peers as they advance through the school system.

Recommendation 9: Amend Section 30.002(c) to clarify that literacy includes math literacy skills, and that braille must be used across educational contexts.

High-quality instructional materials are essential for student success, yet many Texas students who are blind or visually impaired lack timely, complete access to braille textbooks. When materials do arrive, critical visual elements like graphics, charts, and photos are often missing or inaccessible. As districts shift from textbooks to online instructional tools, navigation barriers increase. Company portals frequently use unfamiliar shortcuts and poorly documented interfaces, making access difficult even for students adept with assistive technology.

Recommendation 10: To ensure Texas students with visual impairments have access to high quality instructional materials, the Texas Education Agency must:

- provide training to vendors of instructional material to reinforce transparency and honesty about the product,
- ensure that in the upcoming year the product will be checked for accessibility and quality, and
- build ways to ensure vendors improve their products.

Further, TEA must require publishers to give reports to show compliance by deadlines. If compliance is not met, TEA should not order from them.

Recommendation 11: TEA must emphasize digital accessibility through enforced requirements to meet WCAG 2.1 standards for digital instructional material.

Recommendation 12: In order to receive relevant and timely feedback on the accessibility of a product, TEA should create a form for feedback that can be used by

TVIs. This will allow TVIs to provide feedback on the quality and accessibility of instructional materials directly to TEA.

Recently, TEA has shared that districts can access released STAAR paper braille materials by contacting TEA's vendor to request that specific test titles be shipped to the Local Education Agency. To facilitate increased access to these materials, TEA is exploring a new process wherein districts could receive the digital Braille Ready Files to emboss locally. This is a good start, but students with visual impairments should have the same access to practice tests as their sighted peers.

Recommendation 13: Amend Chapter 30 Education Code Sec. 30.002(b) by adding (4) provide access to braille instructional materials and braille statewide testing materials, including released STAAR and TSI tests and sample questions, at no cost to districts if print or electronic copies are provided at no cost.

Recommendation 14: Amend Chapter 31 Education Code Sec. 31.028(a) to add the requirement that the commissioner ensures students with visual impairments have access to their instructional materials at the same time or earlier than their peers have access to the unadapted materials.

Recommendation 15: Amend Chapter 31 Education Code Sec. 31.028(a) to add a requirement that the teacher receives their adapted teacher edition at the same time that other teachers receive their unadapted teacher edition.

Assistive technology enhances learning and daily functioning for students with disabilities, and recent TEA investments have expanded access for students with visual impairments. The agency purchased 338 devices featuring tactile refreshable graphics with braille—enough for all Texas students who primarily use braille—and included teacher training to ensure effective implementation and use.

Recommendation 16: TEA must continue funding and maintenance for these devices. It is important for TEA to maintain its knowledge and use of best practices related to AT for students who are blind, low vision, or deafblind.

Recommendation 17: Amend Chapter 30 Education Code Sec. 30.002(c)(6) to add year-round (B) access to their assistive technology and instructional materials.

Multiple state agencies serve children with visual impairments, but they often operate in isolation. Strengthening collaboration among these agencies would provide families with more comprehensive, coordinated support that meets the full range of children's needs. Continued interagency cooperation is essential to sustaining effective braille literacy support across Texas.

Recommendation 18: The Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program, and Early Childhood Intervention need to continue to strengthen their collaboration to provide more in-depth parent training and awareness of the benefits and use of braille.

Recommendation 19: The Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation program should provide a variety of transition age braille camps to support development

of advanced braille skills in areas of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics.

There is a national shortage of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs), resulting in inadequate braille instruction and limited access to services in inclusive settings. Strengthening TVI preparation—through updated certification standards aligned with the Science of Reading and required coursework in foundational literacy—would improve early, intensive braille literacy instruction. Ongoing braille proficiency is also a challenge, prompting recommendations for mandatory braille refresher training every five years. Paraprofessionals, often tasked with supporting braille instruction without training or adequate compensation, need a funded career pathway and stipends to improve retention and effectiveness. Additionally, while SSVI funds are critical for supporting and retaining TVIs, more resources must be directed toward accessible high-quality instructional materials and assistive technology to better serve students with visual impairments.

Recommendation 23: TEA should explore how to support schools' use of this fund for both salaries for TVIs and for purchasing accessible materials and technology that is imperative for the TVI to best support the student with visual impairments.

The committee voted unanimously to approve the full set of recommendations, with plans for staff to make minor edits before final adoption.

10. **Executive Director Report** – Ron Lucey

- a. **Subcommittee Reports** – The Adaptive Sports and Recreation subcommittee updates included ongoing collaboration with UIL and Special Olympics Texas to expand inclusive policies under Section 504 and IDEA, alongside developing school-based sensitivity training to promote empathy after incidents involving youth with disabilities. They are creating adaptive sports grant materials, planning the 2026 Adaptive Sports Institute, and supporting inclusive recreation initiatives such as playscapes, outreach, and policy recommendations. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSVBI), highlighted broad opportunities for athletes with various disabilities, and members emphasized inclusion across all ages, including older adults with vision loss. The committee is also helping individuals connect with adaptive sports programs like power soccer and working with Texas Parks and Wildlife on accessible outdoor recreation, including adaptive fishing. Additional subcommittee updates included reactivating the guardianship subcommittee to address supported decision-making issues and advancing recommendations from the vision loss in older adults' workgroup within state agencies.
- b. **Sunset Commission Process for GCPD** – Mr. Lucey summarized the Sunset Review Process that will begin in November. He asked for support from the Committee and mentioned an aspiration to increase the number of members from 12 to 15. This would give the GCPD more bench strength when it comes to policy in all the major issue areas.
- c. **Community Outreach** Ms. Crockom provided updates about strengthening GCPD's communications and social media strategy, noting strong engagement on Facebook, steady growth on Instagram, and the launch of a LinkedIn page.

She outlined plans to tailor content to key audiences, highlight disability awareness initiatives, and track engagement metrics. TWC Ex Officio, Lisa Givens, is working with Ms. Crockom to design and print two hundred 12-month calendars featuring past NDEAM poster winners, expected to be available in December. Ms. Crockom also reported GCPD currently has over 20,000 GovDelivery subscribers, revival of the monthly Tech Lunch digital-accessibility meetup, development of a new local committee handbook, and revisions to the “Texas Driving With Disability” brochure to include new license designations. Recent and upcoming recognitions include multiple gubernatorial proclamations, including one honoring GCPD’s 75th anniversary, and an upcoming dedication of the “Lead On” transit station at the Texas Capitol in honor of ADA champion Justin Dart, featuring new signage, biography, imagery, and accessible features. The “Lead On” commemorative event is set for December 1st.

d. Policy Discussion from Past Public Comment, Discussions, and Meetings

This agenda item was tabled.

11. Individual Member Reports on Outreach – This agenda item was tabled

12. Future Agenda Items and Meeting

The committee chose to hold the January 2026 meeting in Waco, Texas.

13. Ellen Bauman, Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:50 p.m.

These minutes are intended to reflect an accurate summary of discussions and actions taken and do not constitute findings of fact or legal conclusions by the Committee.

Follow up items:

Issue	Action	Person Responsible
Mr. Bland’s continued issues with service coordination	Encourage Mr. Bland to reach out to San Antonio Community Resource Coordination Group (for assistance with navigation of services).	Dr. Patron and Mr. Bland
	Ron Lucey offered to join the staffing at SACRCG, once Mr. Bland gets an appointment. As of 12/8/2025, SACRCG has halted staffings.	Ron Lucey, George Bland, Dr. Patron
Cindy Dellogado case	Follow up with Hector Ortiz, Ex Officio at DFPS to get status of what’s been investigated.	Guardianship subcommittee
Cindy Dellogado case – Action for Committee	Obtain a written summary from Roger to document the issues raised for informational review and explore potential next steps for helping in this matter.	Ron Lucey and staff Roger to email

		summation to Ron Lucey
TWC VR program	TWC to provide at least three data points for each item-three quarters or three fiscal years backing up why case closure numbers are down.	Lisa Givens
VR Program for Blind individuals	Provide the number of those Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) participants are blind? Ms. Fairchild has been asking this question for 2 years and would like an answer.	Lisa Givens
Summer Earn and Learn Program	Obtain at least three years of performance report of students who were placed and what their disability categories were Summer Earn and Learn - requested by Ms. Cano).	Lisa Givens
OIB Program	Obtain at least three data points on OIB to determine a trendline	Lisa Givens
Strategic goal for expanding Project SEARCH	Determine if there's a 5-year plan for scaling up Project SEARCH over time to four or five more sites. Asked by Ron Lucey	Lisa Givens
Policy Proposal	Explore establishment of a workgroup on STAR+PLUS waiver assessment errors and add a second proposal to resolve delayed payments for attendants.	Ellen Bauman (Sue Burek and Linda Litzinger P2P)
Healthcare Transition from pediatric to adult for people with IDD (see detail page 7)	Establish small workgroup to refine the policy proposal – invite Senator Zaffirini and Legislative Aide, William Montemayor to discussion meeting. To develop a clear policy proposal plan to 90 th Legislature.	Elyse Lieberman and Elizabeth Danner (TEA), Ivy Goldstein, Amy Litzinger, Ron Lucey
Public school student cell phone access	Explore information from TEA, about potential to allow student cell phone access in certain situations (disability related need – such as self-monitoring for diabetes)	Elyse Lieberman
Emergency protocols at postsecondary institutions	Continue development of a policy proposal to facilitate communication about safety procedures in emergencies to faculty, staff, and students	Ron Lucey and staff work with THECB

Fragrance sensitivity is a global problem which precludes full inclusion in the public sector	Gain deeper knowledge about fragrance sensitivity issues. This falls between environmental design and human behavior. Revisit for further discussion and possible policy development.	GCPD members and staff
Braille Literacy	Pursue adoption of all policy recommendation to the 90 th Texas Legislature from the Braille Literacy subcommittee	GCPD members and staff
Quarterly Meeting materials accessible format	Dr. Orr asked that all the materials for the quarterly meetings be given to the GCPD members in an accessible format prior to the meeting, to the extent practicable.	Ron Lucey