

Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

SUMMARY MINUTES

February 22, 2023

Laredo College, Ft. McIntosh Campus
Falcon Executive Conference Center
1 West End Washington Street
Laredo, Texas

Meeting Materials Available at:

<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/disabilities/committee-meetings>

Visitors: Dr. Victor Trevino, Mayor of Laredo; Minita Ramirez, President, Laredo College; Erika Martinez, Laredo Blue Ribbon Committee for People with Disabilities; Lidia Fonseca, Program Director Valley Association for Independent Living (VAIL); Ricardo Medina, VAIL; Jennifer Allen; Jay Willis; Tim Morstad, AARP of Texas; Dr. Gerardo Mireles, Mireles Autism and Behavioral Center (MABC)

Members Present

Chair Richard Martinez verified members' presence: Ellen Bauman, Evelyn Cano, Benjamin Willis, Kristie Orr, PhD, and Emma Rudkin attended in person.

Kori Allen, Elyse Lieberman, PhD, Eric Lindsay, Joseph Muniz, and Kris Workman (on Day 2) were in attendance via Zoom.

Staff present: Ron Lucey, Norman Kieke, Matt Dickens, Rebecca Lopez, and Carolyn Saathoff

Absent Kris Workman Day 1

ExOfficio Representatives present

In person: Claudia Peden, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

Cheryl Gomez, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Virtual:

Eva Storey, Texas State Independent Living Council (TSILC)

Marsha Godeaux, Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR)

Kristin McGuire, Texas Education Agency (TEA)

Clair Benitez, Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)

1. Call to Order/Roll Call/Introductions

At 8:36 a.m. Chair Richard Martinez called the meeting to order and thanked the Laredo Community College for sharing their facility with the Committee.

Dr. Trevino, the Mayor of Laredo welcomed the committee. As a practicing physician for over 36 years and now Mayor of Laredo, he is committed to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and create opportunities with the underserved community. He described his mission, with the City of Laredo Health Department and the Blue-Ribbon Committee, to provide support and resources in updating policies in areas of non-visual disabilities, such as learning disabilities, veterans' issues, accessibility, communication, education, health, housing, recreation, transportation, and work force. He looks forward to working on all these areas for the betterment of the Laredo Community.

2. Approval of Summary Minutes for October 7-8, 2022

A motion was made for a voice vote by Richard Martinez, Chair. There were seven "yay" votes made by in person committee members and three "yay" votes by members attending virtually. The minutes were approved.

3. Public Comment (Written and Verbal)

Alice Bleeker: Speaking on behalf of her 11-year-old granddaughter with Type 1 diabetes, Ms. Bleeker described her granddaughter's struggle for a free appropriate public education. She said the lack of education & training about Type 1 diabetes has led to an unsafe environment at school. Inconsistency with nurse monitoring, miscommunication and out of control blood sugar has resulted in an anxiety issue for her granddaughter. Resulting issues include truancy, dismissal from school, incomplete courses, and she is three grade levels behind. She states the lack of nursing staff who perform diabetic care at school and disallowing access to her granddaughter's rescue medicine has made school unsafe. Ms. Bleeker is trying to help her granddaughter return to school and facilitate a safe environment.

Kristin McGuire, TEA ExOfficio Member, responded on Zoom (limited audio clarity) that she put resources in the chat and offered availability to discuss further. Technical issues with Zoom audio interrupted Ms. McGuire's comments.

Committee member Ellen Bauman highlighted the early dismissal issue and frequency around the schools in Texas and addressed the need to educate

school staff. Ms. Bauman said the problem is likely due to lack of training and lack of staffing.

Committee member Evelyn Cano reviewed the issue of a substitute nurse lacking proper training. She said educators are responsible for following the IEP and health care plans with emergency plans to support students in those times. The educators need to make substitutes aware of any students with disability and instructions for follow up. She wants to see what TEA has for the nurses working in schools. Ms. Cano assured Ms. Bleeker that this problem in the schools is a priority for the Committee.

Public Comment Mr. Rob House, Great-grandfather also spoke about the lack of responsibility in the schools toward helping manage diabetes type 1 appropriately. He stated that the compassion is there at the school, but the lack of resources make stress on the system worse.

Public Comment Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent 2 Parent. Ms. Litzinger commented that she is going to meet with the DeafBlind Multi-Disability Association of Texas (DBMAT) at the Capitol. Interveners pay rates were raised but not matched by the Medicaid waiver cap. Two years have gone by with DeafBlind clients having to greatly reduce the work hours to pay Interveners a fair wage. There is a strong need to raise the cap of these waivers. Ms. Litzinger asked for support and prayer for the words today to make a difference.

Public Comment Cynthia Rojas: Ms. Rojas, is a parent of a second grader with Type 1 diabetes in Grand Prairie. She said at school, the doctor's orders are not being followed. She said her student has a right to self-treat in class. He had been self-treating then a new school nurse joined and ended the practice. The nurse has ignored the doctor's orders and the school administrator said their district policies are different and cannot follow the doctor's orders. The Section 504 meetings have been pressure focused in gaining Ms. Rojas signatures, resulting in intimidation. She said nobody is enforcing American Diabetes protocols.

Committee member Elyse Lieberman asked Cynthia if the school has shared how to file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights. Section 504 has oversight for compliance. Elyse will put the contact information in the chat. Kori Allen put the link in the chat and stated the phone number OCR Hotline 800-421-3481.

Email comments Read by Evelyn Cano:

Public Comment Chris White – Ms. White stated special education students are disproportionately assigned disciplinary placements and removals from their non-disabled peers. These removals are required to be reported to the Texas Education Agency and then to federal government through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). In-School Suspensions (ISS) in many schools have become Smart ISS, which is supposed to provide special education services as specified in their Individual Education Program (IEP), instruction to allow students with disabilities to progress in the general curriculum, and access to their non-disabled peers. If the three criteria are met, Smart ISS does not count as a removal from the receive Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities.

Ms. White stated Smart ISS is misinterpreted by administration and as such, has not been reported into PEIMS as they do not count as a removal. Resulting issues are a disservice to students who are already academically impacted by their disabilities. Time out from instruction is detrimental and increases risk for academic failure, high school dropout and decreased post-secondary opportunities. Additionally, data can be inaccurate and adversely affect procedural safeguards and due process protections afforded to them under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to FAPE in the least restrictive environment.

Committee Member Elyse Lieberman commented about recent legal guidance through special education attorneys that if districts provide Smart ISS to students with disabilities, then those removals do not count. The requirements are the student must receive the services specified in their IEP, access to non-disabled peers, need to be able to make progress in the general education curriculum while in ISS. Then those days should not count against removal time. Students in Special Education can be removed from IEP services up to 10 days and not receive their services before there is a conflict. After the 10 days the school district owes them make up or compensatory services. Confusion is due to attorneys' interpretation differing from school administrators' interpretation of Smart ISS. As a result, incorrect data has been entered into the State Information Management System and the data is inaccurate. This missing data has resulted in students missing instruction, placed out of specified IEP services, missing the procedural safeguards that protect students with disabilities against having excessive discipline.

Public Comment Nancy Sansom, Lewisville Senior Living Challenges Coalition: Ms. Sansom addressed their statement: The issue of improving affordable housing for Seniors and multi-generational families is causing a sociological dislocation for these groups in Denton County, the state of Texas, and the nation. Ms. Sansom said seniors and multi-generational families are experiencing cascading and fearful effects causing chaos; skyrocketing rents are bringing despair among these middle-income, low-income, and fixed-income groups. People are living in fear of losing their primary residences in part due to HUD, TDHCA and Real Page Software Algorithms corporation that have caused this massive life upheaval. State Senators are working to redefine the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHC) annual median income rent charts. The rent charts need to reflect realistic incomes of all Texans not just those with high incomes that highly skew the annual income rates. Real Pages Algorithms Software in Richardson, Texas is working with rental/lease property owners to change rental rates based on software algorithms across Texas, United States, Europe, and Asia. Co-jointly, this corporation holds 36 million apartments units under this umbrella. The Lewisville Senior Living Challenges Coalition believes this corporation is bringing the downfall to our nation's rental market and encourages the FTC and Texas Fair Housing Agency to investigate as they increase investor profits at the risk of dislocating whole populations and monopolizing the rent markets. Ms. Sansom says these anti-trust issues have pushed hundreds of thousands of persons into financial bankruptcy, eviction or worse. She said "We wonder what will happen to the old, frail, people with Disabilities, and multi-generational families. Will they end up on the streets too?"

5. Listening to the Local Disability Community

Laredo Blue Ribbon Committee for People with Disabilities – Erika Martinez, Assistant Director of Operations Health Department

The Committee was created in 2010 and comprised of 12 mayor appointed members who serve as an information resource to the mayor on community related issues for people with disabilities.

Highlights of the Committee include Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on accessible parking and appropriate use, employability, and integration into the workforce; provided sensitivity training for the City of Laredo and private businesses and serves as a resource for all people with disabilities in the community. A work program, in collaboration with TWC and the Health

Department, Summer Earn and Learn, for youth with special needs, is successful and expanding in Laredo. A Family Support Program for children and youth with disabilities serves as a model program for inclusivity. Program areas are transition, community inclusion, and medical home. Additionally, the committee is providing inclusive training for childcare center staff, hearing, and vision screening, and in recreation centers, adaptive aquatics, and multi-sensory and calming rooms. The Office of Emergency Preparedness is working with the Laredo Police and Fire Departments on a first responder registry and a road to recovery plan for children with special needs who've experienced trauma. The "All Kinds of Minds Master Plan" developed with the Autism Coalition will be launched in June focused on inclusion, fairness, equality, and respect.

Valley Association for independent Living, South Texas (VAIL) – Ricardo Medina, Independent Living Program Manager

VAIL is a non-profit, non-residential, community based, cross disability organization providing independent living services. Counties served are Webb, Duval, Zapata, Jim Hogg, STARR, Hidalgo, Cameron. VAIL works to address issues for people experiencing common barriers of communication, physical access, policy, and transportation barriers. A lot of things they advocate for are with medical appointments; for example, with deaf individuals to get an interpreter for the visit. Rural areas have a large need for transportation from all seven counties. Approximately 80% of VAIL staff have a disability. VAIL also provides transition services for school, work, or residential changes. Overall, VAIL is a comprehensive program that aims to be a bridge that encourages understanding and respect and cooperation which benefits the whole community.

Disability Advisory Committee for Emergency Communication and Disaster Preparedness with Hidalgo County AND Perceptions of Persons with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness – Dr. Lidia Fonseca, VAIL

Dr. Fonseca presented her report on the Committee which stemmed from the disability issues forum in Hidalgo County. It was for political candidates running for office and a great opportunity to spark interest. She asked questions of the candidates about how they planned to meet the needs of people with disabilities in emergency situations. The first focus area was emergency communications which identified barriers disability populations face pre disaster, during, and post disaster. One result was an inclusive website toolbar for emergency communication for many different disabilities.

VAIL has developed, with the Public Health Department, the South Texas All Hazards education conference and training for first responders. It is the largest in the U.S. and free, so any first responders from any state can attend. There will be a Deaf Track (a 4-hour time track) at this conference. First responders will be trained by people from the Deaf community specifically on how to meet their needs on how to respond to disasters with an opportunity to provide feedback to the trainers which will be more helpful.

Another vital goal is revising the Active Shooter Training to be more inclusive and practical. This is a nationwide movement. Dr. Fonseca presented research data specific to Texans with Disabilities perception of their readiness to respond to a disaster. In the U.S., people with disabilities are two to four times more likely to die or get a critical injury from a disaster than someone without a disability. This research provided a measure of perceived readiness of people with Disabilities which now prompts the questions to be addressed in the South Texas All Hazards Conference.

Question from Eva Storey, Executive Director, SILC – “How large was your outreach?”

Dr. Fonseca said it was statewide and people served through Centers for Independent Living and Spanish speaking due to being in South Texas.

Ms. Storey asked about school safety and school shootings. Dr. Fonseca said the town hall discussion on this topic just started one month ago and they are gathering feedback. The research team will make a standard protocol poster in a simple design in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language (ASL) with still images and a QR code for a video. This will be for schools to use in training students and school staff.

Pete Salazar, Public Policy Specialist for Texas State Independent Living Council, recommended after school training support for safety in an active shooter situation.

Committee member Elyse Lieberman asked about the posters including visual images only for non-readers and/or non-verbal students. Dr. Fonseca confirmed that yes this is in the plan.

6. Reports from Exofficio Agency Representatives

Texas State Independent Living Council (SILC) Eva Storey, ExOfficio Member, reported on the transitions with the agency. New lead staff,

financial, project specialists and Governor appointed council members. Their mission is to assist Texans with disabilities to live independently as they choose. Dana McGrath, HHSC and three were appointed to the Council. SILC is tasked with working with 27 Centers for Independent Living to draft a three-year state plan. Texas SILC is working on a grant project to increase funding options. The projects include a Public Health Workforce Plan for accessibility to COVID immunizations, Peer Support Project for Texans with IDD, system advocacy, self-advocacy, voting rights, and disability rights. Additionally, the Texas SILC and Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TASA) are working collaboratively to increase support for survivors of sexual assault.

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Agency Report

Cheryl Gomez, Exofficio Member

Ms. Gomez reported that Key Personnel Organizational Changes occurred in January 2023. Recently appointed DFPS Commissioner, Stephanie Muth, added new staff Jennifer Sims, Deputy Commissioner, and Trina Ita, Chief Strategist for Behavioral Health, Marta Talbert, is now Acting Associate Commissioner Child Protective Investigations. The focus is to increase access to evidence-based solutions and maximize funding for children and adults in care and who we serve for APS.

Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Agency Report

Claudia Peden, Exofficio Member

In the Executive Summary, in January 2023, we welcomed Alberto Trevino, as the new Commissioner Representing Labor. In November 2022, the Vocational Rehabilitation Division, welcomed new Manager for the Business Enterprises of Texas Programs (BET), Jim Debose. BET is a federally sponsored state administered program that helps Texans who are Blind or Visually Impaired to set up businesses managing food vending facilities on state and federal properties.

Highlights from the report on the Vocational Rehabilitation Division Legislative Policy and Program Initiative are that HHSC is working with TWC VR to implement some legislation that was passed in the 87th Texas Legislature. In the report you will find updates on Senate Bill 50 and Senate Bill 1917.

In Policy and Procedures update, in February, the VR Division did a comprehensive review basic standards in the VR Standards for Providers Manual Chapter 3. This was in response to feedback from the public, The

Rehabilitation Council of Texas, and providers. The goal was to streamline the chapter's content and reduce some of the burden of paperwork for providers providing services to TWC VR customers.

Report on new or significant initiatives relating to disability programs. TWC is having a forum to unite the workforce boards and VR staff to give information and guidance for Summer Earn and Learn 2023.

The *Fostering Transition* initiative is an ongoing statewide effort to increase engagement and successful outcomes for youth in the foster care system. 85 individuals have been referred to this initiative. There will be a conference for VR Counselors in April in San Marcos to give instruction about streamlining these services and what happens after school graduation for these customers.

The VR Outreach has a work group compiling brochures, flyers, and informational handouts for a VR toolkit and VR orientation video expected to release in April 2023. At the end of FY 2023 Quarter 1, there were 2232 VR adult and youth customers referred to participate in work-based learning opportunities including the VR's skill training to employment projects (STEP). STEP provides training focused on job readiness and acquisition of work skills needed to gain employment with participating employers. As of February 2023, we have 56 customers who have completed the STEP cohort.

Committee member Evelyn Cano commented that the Disability Rights Texas (DRTX) information from cases could be useful in connecting the Fostering Transition Initiative to help increase successful outcomes.

Committee member Ellen Bauman commented that in addition to training the VR counselors, getting the teachers and transition specialists in the school aware of the transition program could be so helpful to 18-year-old foster kids. Texas has good programs that are considered "best kept secrets."

Ms. Bauman commented on the presentation at the TWC Workforce conference by a director at TWC and Microsoft about avatars representing us at meetings. AI and robots going around doing tasks in different industries is a concern over loss of jobs to individuals with IDD.

Texas Education Agency (TEA)– Agency Report

Kristin McGuire, Exofficio Member

The state's growth has increased the number of students identifying with Special Education and the demand for overhaul and restructuring the plan to

refresh all special education endeavors. Texas has identified an additional 106,000 students in the past four years making up nearly half the national growth in special education (218,492 national growth). In 2022, complaints hit an all-time high at 541. Ms. McGuire stated that currently in 2023, we have surpassed that number. As of September 2022, the statute of Limitations is now two school years for TEA Complaints. The mission for TEA Refresh is "Every Child Prepared for Success in College, Career, or Military." Key actions are Support Educators, Ready Students, Rigorous Engagement, Aligned Systems, Actionable Goal Setting. The Special Education Funding Commission wrapped up in December 2022 and made the decision to make a transition to an intensity-based funding system from the current placement model. Recommendations also include grants to attract and retain special education professionals.

Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Agency Report

Clair Benitez, Exofficio Member

The first thing to highlight is the public health emergency and ending of continuous Medicaid coverage. In May 2023 emergency aid ends. She reminded all that in HHSC accounts, contact information is very important for Medicaid continuity. Next, Ms. Benitez highlighted the No Wrong Door Governance Grant Project, a two-year grant, which entails listening sessions, research, and will culminate in a strategic working plan to identify barriers and improve oversight of what we consider to be those doors. These listening sessions will be held in Ft. Worth in March. Aging, Disability, and Veteran service coordinators are leading the project. HHSC announced free webinars coming for *Brain Injury Awareness Month* in March 2023.

Ms. Benitez announced a new service called individual skills and socialization program, a new Medicaid Waiver program that will replace Day Habilitation, HCS Texas Home Living, and Deaf-Blind multiple disability programs. Providers must obtain and be issued a license. This new Individual Skills and Socialization Service will officially replace Day Habilitation March 1, 2023. To ensure continuity of care, HHSC will authorize the new ISS for all waiver members who are currently receiving Day Habilitation to meet with their providers to confirm services.

7. Policy Recommendation Development based on Committee's Issue Areas (Access, Communications, Education, Employment, Emergency Preparedness, Health, Housing, Recreation, Transportation).

a. Collecting Disability Stats in Texas – Kristie Avalos, Accessology, President and CEO

Ms. Avalos presented on a disability statistics model from the City of Philadelphia that presents disability statistics through GIS maps by each city zip code. If the GCPD would utilize this model, we would need to scale it to the entire state which would require substantially more resources.

Philadelphia created a map of their jurisdiction, broke into sections based on zip codes, and pulled together council districts, age, race, and Hispanic origin as factors. Types of disabilities, percentage of disabilities per zip code, and the major neighborhoods. This helped to understand who they were planning for. Data points included the characteristics of people with disabilities among the total population, by age, race, Hispanic origin, and other disability type characteristics. These included people with hearing impairments, visual impairments, cognitive impairments, mobility impairments, and people who had difficulty living independently. The city created an interactive map which is useful for learning all the information that was collected about Philadelphia. Ms. Avalos proposed that Texas develop a collaborative statewide effort to create a similar disability statistics map and website. The City of Dallas ADA Coordinator expressed interest in being a pilot for this effort. Ms. Avalos proposed we start with Dallas as a pilot project to develop the methodology and tool that will work for everyone across Texas. Ms. Avalos recommended the following steps to start the project: interview the Mayor's Committee in Philadelphia, develop our team and methodology, identify milestones and timeline, contact all the Disability organizations across the state or in the pilot area, and hold an informational virtual meeting. This would need to be a multi-year project. The GCPD expressed support for partnering with Ms. Avalos on this project. Ms. Avalos added that the emergency management piece is enormously important to include for Texas.

b. Backup Power Solutions During Disasters for Texans with Power Dependent DME Tim Morstad, AARP of Texas

Mr. Morstad stated that backup power is becoming more essential not just for nursing facilities but also people in their homes who rely on durable medical equipment. He said, "We've got a couple of trends colliding - an increasing population and increasing frequency of natural disasters." The frequency and instability of our electric grid in Texas resulting in ice storm devastation and loss of lives due to loss of power.

This issue has become clear, some great research has been done and good solutions have been proposed and put before our Utility Commission a year ago, but they did not adopt any of them. So, the AARP of Texas is bringing this to the 88th Legislature. Mr. Morstad said trying to get a program up and running in our state is not novel, they're doing this in some other states. We need to take steps to make sure the next outage isn't deadly. To do this, accurately determine which households are in need. One list is the Critical Care and Chronic Condition Registry that the utilities keep. For a household to be on this list, a form must be signed by a doctor that a residential occupant is using an electrically powered device to sustain life. Currently in Texas there are approximately 10,000 households that are under one of these designations. As a state, we ask what we can do to facilitate that there is back up power in these households. A proposed Bill says that "It's the intent of the Legislature for these households to have sustained power during outages for up to 72 – 90 hours post natural disaster." For funding, Mr. Morstad recommended income-based eligibility. The current cost for a high capacity the Lithium ion back up battery is \$3000 - \$5000. Funding could come from a onetime appropriation of the Texas Legislature or a recommendation to build a fee into the electricity rates. Utilities would be paying for the program and the cost of the units would be recouped through the customers' rates. The preference for battery back-up power was discussed as it is safer than gasoline powered generators.

Motion was made by Ellen Bauman to support the policy proposal for back up battery power for DME in Texas homes during natural disasters with power outages. Motion seconded by Kristie Orr. There were seven "yay" votes made by in person Committee Members and three "yay" votes made by virtual attendee Committee Members. Motion approved.

8. Texas Association for the Deaf Policy Priorities for Deaf Texans

Item was cancelled due to the Texas Association for the Deaf not attending our meeting.

9. Executive Director Report and Staff Updates

Ron Lucey thanked current and past members for their policy work that went into the GCPD Biennial Report to the 88th Texas Legislature. Every member of the Texas Legislature received a digital copy. GCPD offers additional copies to stakeholder groups who have related bills before legislative committees. With very few exceptions, all GCPD's policy recommendations were accepted by the Administration. GCPD had 9 areas this session instead of ten, due to not having a Veterans policy recommendation. The

organization of the Report has been modified to be more concise. GCPD has been complimented for the detailed citations provided to back up the recommendations in the report. There are 99 policy recommendations this session. The Bill filing deadline is March 10th. The issue of personal care attendant pay raises is the highest priority for Texans with disabilities this session. The requested wage is a minimum of \$15 per hour. Over 300,000 Texans with long term care needs live in the community, while there are 80,000 living in nursing homes. Ron Lucey said that this is the time for Texans to call elected officials and direct them to contact the GCPD as a resource for answering questions about the policies in the report.

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10. Chair Richard Martinez called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m.

11. Public Comment

Committee member Evelyn Cano read emailed public comments.

Renee Anderson, parent of a medically fragile child with severe disabilities. Their home is fully equipped for her daughter's health care needs, including durable medical equipment. Ms. Anderson described difficulty in finding quality caregivers and home health nursing is unavailable. She said to keep her daughter's care covered, working a job is near impossible. Her home is the safest and most nurturing environment for giving her daughter the best quality of life possible. She recommends that parents be allowed to be trained in nursing care and be employed by their disabled children. This scenario would provide the best care, at home, and minimize instability. The LHA Program recommendation is in the GCPD report in the health section.

Sonia Burns, has a family member with multiple disabilities confined to a behavioral hospital. He has been in and out of programs and institutions for years. He did well in the past but now has been in Austin State Hospital (ASH) 14 years. There is a crisis of Persons with IDD in county jails. One thousand inmates with IDD are incarcerated due to felony assaults. State supported living centers are not accepting these individuals.

Clair Benitez responded to issue of emergency admissions of SSLCs. She indicated that the criteria are based on expected length of time for resolution. Kristie Orr asked Ms. Burns for suggestions on specific policy issues to address the IDD crisis. Discussion of the need for quality data collection and education of law enforcement was noted.

Dorothy Meindok, Disabled Veteran, raised issues over VA hospital (Houston) leadership headquarters location in Mississippi not Texas. This makes it far removed from oversight by legal officials. This frustrates ability for veterans, families, medical advocates to address local concerns for veteran constituents. She wants to make The Governor aware and bring it back to Texas for more close oversight and access. Second, there is a pattern of predatory debt collection practices relating to the cause of veteran suicide. This in part, is due to misunderstanding of the Federal Laws surrounding medical bills, creditors are not allowed to collect but do so anyway. Ms. Meindok recommends policy to bar predatory collection practices.

12. Policy Recommendation Development based on Committee's Issue

Areas (Access, Communications, Education, Employment, Emergency Preparedness, Health, Housing, Transportation)

a. Promoting the Texas Driving with a Disability Initiative in Texas Public Schools - Jennifer Allen.

Ms. Allen presented on proposed updates to the Texas Driving with Disability initiative hosted by the GCPD. Recommendations were to: Amend Texas Education Code to require that parents/guardians of public-school transition age students and their student with a communication disability as defined by the Texas Department of Public Safety who are served by special education or received education accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act be provided information on the Texas Driving with Disability Initiative beginning at age 16 but no later than their senior year of high school or age 21.

Include information about the Texas Driving with Disability initiative in high school transportation curriculum.

A motion was made by Elyse Lieberman to support the policy recommendation. Ben Willis seconded the motion. There were 11 "yay" votes made by Committee Members. Motion approved.

b. Disparity of Services for Individuals with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities in Laredo - Dr. Gerardo Mireles, Licensed Psychologist, Mireles Autism and Behavioral Center (MABC) Dr. Mireles' presentation highlighted the high need for all types of behavioral health and diagnostic services in Laredo. The resources in the Rio Grande Valley are stronger than in Laredo so research was conducted to develop a plan for expansion of services.

The main clinic in McAllen conducts general psychological evaluations to assess for Autism, Learning Disabilities, ADHD. Additionally, MABC

performs evaluations for the Laredo Unified School District, Juvenile Justice Center, Texas Workforce Commission, and Social Security Disability Determination. The need is high, there is a 3 month wait list for MABC evaluation services. The Psychological Evaluations are the beginning of treatment and can open the door for services. The most underserved areas in Texas are in Webb County, with only 12 Licensed Psychologists for a total population of 267,945. There are 1 in 44 children diagnosed with Autism. Another focus is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Therapy which can help with increased language and communication skills, improve attention, focus, social skills, memory, and academics, and decrease problem behaviors. MABC currently travels to Laredo to provide the evaluation services and they are working on how to increase the services in the community. Key recommendations Dr. Mireles stated are to develop training programs at local sites, meet with community leaders (Council Member Alyssa Cigarroa and State Senator Judith Zaffirini), and provide space for client interviews and testing. He said DDS and TWC could provide space to examiners and be reimbursed for travel and lodging. These are all useful to help decrease the wait time for people with disabilities to receive these services.

Discussion of New Policy Recommendations

1. Elyse Lieberman – Amend Texas Education Code Sec.25.0875 to clarify the prohibited use of informal, undocumented suspensions and certain releases of students with disabilities to parents after school-initiated communication. The incorrect coding of ISS in the PEAMS has resulted in increased disproportionality of disciplinary removals thereby hindering services and instruction to students with disabilities, making them lag farther behind academically. The lack of proper documentation does not absolve the schools from accountability. A motion was made by Kristie Orr to determine if this is an Agency Rule or Texas Administrative Code. The Motion was seconded by Richard Martinez. A roll call vote was conducted. There were 10 approval votes made by Committee Members.
2. Evelyn Cano made a motion to form a subcommittee for a working group to study the care of students with Diabetes. Elyse Lieberman and Ben Willis were appointed as subcommittee members by co-Chair Bauman. This subcommittee will be called the Diabetes Public Education Subcommittee.

3. Richard Martinez recommended creation of a Transportation subcommittee. Ron Lucey suggested Richard to Chair the Transportation Committee. Eric Lindsay volunteered to be on this committee.
4. The committee recommended Criminal Justice be added to our 10 issue areas by moving Recreation into the Access area. A motion was made by Eric Lindsay to move forward with this recommendation. Seconded by Ben Willis. There were 11 "yay" votes made by Committee Members. Motion approved.
5. Committee Co-Chair Bauman moved that Ron Lucey introduce the idea of adding a Criminal Justice ExOfficio Member to OOG Administration.
6. Elyse Lieberman identified Dr. Gaye Lang, TEA, as the one expert in IDD incarceration issues in the State of Texas in Restorative Practices and suggested the GCPD invite her to make a presentation at a future meeting.
7. Motion by Evelyn Cano to inquire with TWC and HHSC on evaluation space for Psychologists to travel to conduct evaluations. Consider policy recommendation to reimburse travel. Seconded by Kristie Orr. Ten Committee Members voted yay. Motion approved.\

Follow Up

Member Eric Lindsay's recommendation for future discussion of Veteran suicide in next meeting agenda.

Future Meeting: May or June 2023

There was discussion about holding meetings in areas of Texas we have not visited in recent years. Abilene and Tyler were the top choices. An Executive decision was made by Madame Vice Chair Bauman to have the meeting in Tyler. There were 11 "yay" votes made by Committee Members.

Having completed all agenda items, the meeting was adjourned by Ellen Bauman, Vice Chair at 1:00 p.m.

Submitted by Carolyn Saathoff, Recorder