

# AVIT Minutes– December 3, 2020

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## In attendance:

Chris Tabb, TAER O&M  
Cyril Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Dr. Heather Munro, SFASU  
Dr. Rona Pogrund, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI), TAER  
Dr. Michael Munro, ESC 4  
Juanita Barker, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)  
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC Blind Children's Program  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Kathi Garza, TVI  
Laura Hampton, TVI  
Nicholas Trotter, TEA VI Program Administrator  
Stephanie Walker, TSSN, ESC 11  
Susie Welch, DBMAT  
Peggy Garrett, TX ACB  
Matt Daw, Sight Savers  
Grace Hammack  
Tracie Quinn  
Norma Crosby, NFB TX  
Linda Jordan, TSVI  
DJ Dean, SFASU

*Note: there is an acronym list at the end for help in following these notes!*

## Cyril Miller called the meeting to order on ZOOM at 10:05 a.m.

Cyril and Rona shared that AVIT began in 1992 and was based on an advocacy model from California. AVIT is a private non-profit organization of organizations, which allows members to step outside their official roles. We are still unaware of how/where the TX Legislature will meet in January and how hearings will be handled, but we know the session will begin on January 12th! For AVIT to act on a piece of legislation, a member must bring an issue to our attention and participating organizations vote unanimously to support the proposed action (letter writing, etc.) Associate members can also support legislation by acting on their own or within our organizations when/ if allowed.

## Approval of minutes

Chris Tabb moved to approve the draft minutes sent as of this morning; the motion was seconded by Dr. Rona Pogrund. The September 2020 meeting minutes were approved.

## Treasurer's Report

Treasurer's report unavailable for this meeting and will be sent via email separately.

## New Business

### **Legislative Issues**

Cyral researched disability specific issues...there are a number of bills in which that our membership may be interested being suggested by other disability organizations. One such group is the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, who have a legislative priority platform on their website at <https://www.txdisabilities.org/advocacy>.

#### ACBT – Peggy Garrett

Accessible voting was a big issue this year in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of individuals voted by mail, but anyone who wanted to complete their own ballot had to vote in person. Due to underlying health issues, many people didn't want to go out at all. Two resolutions were passed by ACBT to increase the number of people involved in the "Older Individuals who are Blind" (OIB) program in an effort to provide more resources and services to assist those losing their sight at an older age.

#### NFBTX – Norma Crosby

Voting rights is an issue that will be brought to the legislature. NFBTX has been involved in a lawsuit with the state of TX because current systems for voting by mail take away the right to a private/ independent ballot. In order for a blind person to vote by mail, they have to use a sighted assistant. Many with disabilities have underlying health issues, so this was a big concern this year. Bill hasn't been filed yet, but NFBTX has examples from other states they plan to replicate in part. A second legislative issue concerns blind parents and parental rights being taken away due to blindness alone. NFBTX is seeking passage of a bill that says children cannot be taken from a parent merely due to a parent's disability. A Colorado law will be utilized as an example.

#### Chris Tabb, COMS

Chris asked about the possibility of relaxing certification requirements for COMS due to COVID-19 and the lack of professionals currently entering the field. Nicholas Trotter offered to work with Chris to determine next steps within TEA. Discussion ensued regarding complications with evaluation and liability as an O&M provider.

#### Dr. Poggrund, TTU

There is some confusion in the field about when ECC evaluations must be conducted. They are required by law, but not always included in eligibility considerations. Stephanie Walker, TXSSN, shared they are working on developing training specific to this need. Cyral noted that visual impairment must be determined first, as other students may also require instruction in ECC areas, not due to a visual impairment necessarily. We must first establish ECC needs are based on vision loss. Chris Tabb reminded everyone that the impairment in vision must impact access to education per OSEP guidance. Kate Borg added that it can be a future need, and not just a current need.

## Agency/Organization Updates

### ***TEA, Nicholas Trotter***

Nicholas said TEA does not have a lot happening in specific to visual impairment at this time. The Network working to get products submitted and approved at multiple levels at TEA. The sensory support grant still applies to students who are B/VI, although the language may need to be revised somewhat. There is a conversation in process to add audio description to the Project Restore videos. This is a series of videos that are designed to help schools deal with student trauma due to the COVID pandemic. And, discussions with vendors to create the new test for TDB certification are underway.

### ***TWC, Juanita Barker***

Next week, there will be joint training happening with HHSC. This has been missing since the change from a combined agency and it is very positive that they are able to build new connections. Expanding older individuals who are blind program with a new help line which is available at 512-936-3388.

### ***HHSC BCP, Karissa Sanchez***

Karissa shared this message from Lauren Cox, Blind Children's Program Manager:

The services we provide to children and families are to increase their overall independence and success. We support families throughout their journey until they feel confident and have the skills to tackle their challenges on their own. We are always available to assist families when a need arises and can provide follow up services through our post closure process.

Post closure services are in place to ensure families can receive quick follow up services from BCP that can get them back to stability and ensure continued independence in 6 months or less.

BCP is also working on providing Future's Planning 101 trainings.

- They are a 5-part series for BCP families on future's planning facilitated by the ARC.
- The training is being offered virtually and at varied times (such as evenings and weekends) to accommodate our working families and their busy schedules.
- They are also offered in English and Spanish

BCP hosted a virtual camp for children with dual sensory loss in October and will offer again virtually in late Spring.

Lastly, BCP is offering skills-based trainings also virtually with the goal of increasing child or family skills in a specific area and allow families to network.

As always, we continue to open to partnerships both on the statewide and local level.

### **Within our office we are planning a few Awareness month activities**

The Office of Disability Prevention for Children/Office of Independent Services will be hosting webinars throughout the month of March to promote National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) and planning several educational and public awareness activities.

Also, in March is the annual Texas Brain Injury Conference and annual Brain Injury Awareness Month Celebration. The event will recognize Brain Injury Awareness Month, celebrate the achievements of people living with a brain injury, and provide awareness and education on brain injury occurrence and treatment.

They will be sure to share the activities schedule when they are available.

### **An update on the agency's Legislative Appropriations Request and the upcoming legislative session.**

The agency LAR is posted on the HHS webpage. You can find it under the about HHS tab then click on the Budget and Planning section and scroll to the middle of the page to the section titled **Legislative Appropriations Request** and click on the link titled 2022-23 LAR. <https://hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/about-hhs/budget-planning/lar/hhsc-legislative-appropriations-request-2022-2023.pdf>

Fortunately for BCP and the BEST program, the agency requested level funding for both programs. Neither program was reduced nor recommended reductions in staff/FTEs. As you are all aware, Texas is approaching a deficit going into the 87<sup>th</sup> legislative session. It is not as dire as initially predicted by the Comptroller's office, but the legislative members will be tasked with balancing a budget going into session with fewer dollars than last session.

We will be closely monitoring the legislative process as always and will keep you apprised of any impacts as they are identified throughout the process, as the first day of session approaches which commences on Tuesday, January 12<sup>th</sup>.

You are encouraged to browse the HHSC website for additional COVID-19 resources, upcoming legislative presentations, and reports by signing up for GovDelivery if you have not already done so which can be found in the top right corner of the HHSC webpage and by clicking subscribe. You can also reach out to me directly anytime with questions or assistance at my email address: [Karissa.sanchez@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:Karissa.sanchez@hhs.texas.gov)

Also, all of the HHS email addresses changed to hhs.texas.gov from hhsc.state.tx.us. For example, Lauren's email is now [Lauren.cox@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:Lauren.cox@hhs.texas.gov). We encourage you to update your email addresses for all HHS staff to the new exchange. If not, we will still receive your communications until the end of next year.

Those are all the updates I have to share today, we appreciate your support and collaboration and I'd like to wish all of you a Happy Holiday season. Thank you.

***TSBVI, Emily Coleman and Kate Borg***

TSBVI also submitted their Legislative Appropriations Request this fall. Every state agency was asked to reduce their base budget by 5%, so our first exceptional items request was getting that money reinstated. Following that, we requested pay increases for our classified employees as our second priority. In addition, we requested funding for IT infrastructure, security, and our website. TSBVI currently has 64% of students on campus and has begun utilizing the rapid COVID tests for students from areas of higher community spread. Teachers are doing an exceptional job during a very difficult year.

The [Short Term Programs](#) continues virtually and are hosting a Winter Social this month with about 40 students already signed up! They are receiving an increase in requests for 1-1 assistance this year as distance services continue across the state.

The Outreach Programs remain virtual and travel will be based on CDC recommendations for safe travel, so it isn't allowed yet. [Trainings](#) and [webinars](#) are being provided online. The popular [Coffee Hours](#) that started this past spring are continuing, as are the [Texas Families Together](#) online discussion sessions.

Outreach will be doing cross-training with BCP and hope to do the same with TWC soon. Grateful to the network for support on coaching.

***TAER, Rona Pogrund, President, Michael Munro, Past-President and Chris Tabb, TAER O&M***

The March 25-27 TAER conference, [Building Relationships, Making Connections and Changing Lives](#), will be remote and they are hiring an outside vendor to help put it on. The price will be about \$125. Opportunities for social events will be provided along with vendors and virtual exhibitors. Presentation proposals are due Dec. 18<sup>th</sup>. Award nominations are being gathered and more information can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/TxAER> and the TAER website.

SWOMA conference was held in November and attendance was doubled within the virtual environment. Chris gave kudos to the Outreach media team. A large concern in O&M is addressing the gap in the number of new professionals currently entering the field and each organization has put out statements regarding their stance on interns acquiring needed hours during the pandemic. Stephanie Walker concurred that there will be a gap in the field and that compensatory needs must be addressed post-pandemic.

***Texas University Professionals in VI (TUPVI) - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrund, DJ Dean and Heather Munro***

TTU has 92 students in the VI program and 77 from Texas. There are 51 O&M students and 32 are from Texas. Two PhD students graduated in August, including Dr. Heather Munro. Deadline for new summer applicants for Reach Across Texas is May 1<sup>st</sup> and for the fall it is June 1<sup>st</sup>. TEA is no longer accepting the TX183 exam (That was EBAAE; the braille test is now

only UEB). Students are pushing internship back, which will “slow the pipeline.” Summer placements were almost nonexistent last year and will be a challenge this year.

SFASU has a handful of applicants for their three open positions. In the process of finishing semester with 8 week course offering. Option will happen again in the spring. Grad applications coming in and recruitment is happening. March 1<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for the summer cohort. A handful of students were able to meet the internship requirements, but quite a few will be continuing into spring and summer. Undergraduate courses are remaining hybrid and is working forward. Blindfold simulation training with undergrads was completed this fall and has been approved for spring and summer. Braille and cane club is still a “club” but due to university restrictions events have been limited.

### ***Matt Daw, Sight Savers***

Currently working from home due to COVID. They are still providing equipment for children in San Antonio and Dallas. Equipment was shipped to homes and device training happened virtually. They will be working with the Rio Grande Valley and Houston next.

### ***DBMAT, Susie Welch***

First virtual DBMAT board meeting was in October! Online auction worked out really well in lieu of the golf tournament. The new website is up and running at <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>. They have no legislative issues at this time other than keeping services they already have.

## **Discussion/Announcements**

### NFB Texas

They are currently operating their “BEST” program virtually for students. It is held once a month and supplies are sent out to families for the projects. Intent is to engage children and their families across the state. There is a tuition cost, but they partner with families to ensure finances aren’t an issue. Silver Bells virtual weeklong training will happen again in February for blind adults.

### Hillary Rodriguez, TAPVI

The following is what TAPVI has coming up this month for activities for our families:  
TAPVI Teen Time <http://www.tapvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Festival-of-Colors.pdf>  
TAPVI Cookie Recipe Exchange <http://www.tapvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/TAPVI-Families-2.pdf>

## **Future Meeting Dates:**

The next meeting dates are March 11 and June 10. AVIT meetings are from 10-12. Chris Tabb motioned to adjourn the meeting and Dr. Michael Munro seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:40a.m. by Cyral Miller.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.*

## **A. Acronyms!**

There are a lot of shortcut acronyms used in these notes. Here's a handy cheat sheet:

AVIT - Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans

BCVDDP (or BCP) - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

COMS - Certified orientation and mobility specialist

DB - Deafblind

ESC - Education Service Center

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission

HR - human resources (personnel)

IL - independent living programs

IT - information technology (technology services)

NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

OIB - Older Individuals who are Blind

O&M – orientation and mobility

RCT – Rehabilitation Council of Texas

SFA or SFASU – Stephen F. Austin State University

SSP - Support Service Provider

STP - Short Term Programs at TSBVI

TEA - Texas Education Agency

TSBVI - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TTU – Texas Tech University

TUPVI – Texas University Professors in Visual Impairment

TWC - Texas Workforce Commission

TWS - Texas Workforce Solutions

VR - vocational rehabilitation

WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the legislation that governs much of the vocational rehabilitation moneys from the Federal government