

# AVIT Minutes– March 11, 2021

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## In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Emily Coleman, Secretary  
Dr. Rona Pogrund, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI), TAER  
Juanita Barker, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)  
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC Blind Children's Program  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Kathi Garza, TSVI, TSBVI  
Laura Hampton, TSVI, SFASU Adjunct  
Nicholas Trotter, TEA VI Program Administrator  
Susie Welch, DBMAT  
Matt Daw, Sight Savers  
Linda Jordan, TSVI/ COMS  
DJ Dean, SFASU, COMS/TSVI  
Margarine Beaman, Helping Hands and Austin ACB  
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind  
Dr. Anne Corn, Retired TSVI

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

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

Cyral explained voting when asked by Kate Borg. When formal voting occurs, each organization gets one vote. During meetings, associates can vote individually for minutes, adjournment, etc.

## Approval of minutes

Dr. Rona Pogrund moved to approve the draft minutes as sent that morning; the motion was seconded by Kathi Garza. The December 2020 meeting minutes were approved.

## Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported no deposits or withdrawals since the last meeting. Our balance remains at \$4116.00.

## New Business

## Legislative Issues

An advocacy meeting was held in partnership with CEASD and AERBVI to discuss the Cogswell-Macy Act. More information can be found at [cogswellmacyact.org](http://cogswellmacyact.org). A reintroduction is anticipated during this session of Congress. Years ago, AVIT voted to support Cogswell-Macy and Cyral Miller was asked by AERBVI to confirm our continued support. Emily Coleman expressed agreement that we should continue to support the Act. When asked if there were any concerns about continuing to support the Cogswell-Macy Act, there was no dissent expressed.

Cyral reintroduced the issues regarding accessible voting as shared by ACBT and NFBTX at our last meeting. The Biden-Harris administration issued an executive order that directs the federal government to ensure that federal websites are accessible to individuals with disabilities, and to analyze barriers to voting for people with disabilities. The order can be read at this link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/03/07/executive-order-on-promoting-access-to-voting/>. Cyral requested to be notified if there are any current bills at the state level related to accessible voting. There are many bills related to voting. Note: H.B. No. 4019 does regulate the posting of early mail in ballots on an accessible website and adds a rule that the mail in ballot may be provided by email in PDF format, through a scanned format or by any other method of electronic transmission. This would be a step forward!

TEA released updated “Commissioner of Education Rules” due to legislative changes from the 86<sup>th</sup> session, removing the term “Functional Blindness” from Texas Education Code. These changes will go into effect March 14th. Nicholas Trotter requested that if we run across that language on the TEA website or anywhere else to let him know, so he can get them updated. Nicholas can be reached at: [Nicholas.Trotter@tea.texas.gov](mailto:Nicholas.Trotter@tea.texas.gov).

HB 3287 brings up the SSP program for Deafblind except now instead of support service providers, that position is being called “Co-navigator”, as shared by Juanita Barker. No funding has been tied to the Bill.

Cyral shared a link to “Texas Legislature Online”: <https://capitol.texas.gov/MnuMyTLO.aspx>. At this website you can search legislation that has been introduced by title, subject, sponsor, and follow the history of action on bills. It's also got a bill alert that can help you find out when bills are sent to or from committee.

## Agency/Organization Updates

### **TEA, Nicholas Trotter**

Nicholas discussed that the Teacher of Students who are Deafblind (TDB) certification testing process is underway. A framework has been agreed upon by TEA and Pearson. The Equity Assurance Panel is May 4<sup>th</sup> and the Content Committee is May 6<sup>th</sup>. Nicholas will share the link to the application for those who are interested. Those who participate in the process will be eligible to take the exam, which is not typical practice, but allowed due to the size of our field.

**TWC, Juanita Barker**

Expanding the Older Individuals who are Blind program is a new help line which is available at 512-936-3388. The TWC website at <https://www.twc.texas.gov/> has been updated so you can find disability programs on the home page. Transition services for youth 14 through 21 will offer some summer programs across the state, which are virtual and in-person. STEM initiatives are in-person camps offered across the state. Dr. Pogrud asked whether Criss Cole programs are virtual or in person, and Juanita shared that when they begin in-person programs it will likely start as a day program. They have been providing remote instruction and offerings during the pandemic. Juanita also shared that there are expanded tele-work expansion opportunities for their clients as a result of the general increase in remote work during this time.

**HHSC BCP, Karissa Sanchez (notes provided by BCP)**

BCP is continuing to provide services to children and families 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. All services are being provided virtually.

BCP is presenting at Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) Conference scheduled for March 25-27 on our Futures Planning series with the Arc of Texas. We are excited to showcase this training opportunity for families and our partnership with the Arc. More info at: <http://www.txaer.org/conference.html>

BCP's Futures Planning 101 trainings (facilitated by the Arc) are continuing:

- To date, we have had 70 families start the series.
- 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.
- Training topics: person-centered planning, goal-setting, financial planning, decision-making (including guardianship and alternatives to guardianship) and building community for the future

BCP will host a virtual camp for children with dual sensory loss April 23-24 with virtual parent chats on April 18th and 29th, and Sibshop on April 25th. Families from all over the state will participate virtually in typical camp activities such as a campfire, cooking, crafts, sensory activities and a family dance intentionally designed to be fun and help children with combined vision and hearing loss develop skills in a variety of critical areas. Targeted skill areas included sensory efficiency, literacy, communication, socialization, and independent living skills.

- If you have questions or know of a family who may want to attend, please reach out to Sarah Karmacharya at [Sarah.Karmacharya@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:Sarah.Karmacharya@hhs.texas.gov).

BCP continues to offer skills-based trainings virtually with the goal of increasing child or family skills in a specific area and allow families to network. As always, we continue to be open to partnerships both on the statewide and local level.

BCP's quarterly parent newsletter, Beyond Vision, will come out in April focusing on Futures Planning. If you have topics you'd wish to include that would be helpful for our parents, please reach out to Cassondra Glausier (Field Manager) at [cassondra.glausier@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:cassondra.glausier@hhs.texas.gov)

Referrals and inquiries can be made to the BCP program via the program email box at [blindchildrensprogram@hsc.texas.gov](mailto:blindchildrensprogram@hsc.texas.gov).

### **Just a reminder from last quarter's update;**

Within our office we are conducting two Awareness month activities in March that offer CEUs for attending in continuing medical education, nursing education, and for the following licensures: social work, certified public health and health education specialists, LCDC, marriage and family therapies, professional counselors, psychologists and nursing facility administrators.

The Office of Disability Prevention for Children is hosting a conference every Tuesday this month to promote National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM). Two hours of Continued Education credits/contact hours are available daily during this conference. A total of eight credits/contact hours will be awarded to those attending all four days.

Here is the registration link for the remaining three days of virtual sessions: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/TXHHSC/bulletins/2b57549>

Also, in recognition of Brain Injury Awareness Month in March, the Texas Brain Injury Programs at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission is hosting a FREE virtual Brain Injury Conference and webinar series every Wednesday in March. The conference dates are March 25-26, 2021. The theme is "Bridging Silos: Connecting Systems of Care with a Person-Centered Approach."

3 hours of continuing education credits/contact hours are available during the conference. A total of 6 credits/contact hours will be awarded to those attending both days. Also 1 hour of continuing education credits per webinar will also be offered.

### **Shifting to the 87<sup>th</sup> legislative session:**

SB1 and HB1 are posted on the Texas Legislature Online. The Blind Children's Program and the BEST program were provided with level funding in both versions.

As always, we are closely monitoring the legislative process and will keep you apprised of any program impacts as they are identified throughout the process. The last day for bill filing is Friday March 12<sup>th</sup>.

I also encourage you to continue to browse the HHSC website for 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)

Many of you are familiar with the Centers for Independent Living. HHSC contracts with several of the CILs to provide independent living services such as counseling to help with adjusting to a disability, orientation and mobility to learn how to navigate without vision, assistive technology and vehicle modifications. These are just a few examples of services CILs can provide through the ILS program.

Recently we had two provider changes. The region in the Waco area transitioned from the Heart of Central Texas CIL to the San Antonio CIL, SAILS. Those counties include Bell, Bosque, Coryell, Falls, Hamilton, Hill, Limestone, McLennan, Mills and Navarro.

Also, the Beaumont area transitioned from RISE Center for Independent Living to Coalition for Barrier Free Living/Houston Center for Independent Living. Those counties that transitioned to HCIL are: Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton and Orange.

The most current ILS program information and the CILS service coverage areas can be found on the HHSC website at: <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/independent-living-services>

Those are all the updates I have to share today, we appreciate your partnership and thank you for inviting HHSC Office of Independence Services to participate in your meetings and share updates with you our valued partners. Thank you.

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

TSBVI has already presented at the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Subcommittees on our programs and exceptional items. Every state agency was asked to reduce their base budget by 5%. Some of our 5% was already reinstated due to connection to our on-campus programs, but we are still asking for restoration of summer school funding. 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 about 70% of students on campus and more will be returning after Spring Break. After this week, 300 of our employees will have received at least partial vaccination and over 120 are fully vaccinated. We're looking forward to planning for spring events like prom and graduation, which will likely be held online and in-person.

The [Short Term Programs](#) is planning for Summer Programs. They have over 150 applications and 77 slots currently available. They will be providing online and in-person opportunities and are looking at expanding student slots if possible. The application deadline is March 12<sup>th</sup>.

The Texas Deafblind Education Symposium has been very successful this month with almost 1000 registrants from across Texas, the US, Canada, Central and South American as well as other countries across the globe. The VI Registration and DB Child Count both closed out in February and data is being sorted. There was a decrease of registered students across all categories similar to statewide student number decreases. There was a significant drop in birth – 3, and an increase in Section 504 students. 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.

***East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Ann Phillips***

A new contract with the Air Force for assistive technology trainings for those who are blind has been started. The Air Force has committed to hiring four visually impaired employees per quarter.

***TAER, Dr. Rona Pogrund, President***

The March 25-27 TAER conference, Building Relationships, Making Connections and Changing Lives, will be remote. There will be a silent auction, door prizes, exhibitors, etc. We have a lot of out-of-state attendance due to the format. There are over 400 people registered. Allied Independence is managing the logistics. Registration is open through March 19<sup>th</sup>.

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

TTU is halfway through their spring semester. There will be face-to-face weekends this spring, including the assistive technology weekend in April. Another O&M weekend will be held in the summer. They have about 100 students in the VI program although fewer applicants this spring. There are 65 in the O&M program, including some from out of state. The Education Department programs are going through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAPE) accreditation process utilizing CEC standards. Reviewers are working virtually. Nine doctoral students in VI are enrolled currently, with 3 more starting in the fall, including a couple in O&M. The Reach Across Texas deadline is May 1<sup>st</sup> for summer and June 1<sup>st</sup> for fall. Dr. Nora Griffin-Shirley won the CEC DVIDB Distinguished Service Award!

SFASU is hiring a program assistant. Interview process is underway for full- and part-time positions. Summer applications are being reviewed for TVI and O&M. They will be continuing blindfold classes in person. Placement sites for interns have been challenging, but it appears everyone will be placed. Braille and Cane Club still exists, but has been unable to meet on campus at this time.

***Matt Daw, Sight Savers***

Currently working from home due to COVID. Funding is available for TX Hill Country and Dallas sites. Funding available in eight counties for CCTVs. Equipment was shipped to homes and device training happened virtually.

***DBMAT, Susie Welch***

Family conference planning is happening for the fall. They will be holding it virtually again. The website is up and running at <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>.

***Margarine, ACB***

Margarine noted that the new twenty-dollar bill is going to be a reduced size for easier tactile recognition.

## Discussion/Announcements

Dr. Anne Corn shared that she felt there are many accessibility issues for those trying to access vaccines. The American Foundation for the Blind is interviewing individuals about their experiences and if interested in sharing your story, please contact Dr. Penny Rosenblum at [prosenblum@afb.org](mailto:prosenblum@afb.org).

## Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date is June 10 on Zoom. AVIT meetings are from 10-12. Emily Coleman motioned to adjourn the meeting and Cyral seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:23 a.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

CEC - Council for Exceptional Children

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

TDB - Teacher of students who are Deafblind

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