

# DRAFT AVIT Meeting Minutes – February 14, 2023

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## In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Emily Coleman, Secretary  
Chris Tabb, TAER O&M Division, TSBVI Outreach  
Mary Ann Siller, Treasurer and North Texas Professionals in VI  
Aubri Simpson, TAPVI  
Neva Fairchild, AFB  
Nicholas Trotter, TEA  
Than Niles, ABC Texas  
Pat Pound, Open Doors Organization, Guide Dogs for the Blind and Canine Companions  
Karissa Sanchez, Health and Human Services Commission  
Dr. Rona Poggrund, TUPVI, TTU  
Lee Sonnenberg, AER, ABC Texas, TSBVI Board  
Christine Givens, DBMAT  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach

*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.**

## Approval of minutes

Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes emailed as corrected this morning. Mary Ann approved and Chris Tabb seconded and the December 2022 minutes were approved.

## Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller emailed our Treasurer's report this morning. Our current balance is \$3571.97. We had one withdrawal paid to the post office in the amount of \$198.00 since the last report. We have also finished our taxes for 2022. Mary Ann will be sending out fee requests for membership groups; i.e. invoices.

## New Business

### ***Pat Pound, Guide Dog User Support***

Pat Pound shared her background and information about service dog users. Recently guide dog users have experienced badly behaved dogs in public places who may also be poorly managed, causing significant problems. In addition, health care providers online are writing letters supporting emotional support dogs to allow owners to have pets in their rentals, etc. These letters are often accompanied with a card that looks a lot like ADA permission. Pat and others are working on a bill to take aim at online sales of authority and health care provider permissions, which has been successful elsewhere.

CA law states it's illegal to say you have a service dog if it hasn't been trained and aren't a person with a disability. In addition, companies selling these permissions on the internet in CA have to disclose it's illegal to claim you have a service dog when you don't. For the second issue, health care professionals are unaware of the "definition of disabilities" and are therefore making inaccurate judgements. Secondly, health care professionals often don't fully understand the definition of a service dog functioning in relation to an individual's disability.

Bill numbers are pending. AVIT members will have an opportunity to vote for or against the issue via email. Pat will share additional information and her email is [patpound10@gmail.com](mailto:patpound10@gmail.com) if anyone would like more information. Chris Tabb asked if Pat has reached out to any O&M organizations yet and she said they haven't contacted national groups yet. Chris suggested SWOMA as an avenue for sharing more information.

Neva shared her concern surrounding the sale of fraudulent service dog and puppy in training vests. Pat said Etsy, Target, and Walmart have agreed not to sell them.

## Agency/ Organization Updates

### ***TAPVI, Aubri Simpson***

Preparing to vote on TAPVI leadership at the DB Symposium. Working on flier to share with local hospitals regarding the three most common forms of blindness. Shared that TWC and BCP are working on increasing identification and sharing resources, but feel that families are still not getting information about resources. Discussed lack of childcare for infants who are blind or deafblind and the need for more support.

### ***DBMAT, Christine Givens***

DBMAT intends to bring back their Family camp in person in September, but they haven't received confirmation from HHSC. Legislatively, they are working to increase cost cap for DBMD waiver and offering more slots. Shay James is the individual working with them on DBMD waiver; contact info pending. DBMAT will be meeting at the rotunda at 10:30 on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Those interested in joining can contact Vivecca Hartman at 713-231-7508. DMBAT will also have many members at the DB Symposium February 23-25 in Round Rock, TX.

***TUPVI, Dr. Rona Poggrund***

Knows TTU perspective, but doesn't have SFA updates. TTU moved up "Reaching Across Texas" summer deadline to April 15<sup>th</sup>. Fall deadline is still June 1<sup>st</sup>. They still have an open faculty position, however now they are requiring TVI certification only; O&M is no longer required. The position will close on March 31<sup>st</sup>. Project INVITE (through OSEP) second cohort is nearing the end of their first year. Seeking to get increased funds through TSBVI legislative budget requests. TTU is considering applying for another federal grant.

Rona is also going to work with Diane Fazzi to update Early Focus with the support of additional authors and editors with a potential release date of 2026.

***All Blind Children of Texas, Than Niles & Lee Sonnenberg***

Than is the new program consultant and representative for ABC TX moving forward. He joined ABC around the start of the year and is excited to take them into the new year. Outreach work, brand update, new website, and improving donor and grant application experiences are all underway.

Amplify Austin is a big event coming up <https://www.amplifyatx.org/organizations/all-blind-children-of-texas> with a potential donor match. They are also working to get back on the State Employment Charitable Campaign. In addition, sharing ABC Texas information on social media and telling more stories. Abctx.org will also be updated within the next month or so.

***TEA, Nicholas Trotter***

Sensory network is developing six short courses on identifying secondary disabilities in addition to B/VI including assessment. The first two are under review and scheduled to be released in the fall targeted to LSSPs and Diagnosticians. Deafblind guidance document is under review. TEA is also working on 504 guidance for kids with visual impairments and other students with disabilities. Nicholas encouraged them to give full evals to those in VI.

Haven't received any legislation specific to B/VI/DB at this time. General SPED bills are being introduced. TDB certification and test writing questions are still underway with a potential test launch in 2024. Stakeholder conversations will be initiated early in 2023.

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

The legislative session has begun and we've already testified in front of Senate Finance with House Appropriations coming up February 27<sup>th</sup>. In the introduced budget bills, both the House and Senate approved additional salaries for our classified staff in addition to the statewide increases proposed for all state employees. Our two top exceptional item requests are growing our Outreach program and providing additional funding for teacher prep programs. We're also requesting an additional stipend for our educators due to the extensive certifications they must hold.

We continue to struggle with recruitment and retention. We're consulting with a PR company to try and reach new markets and increase applications received. School day staff has seen some improvement but vacancies within our residential program continue to grow.

Short-term programs are fully back in-person and summer applications close today. It looks like we'll have close to 300 applications. Outreach has the DB Symposium coming up February 23-25, in Round Rock, TX. Registration is up to about 280 participants.

Outreach is in the midst of writing their grant for the Texas Deafblind Project, which is due in March. VI Registration has closed out and our numbers are up to 10,800 total and about 850 for the deafblind child count. Our Birth through 3 numbers are also looking better than in years past. The family engagement series and leadership trainings will pick up again next year based on feedback from family focus groups.

### ***AFB, Neva Fairchild***

AFB is awaiting appointment of their new CEO and President prior to the AFBLC conference. The Leadership Conference is going to be held in April in Arlington, VA. April 19<sup>th</sup> is Helen Keller Achievement Awards and April 20-21 is the AFBLC conference.

Esther's Place, etc. has fully transitioned to Envision Dallas. Products can be seen in a natural home setting. If you want to check it out, call 214-821-2375 to schedule an appointment. Or you can contact Jennifer Svelan at [Jennifer.Svelan@envisionus.com](mailto:Jennifer.Svelan@envisionus.com). The work in Dallas is still under AFB, but operated by Envision Dallas.

HHSC launched an older blind information website to share resources and information. Neva and others are providing feedback and information. OIB-TAC.org has a new website roll out with a webinar happening soon. Also recommended the APH connect center for additional resources: <https://aphconnectcenter.org>. tel:+18002325463

Neva is still working with Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition, part of Vision Serve Alliance. This covers the spectrum of any level of vision loss. AvInc.org or <https://visionservealliance.org/avInc/> is the website for more information and opportunities to participate.

### ***O&M Updates, Chris Tabb***

TAER coming up, March 23-25, 2023. SWOMA is being planned for November 2nd through 4th and will be virtual this year. International Mobility Conference in Warsaw, Poland May 22nd - 26<sup>th</sup>. Multi-Assistance Center at Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio has two orientation and mobility specialists helping with therapy, CVI, etc.

### ***TAER, Kate Borg***

Conference March 23-25, 2023 in Denton, TX. Policies and procedures have been updated and are ready to be voted on by the membership at the spring conference.

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

#### ***Blind Children's Program Update***

The Blind Children's program filled Blind Children's Specialists positions starting this month in Harlingen, Laredo and Tyler. We continue to have Blind Children's Specialists vacancies across the state in the following areas: Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Houston, Lubbock, and San Antonio. Please share with anyone who may be interested. HHSC Jobs Center: <https://jobshrportal.hhsc.state.tx.us/ENG/careerportal/default.cfm?>

Our DeafBlind Family Camp will be held April 21-23, 2023 at CAMP Camp in Centerpoint, Texas. This is only available to children who are DeafBlind and enrolled in BCP services. This year CAMP Camp staff requested additional training from BCP staff to improve their skills in working with children with visual impairments including those who are DeafBlind. This is very exciting as they really want to expand their ability to provide summer camps for children with visual impairments.

Outreach activities have increased this year. We are attending meetings with ESCs to find ways to collaborate to serve children and families. We are exhibiting at conferences that are focused on providers who serve children and families to increase awareness of our services. We are collaborating with the ECI state office on newsletter content and training. We are planning our annual DB awareness event to include members of the DB taskforce to expand the event.

#### *March 2023 Brain Injury Awareness Month Event*

March commemorates Brain Injury Awareness Month, and the Health and Human Services Brain Injury Programs are hosting a free Webinar Series and Conference: "Pathways to Recovery; Connections to Hope". 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.

#### *Texas Brain Injury Webinar Series*

The webinar series will be held each Wednesday in March from 12 - 1 p.m.

Registration:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5319963250344970328>

- March 1 – Thriving After Brain Injury: Challenges and Opportunities for a Village
- March 8 – Traumatic Brain Injury and its Relationship to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- March 15 – Managing Depression and Anxiety for Brain Injury Recovery
- March 22 – Behavioral Health and Brain Injury: Challenges and Resources
- March 29 – Journey to Recovery

#### *Texas Brain Injury Conference*

Registration: <https://event.gotowebinar.com/event/8832448d-7f03-4519-8abb-61b2bdbe0dd0>

##### • [March 23 – Day 1 from 12 - 5 p.m. Central Time](#)

o 12:30 – 1:30: My Head Injury Was a Wake-up Call for Gratitude o 1:30 – 2:30: Moving to the Beat – Rehabilitation and Music Therapy

o 3:00 – 4:00: No Pain, Big Gains: Using Cranial Manual Therapies for Injured Brains

o 4:00 – 5:00: Living and Recovery from a Traumatic Brain Injury

##### • [March 24 – Day 2 from 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Central Time](#)

o 8:30 – 9:30: The Neuroscience of Hope

o 9:30 – 10:30: Crossroads of Psychiatry and Neurology in Health, Brain Injury, and Recovery

o 11:00 – 12:00: Trauma Informed Care and Yoga

o 12:00 – 1:00: Self-care for Human Services Professionals

#### *88<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session Update*

The Health and Human Services Commission presented to the Senate Finance Committee on February 10, 2023. The presentation can be found on the HHSC website online at: [https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/senate-finance\\_committee-long-term-care-feb-2023.pdf](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/senate-finance_committee-long-term-care-feb-2023.pdf)

This presentation provides an overview of HHS's mission, vision, organizational structure, and key functions. It covers key budget drivers and a summary of Senate Bill 1. It also summarizes the agency's 19 exceptional item requests as well as caseload and cost growth trends.

*Key Exceptional Items:*

**Exceptional Item #2: Address Critical Workforce Needs**

HHSC is experiencing challenges with high turnover and high vacancy rates, partially due to an inability to offer higher salaries and an inability to provide salary increases for high performing employees. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem. HHSC is requesting funding to increase employee salaries and address salary disparities. Targeted to critical and hard-to-fill positions.

**Exceptional Item #13: Increase Access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services**

This item is to increase access to services for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind. It would allow HHSC to serve 5,000 additional clients to increase independence and positive outcomes by funding contracts with additional services providers in currently unserved and underserved HHS regions: Region 2 (Abilene) and 9 (Midland) are currently unserved. Also, Senate Finance Committee will be accepting public testimony on Article II which includes the Health and Human Services Commission on Tuesday, [February 21, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.](#)

*Key dates of interest:* March 10, 2023 – Bill Filing deadline and May 29, 2023 – Sine Die (end of the Regular Legislative Session)

***AER, Lee Sonnenberg***

Working on strategic planning and holding multiple focus groups with students and those who recently left the association. They will also be sharing a survey with the full membership. Spring conference season is starting up. Texas company called "Way Around Tag and Scan" is partnering with TAER and AER international. They support wayfinding and information sharing. In addition, they provide information about layout of the facility. It is a tool utilized with smartphones. Summer 2024 international conference location to be determined.

***Sight Savers, Matt Daws (submitted via email)***

We will be having an in-person CCTV donation and training clinic in Houston in March. We will also be having another West Texas CCTV evaluation and training clinic in Abilene in May. We are accepting referrals for the San Angelo area of people who would benefit from using a CCTV. We can accept referrals ages 5-19. We expect to have a CCTV clinic in Dallas and the Rio Grande Valley later this year.

## **Discussion/Announcements**

There were no further announcements or discussions.

## Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date will be **Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>** (day after Cyral's birthday). AVIT meetings are from 10-12. The next meetings will be August 8<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> from 10-12.

We have a regular Zoom number and telephone number for these meetings which will be sent out ahead of each meeting:

Zoom: [tsbvi.zoom.us/j/5123718516](https://tsbvi.zoom.us/j/5123718516)

Telephone: +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 6833.

Meeting ID: **5123718516**.

Mary Ann motioned to adjourn the meeting and Chris Tabb seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:41 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

CVI - Cortical Visual Impairment

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

NVI - Neurological visual impairment (often referred to as CVI)

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