

Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) Annual Report Fall 2002- Summer 2003

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I. Direct Legislative Advocacy: CTD and the 78th Legislature

2003 was a very difficult year for Texans with disabilities. The dominant issue was the state budget. Facing a shortfall of \$10 billion, the state's elected leadership chose not to seek a balance of revenue increases and spending cuts, as many other states have done, but rather chose to balance the budget entirely with spending cuts. Funding for health and human services, including services for people with disabilities, was targeted for major cuts. The first budget passed by the House eliminated community services for 85,000 current recipients. By the end of the session, almost all of those individuals were restored, largely in response to round the clock advocacy.

Separately attached is the 2003 Legislative Report of the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities. CTD was actively involved in all the issues listed. Our role and the organizations we partnered with are identified. You'll see a number of issues including CTD's effort to recover lost ADA civil rights. We raised issues, won some, and lost others. Committee chairs scheduled hearings at 7 a.m., late into the evening, on weekends and even on ice days when central Texas roads were undrivable. CTD was there for Texans with disabilities, working for you. CTD efforts included:

- Testimony at public hearings
- Direct contacts to legislative offices
- Supplying language for legislation
- Written position papers distributed to the Legislature
- Media interviews
- Collaborative coordination on three statewide teleconferences. Participants received up-to-the minute legislative information and had opportunities to seek specific guidance and disability related expertise from CTD and other conference speakers.
- Collaborative organization of two legislative rallies at the state capital, drawing hundreds of individuals from across the state. Forged new partnerships with the state employees, mental health advocates, and senior citizens' organizations. CTD's Collaborative "Capital Day" Rally and press conference in February, and "No Budget Cuts Day" in May received media coverage from local English and Spanish radio, newspaper, and television stations.
- CTD instituted a statewide "Action Alert" listserv via Texas independent living centers, disseminating important legislatively related information, allowing for immediate action from all across the state.

II. Strengthening the Foundation of CTD Public Policy Work

CTD worked on strategies to strengthen the framework of disability advocacy. The strategies were not issue-specific, but rather designed to improve resources for any ongoing policy issues.

Political Leaders to CTD: CTD's Sept 2002 Convention drew top-of-the-ballot Democrats, U.S. Senate candidate Ron Kirk and Gubernatorial candidate Tony Sanchez, as well as a personalized video message from Texas Governor Rick Perry.

Community First: Working with ADAPT and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, CTD convened Community First, specifically for legislative coordination and collective advocacy. A highly successful Candidate Survey received statewide media attention. Over 30 candidates responded to this disabilities issues survey, with answers published side-by-side and distributed electronically.

Leveraging Mt. Everest: CTD succeeded in inserting awareness of disability issues into the extensive media coverage of the Team Everest '03 expedition. Several news articles noted the fight to keep basic human services in the Legislature. One called attention to the thousands projected to lose services in the first House budget. Another reported on the sit-in at the governor's office. "On a Roll", a nationally syndicated radio show, did an hour-long interview program on public leadership that can get behind a disabilities expedition while simultaneously pushing to cut the services that permit people with disabilities to conduct daily activities. Email dispatches from Nepal almost always included specific reference to current issues. Lastly, CTD was able to leverage an invitation by the governor into a direct, private conversation on the restoration of attendant care cuts.

New and Diverse Partners: AARP, the Texas Forestry Association, the Texas Trial Lawyers Association, Santos Alliances, American Electronics Association, Provan and Associates, Texas State Employees Union, State Bar of Texas

Continuing On: Several legislative issues, including budget cuts, reorganization of health and human services agencies, accessibility, and ADA erosion, are demanding ongoing work and advocacy.

III. CTD Appointments/Affiliations

CTD works to place its staff and individual members on a variety of committees, workgroups, task forces and boards that have influence over issues of importance to the Texans with disabilities. Once at the table, CTD staff and members are active participants.

Staff placements:

Gubernatorial appointee, The State Independent Living Centers (SILC) Board

CTD is working to increase SILC involvement in policy education and advocacy and take a proactive stance in planning the long term future of independent living services in Texas.

Medicaid Buy-In Workgroup, Texas Department of Health and Human Services
CTD advocates for a user-friendly system to allow people with disabilities to enter the workforce without loss of critical Medicaid coverage.

Appointee, SB 367 Housing Task Force, Texas Dept of Health and Human Services
CTD is using this policy forum to promote a more active role for public housing authorities in providing accessible, affordable, integrated housing.

Appointee, Independence Initiatives Advisory Board, Texas Rehabilitation Commission
CTD advocated for adoption by TRC of a plan to address the movement of people with disabilities out of institutions into the community, including the training of people with disabilities to work as personal assistants and strategies to provide service “bridges” while in course of transferring out of institutions.

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Appointee, New Accessibility Standards Task Force, Texas Dept of Licensing and Regulation
CTD is reviewing proposed changes in the state’s accessibility codes.

Appointee, Weatherization Policy Advisory Council, Texas Dept of Housing & Community Affairs
CTD reviews the state plan to ensure that people with disabilities are a target group for this free home weatherization program.

Appointee, HR 3295 Help America Vote Act Advisory Committee, Office of the Secretary of State.
CTD is working with the Office of the Secretary of State on drafting rules to implement this federal legislation, which has provisions regarding accessible voting and secret ballot for all Texans with disabilities. CTD has submitted substantive comments that ensure that Texans with disabilities may vote freely and privately.

Appointee, Violence Against Women Prevention Advisory Council, Texas Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

disproportionately

Because women with disabilities are disproportionally affected by violence, it is especially important that they have a voice at the table as the state seeks to develop strategies to make the prevention of violence against women a public health priority.

Appointee, Advisory Council, SB 95 Evaluation of Personal Attendant Training Programs, Department of Human Services

CTD provides pilot project grantees across the state with technical assistance, support, and procedural guidelines for systems change goals affecting three community care projects.

Appointee, SB1586 Consumer Directed Services Committee

CTD promotes that people with disabilities control the recruitment, hiring, management, and firing of their personal assistants. The committee makes recommendation directly to the Legislature.

Chair, Statewide Grassroots Building Advocacy Committee, Disability Policy Consortium

CTD is working with a number of diverse disability organizations in an effort to stimulate individual level advocacy efforts while acknowledging the changing legislative landscape of budget challenges and varying leadership priorities.

CTD Member placements:

Appointee, Architectural Barriers Advisory Committee for the Texas Department of Licensing and Registration

Appointee, SB1586 Consumer Directed Services

Appointee, Board of Directors, Advocacy, Inc.

Appointee, Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities

Appointee, Relay Texas Advisory Board

IV. Other Projects and Programs

Biennial Report to 78th Legislature: CTD conducted extensive research and synthesized existing data for "PAS, Present and Future: An analysis of the need for and availability of Personal Assistance Services in Texas and the United States." The report provided lawmakers with crucial information concerning the importance of adequate personal attendant services for people with disabilities.

Texas PHA Project: This project provides training and technical assistance to Public Housing Authorities in Texas to increase integrated housing for people with disabilities, especially those individuals moving from institutions.

Team Everest '03: CTD's Team Everest '03 was arguably the highest profile disability event of 2003. As a result, we believe that potentially millions have radically changed the way they perceive individuals with disabilities. A recent media search disclosed over 100 state and national newspaper and magazine articles, plus numerous state, local and national TV reports plus international coverage in Nepal, China, Canada and Europe. Team Everest '03 twice made history: first becoming the largest cross-disability group to reach Mt. Everest Base Camp at 17,500 feet, then when Expedition leader Gary Guller became the first person with one arm to summit Mt. Everest at a dizzying 29,000+ ft! The Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities awarded CTD the 2002 Barbara Jordan Media Award "for excellence in the communication of the reality of disabled people".

Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP): For the last four years CTD has operated outreach in over 100 Texas counties, providing financial assistance to individuals with disabilities, so that they may purchase specialized telephone equipment.

Youth Leadership Projects: the Kenny Murgia Memorial Scholarship and the CTD Internship Program: CTD awards the Kenny Murgia scholarship annually to one high school senior with a disability whose leadership skills have enhanced the lives of people with disabilities in their community. This year's winner is Michael Beukencamp, a young man with blindness from Amarillo.

CTD also offers students with disabilities the opportunity to intern at CTD offices in Austin, TX. CTD's Summer 2003 intern recently graduated from college with a degree in political science. Michelle, an individual with Myasthenia Gravis, is currently pursuing her dream of teaching junior high in the Valley.

V. Individual Level Advocacy

CTD provides Texans with disabilities assistance with everything from emergency communications equipment loans to accessibility compliance, to representation of Texans with disabilities in agency level appeals processes. Some of this year's stories:

Mrs. Fair: Reconnection

An Austin area man feared for his elderly mother's well being. She enjoyed living independently, but never answered the phone, which worried family members living some distance away. CTD helped the mother apply for a free amplified telephone, then installed a loaner telephone until she received her own. Now Mrs. Fair can hear the phone ring and has a vital lifeline in the event of an emergency.

Mr. Thompson: Staying Independent

After a stroke and Alzheimer's disease left Mr. Thompson unable to continue working, he began to receive social security disability insurance (SSDI). Though small, these checks kept Mr. Thompson independent in a small apartment. Due to a complicated procedural error, Mr. Thompson received notice from the Social Security Administration that his benefits would be greatly reduced. CTD assisted Mr. Thompson through a lengthy and complicated appeals process at both the agency and administrative judge levels. Mr. Thompson credits CTD's determination for helping him make it through an 18 month ordeal.

Mr. Gonzalez Rolling Again

On an infrequent shopping trip to a large department store, Mr. Gonzalez' power wheelchair became tangled in a rack of hanging clothes. Finally breaking loose, he crashed into a wall, shattering the battery housing on his chair. The store refused to pay for the repair, leaving Mr. Gonzalez confined to home. After CTD intervened with corporate headquarters, the store committed to fully repair the chair.

Information and Referral

In addition to providing intensive individual level advocacy for individuals needing assistance, each year CTD provides hundreds of Texans with disabilities information and referral services relating to financial, legal, housing, transportation accessibility and employment issues.