



Disability Consulting and Advocacy

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CTD Annual Report Fall 2006 - Summer 2007

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I. Advocacy: 2007 Texas Legislative Session and More

It was supposed to be a friendlier Texas Legislature. For the first time in years, the State had a budget surplus and it seemed time to address priority funding issues for Texans with disabilities. CTD worked tirelessly through the days and nights of the 140 days of the 80th session to help assure that Texans with disabilities had a seat at the political poker table. With the help of individuals calling and writing their Senators and Representatives, along with the help of our partner advocacy groups, positive outcomes were achieved. **Attached is the 2007 Legislative Report of the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities.** We've split our report into three categories: **State Budget Issues, Voting Legislation, and Diverse Disability Legislation.**

CTD was actively involved in all the issues listed. Our role and the organizations with which we partnered are identified. CTD is deeply appreciative of ADAPT, Advocacy Inc. and the Texas Center for Disability Studies; our partners in broad-based disability advocacy. We thank AARP for their strong effort on the waiting list, utility and voter ID issues. CTD efforts included:

- Testimony at **public hearings**
- Direct contacts to **legislative offices**
- Supplying and reviewing **language for legislation**
- Written **position papers distributed** to the Legislature
- Implementation of Raise Your Voice! (click the link on www.cotwd.org), a web-based tool to communicate to legislators. CTD members **sent legislators over 2,200 emails.**
- Collaborative organization of two legislative **rallies at the Capitol**
- We held our annual convention just blocks from the Capitol in April, bringing in folks from around the state
- CTD sponsored the Capitol visit of the **national Road to Freedom ADA bus tour**, combining the event with a press conference on the Capitol steps.
- CTD organized the *Legless Lizard Tour de Tejas*, a **25-day public awareness event** to draw attention to pressing legislative issues. CTD member and polio survivor Mikail Davenport handcycled 950 miles from El Paso to Beaumont, attracting a national documentary film crew as well as national, state and local media along the route.



Budget: The Legislature chose to leave Austin with \$6.5 billion unspent despite the unmet needs of the disability community. Though we did not get everything we wanted, at the end of the day the results are that thousands of additional people with disabilities will get services and benefits in the community. In this difficult state, the outstanding legislator is Senator Judith Zaffirini (photo with CTD's Dennis Borel), whose hard work, legislative acumen and commitment to Texans with disabilities secured most of these funds.

Voting Legislation: We won this tough fight.... numerous bills were filed to water down or eliminate the accessible voting rights gained under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). As CTD has done HAVA outreach and education, we heard many times of the value given to a private ballot, accessible polling places and modern accessible voting technology. CTD developed close working relationships with the election committees in both chambers, expressing the strong will of Texans with disabilities to never return to the days of disenfranchisement. And "voter ID" became a high profile challenge; if passed it would have harmed the voting participation of people with disabilities, elders and minorities.



Diverse Disability Legislation: On top of the budget and voting legislation, CTD was actively involved in over 21 diverse bills with an impact on the community of people with disabilities. Two bills were filed at CTD request: HB2216 passed and will ensure that structurally modified vehicles will continue to be available in Texas. The ADA bill (above photo: Sen. Hinojosa speaks to the media, Rep. Strama in back row right) did not pass, though we were heartened to advance it further in the process, passing it through the House Civil Practices committee and raising more awareness to the State's offensive practice of claiming immunity for its acts of disability discrimination. CTD was among the primary advocates for successful bills on consumer directed services, workers comp extended coverage, judicial review of Medicaid decisions, property tax cuts for homeowners with disabilities, accessible parking and protection from abuse, among the diverse issues. We were surprised at the public interest in HB308, which became known as the "blind hunters bill". The bill legalized the use of laser sighting devices for hunters with blindness. CTD got behind HB308 because it was about a reasonable accommodation and a good, though offbeat, example of inclusion into all activities.

Thanks to all the CTD members, volunteers, friends, legislators and Capitol staffers who helped us in our mission.

Major Advocacy Project: State Services Privatization:

Privatization has been a big change for Texans with disabilities. Reduction of agency field workers with a privatized integrated eligibility system relying on call centers and web sites did not work on a number of levels and was scrapped by the State. CTD has long advocated that the call centers may not prove accessible to all people with disabilities. This is not the end of privatized eligibility. **We'll closely monitor the State's next steps.**

Medicaid managed care is expanding from its one location in Houston to eight more urban areas. Known as ICM (Integrated Care Management) in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and as STAR Plus in the other areas, CTD believes that managed care merits close attention.

Activities:

- CTD sits on the advisory councils of 3 of the HMOs—Superior, Amerigroup, Evercare—for direct dialogue.
- CTD has trained new staff for Evercare and Superior on effective interactions with people with disabilities.
- CTD set up over 40 consumer outreach and education events.
- CTD participates in the State's managed care stakeholders meetings.

Major Advocacy Project: Protecting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott continues to fight for the State's immunity from the civil rights protections of the ADA. His position: Texas has sovereign immunity from the ADA and may discriminate based on a person's disability without recourse. CTD is at the forefront of this battle.

At this time, **we believe that Texas state legislation is still needed to definitively resolve this critical issue.** In the meantime, the ADA information on the CTD home page at www.cotwd.org gets more comments than anything else on the site.

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 2007 convention drew Rep. Patrick Rose, Chair of House Human Services Committee; Rep. John Davis, Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, and Texas Secretary of State Roger Williams, all of whom have been key players in making disability issues front and center.

Raise Your Voice! Web Communications: CTD's on-line communications system to policy makers was introduced and proved successful in linking members with their decision makers in Austin. Raise Your Voice! logged over 2,200 emails to legislators from February through May.

Brain Injury Association of Texas: BIATX continues to be co-located at CTD. In 2007, CTD and BIATX combined their annual conventions. Many BIATX members were very positive about the advocacy orientation provided at the convention.

Texas Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America: PVA and CTD partnered significantly on advocacy and the Austin chapter of the PVA is now co-located at CTD.

The CTD Messenger e-newsletter: Now distributed most months, the electronic newsletter continues to expand its reach. There is no cost to subscribe. Anyone interested can email wgreer@cotwd.org to be added to our mail list.

IV. 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 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.

HHSC Executive Commissioner Appointee, Promoting Independence Advisory Council

CTD is using this policy forum to ensure that Texas' promoting independence initiative continues to move forward.

Appointee, Consumer Directed Services Workgroup

CTD promotes that people with disabilities control the recruitment, hiring, management, and firing of their personal assistants, which results in lower attendant turnover rates. The committee makes recommendation directly to the Legislature.

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, helping to develop the Texas implementation and continue to conduct outreach to thousands across the state. CTD has submitted substantive comments that ensure that Texans with disabilities may vote freely and privately.

Appointee, Direct Services Workforce Workgroup, DADS.

This workgroup is charged with coming up with ways to recruit and retain community direct care providers without a wage increase. CTD promotes the position that wage increases are an absolute necessity.

Invitee, HHSC DRA Proposal advisory/ MFP Advisory Group. CTD pushes for rebalancing the long term services and supports system and money-follows-the-person for the ICF/MR population.

Board Member, CORE Foundation. Start-up non-profit whose first project is an accessible fishing pier on Lake Lady Bird in Austin.

Invitee, Wheeled Mobility Workgroup, Senator Zaffirini. Legislative workgroup on wheelchair fitting issues.

Invitee, TX Dept of Agriculture Home Meals Program. Under this new funding source, CTD pushed for inclusion of people with disabilities who are too young to receive home meals under the Older Americans Act.

Waiting List Stakeholders

CTD is regularly attending these meetings to ensure that reduction of community services waiting lists is progressing.

Invitee, Medicaid Waiver Optimization Workgroup, DADS. CTD promotes consistency, equity and consolidation of the waivers.

Member, Goodwill Central Texas Community Advisory Council

CTD advises on state advocacy issues related to employment of people with disabilities.

CTD Member placements:

Appointee, Architectural Barriers Adv. Committee, Texas Dept. of Licensing and Registration

Gubernatorial Appointee, Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities

Appointee, Consumer Directed Services Workgroup

Gubernatorial Appointee, Rehab Council of Texas, DARS

Appointee, Board of Directors, Advocacy, Inc.

Appointee, Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities

Appointee, Relay Texas Advisory Board

IV. Public Awareness, Other Projects, Programs and Awards

Raising the Vote of the Community of People with Disabilities

CTD aggressively worked to promote voting by people with disabilities and to spread the word about new accessible voting machines and requirements for accessible polling places.

- Worked with Texas Secretary of State Roger Williams to ensure that **voters with disabilities are the priority of his statewide VOTEXAS** project. Provided technical assistance to Williams and his staff.
- Facilitated **trainings on Help America Vote Act (HAVA)** throughout Texas
- Presented a HAVA workshop at **the 5-state IL conference in Little Rock, AR** and another at the **Brain Injury Association's fall 2006 conference.**
- Invited Presenter, **Secretary of State Election Law Seminar**, "Polling Place Accessibility" to 800+ county judges and election officials.
- Producer, nationally-released web-based **video training for poll workers** on interactions with voters with disabilities.

CTD started a consumer directed services agency (CDSA): Consumers in Travis and the surrounding counties can now obtain CDSA services from CTD, providing them more choice and control over their community services.

Legless Lizard Tour de Tejas: Without the use of his legs, CTD uber-member Mikail Davenport hand cycled 950 miles, from El Paso to Beaumont to raise awareness of CTD's priority legislative issues. Davenport kicked off the El Paso marathon, cycling through

dozens of small communities, which welcomed him and his messages of educating Texans on public policy issues. This journey, widely covered by media all across the country, culminated on day 25, resulting in a large celebration in Beaumont, TX.

Bryson goes national! CTD's Bryson Smith was one of the lead on-screen persons in ACLU's multi-state documentary on proposed laws that would disenfranchise voters.

Round Table on Relocation from institutions to community: CTD provided planning, outreach and logistical support for this well-attended training event in August 2007.

Website accessibility: CTD conducted an extensive hands-on product test of a state agency's new website, making design recommendations to improve accessibility to people with disabilities.

Help obtaining prescriptions: CTD participates in the Partnership for Prescription Access. Instead of each drug company having a separate program to help consumers get free prescriptions, the Partnership combines over 150 patient assistance programs into a single system. Consumers who need help should contact 1-888-477-2669 or go to www.pparx.org

Cinema Touching Disability Film Festival: Using the media of film, CTD showed how cinema has reflected the changing societal role of people with disabilities. The third year of what is believed to be the first Texas film festival focusing on people with disabilities took place in October 2006. Former Austin Mayor Bruce Todd, a traumatic brain injury survivor, was the featured speaker. The film festival received substantial coverage in newspapers, internet, radio and TV. The 4th Annual Cinema Touching Film Festival was held in Austin in October 2007.

Cutting-edge technology to help people with disabilities: CTD is working with Motion Tech, a tech development start-up with a patented design that would improve the ability of people with disabilities to control their environment.

CTD's Team Everest: Public Awareness of the Potential of People with Disabilities: The full-length documentary, "Team Everest, A Himalayan Adventure" had its world premiere in Seattle and has been screened at film festivals in New York, Austin and Boston.

Advocacy presentations were delivered at the state independent living conference and the statewide meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Keynote speaker, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas annual awards event.

Breaking Boundaries on the radio: CTD staff were featured guests numerous times on this disability issues talk show on Austin's KOOP.

Are you ready? Or not? CTD organized a focus group of people with disabilities for input into the State's emergency preparedness project.

Shooting the Grand Canyon Rapids: CTD sponsored and participated in a panel discussion and presentation of Right to Risk, a documentary film of a team of people with disabilities river rafting the Grand Canyon.

Disability Mentoring Day: Served on Steering Committee 2006-07. Supported the local effort and hosted a mentee.

Information and Referral: Each year CTD provides hundreds of Texans with disabilities information and referral services relating to financial, legal, housing, transportation, accessibility and employment issues.

Awards:

- The Legless Lizard Tour de Tejas won the **Austin Mayor's Media Award** in fall 2007.
- **ADAPT** presented CTD with its **Disability Champion Award**.
- CTD and partners' Help America Vote Act statewide outreach campaign called "VOTEXAS" won the **Best Public Affairs Campaign 2006 Award from the American Public Relations Society of America**, Austin Chapter.
- The Amerigroup Foundation awarded CTD the **2007 Healthy Hero Award**.
- CTD Executive Director Dennis Borel was selected to receive the national **James Neubacher Award** from the University of Michigan, given to an individual for working on rights and opportunities of people with disabilities. Borel graduated from Michigan more years ago than he will admit.

CTD is a social and economic impact organization benefiting Texans with all disabilities of all ages.
CTD is a 501(c)3 membership organization controlled by people with disabilities.