

# Please Support HB 3287 (Gonzalez) & SB 1715 (Hughes)

ADDRESSING ONE OF THE MOST OVERLOOKED GAPS IN CRITICAL SERVICES FOR TEXANS WHO ARE DEAFBLIND



**Intent** - *To provide adult Texans who are DeafBlind with meaningful, reliable, and consistent access to basic health, safety, economic, legal and civic matters through the establishment of a Statewide Services Network of qualified and compensated Co-Navigators.*

**PROBLEM** - There are approximately 2,500 Texans who are DeafBlind, or challenged with a dual sensory loss of hearing and vision. A small percentage of these Texans are adults who strive to live as independently as possible, but face many barriers to participating in the activities that support living independently.

These autonomous and largely self-supporting individuals do NOT qualify for existing services, such as those available through the Medicaid DeafBlind Waiver Program. As a result, they receive little or no community access services, and must rely primarily on untrained, and often unavailable, volunteers, in addition to unhealthy and unproductive reliance on family members and friends.

Over 30 states, including those neighboring Texas, have alleviated this serious access issue by funding Co-Navigator (also referred to as Support Service Provider) services. These specially-trained personnel convey environmental information as well as verbal and non-verbal interactions, while co-navigating with DeafBlind individuals, so that they are able to autonomously handle daily living and civic activities. Such fundamental human endeavors include—but are not limited to: shopping, banking, traveling, voting, engaging in personal medical evaluations and treatments, financial transactions, and community and civic events. The Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities has recommended that Texas follow suit, and estimates that an individual would receive up to 20 service hours a month under this bill. The legislature has articulated that one of the Health and Human Service Commission’s goals shall be to “foster the development of responsible, productive, and self-sufficient citizens by increasing services to help people with disabilities maintain or increase their independence.” This important legislation would do exactly that. **Please support HB 3287 & SB 1715.**

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