

HB 3287 (Gonzalez)/SB 1715 (Hughes) **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities (GCPD) has found that many adult Texans who are deaf-blind are unable to equitably access their home and community “due to near total lack of available support services.”¹ Importantly, these individuals do not qualify for existing services under the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Deaf-Blind Multiple Disabilities Waiver program, as they do not “have an additional disability.”² Numerous states have addressed this critical gap in services by establishing co-navigator (also referred to as support service provider) services, either statewide or in specific local metropolitan areas.³

Co-navigator services provide autonomous Deaf-Blind Texans with practical support in the home, as well as access to previously inaccessible resources in the community. For example, in the home, co-navigators might work with Deaf-Blind individuals on such vital activities as sight-reading mail and expiration dates on food items, paying bills, and facilitating computer and phone use. In the community, co-navigators guide, provide visual and environmental information and basic communication assistance for such independent living activities as grocery shopping, getting medical care, obtaining training and education, and participating in workplace activities. At times, co-navigators may also provide transportation. The DeafBlind Coalition of Texas has been advocating for a statewide co-navigator program over a decade. And the Texas Association of the Deaf adopted the creation of a statewide co-navigator program as “one of their top policy priorities for the 87th Legislature.”⁴ GCPD has formally recommended that the Texas Legislature establish formalized co-navigator services within HHSC.⁵

The purpose of HB 3287 and SB 1715 is to provide autonomous Deaf-Blind Texans reliable and consistent access to health, safety, economic,

¹ 2022-23 Policy Recommendations Report to the 87th Texas Legislature. Page 24.

² GCPD, Report on Support Service Providers (SSPs)/CoNavigators (CNs), Dec. 2020. Pages 9-10.

³ GCPD, Report on SSPs/CNs. Page 6.

⁴ GCPD Report on SSPs /CNs. Page 5.

⁵ Policy Recommendations Report. Pages 24-25.

legal and civic matters. It creates a monitored statewide services network of qualified and compensated co-navigators, provides funds for training co-navigators, and allows eligible Texans who are both deaf and blind to effectively use these services to live their most independent lives.