

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities 2023 Annual Summary

December 15, 2023

A new year is on the horizon, and at CTD, we're reflecting on the past 12 months. As in all years, there were some ups and downs, some victories and some defeats. We are proud of all that we accomplished during this long legislative year and in the many communities we work in outside of the Capitol.

The wins and progress we've been a part of this year are all the more meaningful in light of the ever-increasing headwinds in our state and in our world. Texans in power have always been resistant to fully invest in their constituents with disabilities, and we really felt that this legislative session. However, we were buoyed by our own conviction in the necessity of this work and the strength and brilliance of our partners and members.

Our quick-read annual summary below has more details of CTD's accomplishments in a very difficult year.

2023 by the numbers

\$2,188,000,000 moved in
state budget

33,155 emails sent by 3,072
CTD members to 72
legislators and staffers

1,341 participants at CTD
advocacy events

59 advocacy partners

50 media hits

The 2023 Texas Legislature

Texans with disabilities didn't get all we needed this session, but we came away with more than nothing—a lot more. In a session where golden opportunities were passed by and culture wars dominated conversations, we take pride in these achievements and know that we have laid important ground work for more positive outcomes in 2025. A few highlights:

Community Services and Supports

CTD was among the, if not the most, active consumer advocates in dealing with the attendant workforce crisis. The Legislature raised the base hourly wage of community attendants **from \$8.11 to \$10.60**. After starting the session with a lot of optimism, we are disappointed by this woefully inadequate increase.

CTD is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with Federal Tax ID #74-2071160. CTD is a social and economic impact organization benefitting Texans of all ages with all disabilities. CTD is a membership organization controlled by people with disabilities. Your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

At the same time, we are encouraged. The budget conference committee took the Senate's methodology of raising the wage, which will give more to attendants than the House's version: \$2 billion this biennium and another \$2 billion carried forward in the next biennium's base budget. Not only is this more money to attendants in the next couple years; it will also put us in a stronger position to push for a competitive wage **next session**. Already, our legislative champions on this issue are committed to continuing this progress in 2025.

In addition, even though a \$2.49 per hour raise is not nearly enough, it's the **biggest increase the Legislature has ever given attendants**, by far.

Student Safety

In recent years, CTD and our partners have noted an alarming uptick in news articles and reports of students with disabilities being violently, and even lethally, disciplined in Texas public schools.

Right out of the gate this session, CTD helped to organize a powerful press conference on harmful student restraint in schools to educate lawmakers about the dangers of such practices—and policy solutions to end them.

Right: Rep. Lacey Hull, House author of No Kids in Cuffs, CTD's Jolene Sanders, and the Autism Society of Texas' Jacquie Benestante at the School Shouldn't Hurt: Ending Harmful Student Restraint Press Conference, January 30. Photo by CTD.



With the No Kids in Cuffs coalition, CTD was instrumental in the passage of **SB 133** (West), the **No Kids in Cuffs** bill, which bans certain types of physical restraint, tasers, handcuffs, and the use of chemical irritants on students in 5th grade and below.

Consumer Protections

HB 999 (Price), the **Copay Accumulators** bill, was a multiyear, multisession endeavor to ban the practice of commercial insurance companies double dipping into copay assistance funds while not applying those funds to a patient's deductible or out-of-pocket maximum. CTD played a critical role in advocating for this bill in the House and Senate, making office visits, giving invited and public testimony, and utilizing our broad network of partners and advocates to raise awareness of the issue. CTD is a leader in the Texas All Copays Count Coalition and the Coalition for Stable Patients to get this bill across the finish line. We are extremely pleased to have secured this win but remain vigilant for new insurance practices that unfairly shifts cost onto the consumer.

Criminal Justice

We worked with a determined group of criminal justice advocates and self-advocates to pass **SB 1146** (West), a bill that will end the dehumanizing—and completely inaccessible—conditions of medical

transport for women in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), known as **medical chain**. Already, this December, we have received reports from incarcerated women that conditions are improving as they make the journey across Texas from their units to receive medical care.

Other Significant Legislative CTD Impacts

- CTD continued educating legislators on major underfunding of **Medicaid waiver interest lists** and **Early Childhood Intervention**. An increase of \$188 million went to these budget priorities.
- CTD strongly supported **better polling place practices** for voters with disabilities, and we led advocacy for a bill on **accessible mail-in ballots**, unfortunately vetoed by the Governor.
- We worked on successful legislation for better access to **biomarker testing, infusion treatments**, and **kratom supplements**, as well as preserved the **single formulary in Medicaid**.
- We improved **accessible parking enforcement**.
- From January all the way through the 4th special session that ended this month, CTD consistently and forcefully educated legislators on the loss of rights of students with disabilities in a range of **proposed school voucher programs**. As of this letter, none of those proposals have passed.

For more detail on these and other issues, read our full [2023 Legislative Report](#).

In the Community

Advocacy Education

Our **Raise Your Voice!** program is designed to provide a functional understanding of the legislative process while connecting self-advocates with the CTD advocacy team and each other. It also gives CTD staff insight into the needs and concerns of Texans with disabilities that inform organizational policy priorities, recommendations, and strategy. During the 2023 Legislature, we brought together over **500 participants** on **19 Zoom calls** from February to December, for in-depth conversations about our own advocacy work, plus feedback about participants' priorities and concerns.

A newer grassroots program, the **Advocacy Corps**, seeks to engage, encourage, and support self-advocates who have lived experience with disabilities. A-Corps interns commit to legislative participation and receive training and support from CTD staff who share their priorities. In our first year, **12 A-Corps interns** joined the program from around the state, and **2 bills were filed** at the request of A-Corps interns.

Right: CTD's Chase Bearden with A-Corps interns Leah Gardner, Laurie Truesdell, Megan Truesdell, and Shawnett Viani on a Capitol visit. Photo by CTD.



In the Media

CTD's staff and work has **appeared in the media 50 times** in 2023, and we connected several reporters with our members and A-Corps interns who had lived experience that was relevant to their projects. Just a few recent highlights:

- [The State of Disability in Texas: A Texas Standard Special](#), September 2. The Texas Standard.
- [At-Risk Texans Are Getting Half the Attendant Care They Need](#), July 20. D Magazine.
- [Gov. Greg Abbott vetoes bill that would give people with disabilities new option to vote by mail](#), June 21. Texas Tribune.

Read these and other articles as well as press statements on our [Media Kit](#).

Cinema Touching Disability Film Festival

2023 was a big milestone for Cinema Touching Disability, as we celebrated our 20th year! October 20th and 21st, we held the Festival at a **new venue: the Rollins Theater** at the Long Center for the Performing Arts. We had a great time watching movies and hanging out in this beautiful, new-to-us space!

Each night, attendees enjoyed ambient music by **Gretchen McMahon** (Celtic harp) in the lobby and **Devin Gutierrez** (keyboard) in the theater. Both are local musicians with disabilities!

Right: Devin and Gretchen (center) with audience member (and fellow musician!) Mary Rose Bushland. Photo by Patty Bushland.



To the screen, we brought **13 winning and selected short films from our international Short Film Competition**. These documentaries and narrative shorts examined and portrayed people with disabilities living both ordinary and extraordinary lives. You can still see our [full line up, including winners of this year's competition](#).

In addition to these screenings, the Festival welcomed a ton of guests from near and far!

- **Mayor Kirk Watson** helped us kick off the Festival on Friday,
- we learned how to sign some Austin FC chants from **Deaf Capo star Leo Bopp**,
- the **Texas Film Commission** presented us with a proclamation in honor of 20 years, and
- **directors Andy Cockrum, Cory Reeder, and Cameron S. Mitchell** attended to present their films and take audience questions.

As we celebrated an incredible 20 years, we also said **goodbye to our Film Festival founder and director, William Greer**. Under William's leadership, the Film Fest went from an idea to an award-winning, internationally recognized staple in Austin's film scene. He is now moving on to the next chapter in his career, and we wish him the best.

Literary Events

Our monthly **Lion & Pirate inclusive open mic**, with partner Art Spark Texas, has remained nearly all virtual in 2023 (in October, we held our first in-person open mic since the shutdown). Each month, we feature a different artist(s) with a disability, before opening the mic to community participation. 2023 featured artists included a number of poets and musicians, as well as a story-teller, new media artists, and video tributes in memorium to members of the L&P community who have passed.

Right: Amy Litzinger and Juan Muñoz perform an improvisational dance piece at the in-person Lion & Pirate open mic in Art Spark Texas' back yard. Photo by Patty Bushland.



Also in collaboration with Art Spark, we have continued our support of the **Thunder & Lightning Poetry Collective**, which is led by and serves BIPOC disabled and queer disabled poets. In 2023, CTD helped to produce 3 **Storm the Mic! poetry showcases**, as well as a monthly series of **creative writing workshops** led by queer, BIPOC, disabled poets.

Consumer Directed Services (CDS) Division

CDS supports Texans in attendant care programs to take control of their services. It's not a secret that the pandemic and the introduction of EVV (Electronic Visit Verification) threw wrenches at all Texas agencies supporting CDS consumers. CTD's CDS team installed new user-friendly technologies this year that have solved these issues. In fact, we're open to new CDS consumers now!

Call (512) 236-1070 or email cds@txdisabilities.org for information.