

Houston Commission on Disabilities

August 14th, 2025, 4:00 – 6:00 PM

The Houston Commission on Disabilities meets on the 2nd Thursday of every month at Houston TranStar (6922 Katy Road). The meeting is streamed on the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities Facebook page.

Chair Silcox went over housekeeping items.

Kimberly Blanchard proceeded with the roll call.

Roll Call of the Commissioners:

Position 1: Michael Cottingham	Absent
Position 2: Caitlin Conner	Present
Position 3: Ann M. Bacon	Absent
Position 4: Katie Crouch	Present
Position 5: Sashikala Nisankarao	Present
Position 6: Monique Mason	Present
Position 7: Adam Farris	Present
Position 8: Amie Jean	Absent
Position 9: Mary Sias	Present
Position 10: Meridith Silcox – Chair	Present
Position 11: Lydia Nunez Landry	Present
Position 12: Melisa Rosario-Diaz	Present
Position 13: Osvaldo Chapman	Absent
Position 14: Adele Henry	Absent
Ex-Officio: Angel Ponce	Present
Ex-Officio: Robin Jolivet	Absent
Legal: Rebekah Wendt	Absent

Chair Silcox called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM with a quorum present and welcomed attendees to the meeting.

MOPD Staff: Angel Ponce, Amanda Boyd, Norma Medrano, Kimberly Blanchard, Anataja Harris, Reynaldo Herrera

Metropolitan Multiservice Center Staff: Chuck French

Announcements

Review and Approval of June Meeting Minutes

Motion: Chair Silcox

Second: Commissioner Conner

Public Comments

- Meghan Castillo, Castillo Counseling Services
 - Shared information regarding counseling services available to the community
- Charles Laday, Clinical Director of Bayou Behavioral Health Services
 - Free mental health services for domestic violence, discussed services for recipients who use Medicaid
- Augustin Villareal, Sharing personal story
 - Advocated for people with disabilities at the Capital
 - Looking for employment and opportunities to advocate

Expert Speakers- Educational Success & Public Education

Wendy Maurer (Regional Business Development Manager – Cole Health)

- IEP (Individualized Education Program) is a legal documentation to ensure FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education)
- Ensure all children are getting access to education
- Eligibility
<https://childfindtx.tea.texas.gov/eval-disability-criteria.html>
- IEP goals:
 - Clearly written
 - Measurable
 - Timeline
 - Data Collection
 - IEP Report Card with codes
 - Meaningful
- Related Services
 - Speech Therapy

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Applied Behavior Analyst
- Counseling Services
- In-home Parent Training
- Community Based Training
- HB4545
- Resources:
 - IEP Development-TEA
 - SPED TEX
 - Partners Resource Network

Shana Halvorsen (Founder and CEO, EmpowerED, LLC)

- IDEA (Individuals Disabilities Education Act) ensures all students 3-21 years old with disabilities will be provided individualized programs dedicated to their needs
 - Offers services and instruction
- 504 Rehabilitation Act- is a Civil rights law anti-discrimination prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance
 - Schools must complete 504 plans
- New Texas Voucher Program
 - New law allows public taxpayer dollars to be used for private school tuition and other educational expenses, effectively creating a school voucher program. Senate Bill 2, now law, establishes an Education Savings Account (ESA) program, providing funds for families to choose private schools or cover various educational costs.
 - Parents will not be able to use until 2027 school year

MOPD Report to the HCOD

Angel Ponce (Director, MOPD)

- From May-July MOPD assisted a total of 2,446 people with constituent cases, community outreach events/meetings and presentations given.

- Community Input Event 2nd and Final
 - The Office of Council Member Abbie Kamin, along with the Parks and Recreation Department, General Services Department and the Office for People with Disabilities participated in community input sessions at West Gray. Will be releasing a full report once it is finalized.
 - Community topics:
 - Pool access
 - Gym and playground improvements,
 - Art and theatre program concerns,
 - Bathroom access concerns,
 - Special event challenges,
 - Parking, lobby, and transportation access issues
 - Security concerns, etc.
 - Several initiatives underway
 - United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Grant, secured through the Fiscal Year 2024 Community Project Fund, provides \$1 million in federal funding designated explicitly for facility improvements.
 - Community engagement remains central to the improvement strategy, with the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Revisioning/Community Engagement Plan receiving dedicated funding. This investment ensures that all stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the facility's future direction while building consensus around improvement priorities.
 - Future Projects represent potential investments. These projects will likely address major infrastructure needs, expand capacity, and introduce new program areas that respond to evolving community needs.
- ADA 35th Anniversary & Disability Celebration
 - OPD received a special proclamation during a City Council session, presented by Council Member Abbie Kamin and Mayor

John Whitmire, in recognition of the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

-On July 26, 2025, we celebrated by hosting a disability led and advocate produced event to acknowledge this very important piece of legislation hosted by OPD, in partnership with Houston METRO, and the Southwest ADA Center.

-Angel thanked Chuck French from West Gray for his ongoing support on this event. We really appreciate you Chuck!!

-The Office for People with Disabilities had the honor of attending a special screening of **Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution at the Precinct One Administration Building**. This impactful documentary explores the origins of the disability rights movement and the grassroots efforts that led to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Held in recognition of the ADA's 35th anniversary, the event fostered important dialogue around disability, justice, accessibility, and the continued fight for equal rights.

- Outreach & Community Engagement

-OPD attended Commitment Day at Houston Community College's VAST Academy to welcome their newest cohort of students. VAST Academy's Path to Careers programming initiative is dedicated to empowering students with intellectual and developmental disabilities through inclusive education, workforce readiness, and personal development.

-Angel Ponce, Director of the Office for People with Disabilities, was featured on ABC13 to spotlight the upcoming Houston Abilities Expo 2025 (August 1-3). Event showcased the latest in adaptive technologies, inclusive programs, and community resources designed to empower individuals with disabilities.

-Rey Herrera and Norma Medrano attended the Citywide Positive Interaction Program (PIP) meeting hosted by the Houston Police Department featuring Steven Daniel, an expert in active shooter defense. His presentation, "Surviving an Active Shooter," provided practical strategies to help citizens respond effectively during high-risk situations.

-They also represented OPD at the Lighthouse of Houston's community resource fair, connecting with attendees and sharing information on city services and accessibility resources.

MMSC Report to the HCOD

Chuck French (Recreation Specialist, MMSC)

- Hoping to get results from Town Hall meetings
- Current construction: pool is still closed. Expecting to be closed until mid-September
- 2 lifeguard positions are still open. Had 2 interviews this morning.

ADA Update

- No update

Committee Updates

What commissioners have been working on:

- Chair Silcox mentioned White Cane Safety Day in October.
- Chair Silcox is anticipating employment speakers for October's HCOD meeting

Chair Silcox motions to adjourn meeting.

Meeting closes at **5:57 PM**.

Meeting Minutes recorded by Amanda Boyd; Amanda.Boyd@houstontx.gov.
Please email any corrections.