

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on International Relations & Economic Development
For HB 2598

Compiled on: Tuesday, April 11, 2023 10:42 AM

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Hearing Date: April 11, 2023 8:00 AM

Lauren Gerken
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities
Austin, TX

Chair Button and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony on HB 2598, relating to the establishment by the Texas Workforce Commission of a workplace soft skills training pilot program. My name is Lauren Gerken, and I am the Public Policy Analyst for the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD).

TCDD is established by state and federal law and is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

While access to quality employment preparation and opportunities is a fairly uniform issue for the disability community, the abilities and preparation needs are incredibly diverse. Some individuals with disabilities may benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment services from the Texas Workforce Commission. Others, who may not be eligible for VR, may need training on workplace ethics, etiquette, communication, leadership, organizational skills, and time management.

The training course proposed offers individuals with disabilities another avenue to employment and long-term success. The course may not be a disability-specific program. However, it is a prime example of how there are many instances when disabled and non-disabled individuals share similar needs and benefit from similar programs.

We appreciate that, besides the geographical stipulation of Cameron County, Representative Gamez did not include any exclusionary language regarding who can and cannot participate in the training course. TCDD recommends that as TWC develops rules and curriculum for this six-week training program, they use the openness and potential of the language to do so with the mindset that people with disabilities also need soft skills training. We also encourage TWC to recruit people with disabilities to participate in the course so that, should they recommend the pilot be expanded, it can be done so inclusively. Subsequently, we ask that legislators actively look for, even require, disability and inclusion as a component of the report to the legislature.

Thank you so much for considering this testimony. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the recommendations above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
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Shannon Noble
Texas Air Conditioning Contractors Association
Austin, TX

The Texas Air Conditioning Contractors Association supports HB 2598. Thank you.