



Outstanding Women in Texas Government Awards

This article is a repost from TDCJ News, September 30, 2024

Angie McCown, Director TDCJ Victim Services Division

Angie McCown was recently recognized as a recipient of the 2024 Outstanding Women in Texas Government Award. The State Agency Council to Gov. Greg Abbott's Commission for Women commended McCown for her exceptional leadership and dedication to serving the state of Texas for over three decades.

"Angie's tireless efforts to serve crime victims have made a significant impact on our agency and the community. This award is a testament of her exceptional work and unwavering commitment to helping others," TDCJ Executive Director Bryan Collier said. "I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with Angie over the years and witness firsthand her dedication and compassion."

Throughout her tenure, McCown has played a pivotal role in empowering crime victims to actively participate in the criminal justice system. Additionally, she has provided invaluable support to thousands of professionals who serve these victims. Under McCown's leadership, the TDCJ VSD has successfully implemented various innovative strategies and programs to better address the needs of crime victims.

"I am honored to receive the Outstanding Women in Texas Government Award for Outstanding Community Involvement. I am fortunate to have been able to work and volunteer for over 35 years in a field that I have so much passion for. The state agency administrations I have worked for have supported me and allowed me to create unique victim services programs to serve Texas violent crime victims and their families," McCown said. "I feel both privileged and humbled to have walked alongside these victims in their journey to navigate the criminal justice system and attempt to heal from the violent crime



Director Angie McCown and Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott (L-R)

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perpetrated against them. I have gained so much more than I have ever given witnessing the resiliency of the human spirit and the path back to living a life that can once again include joy.”

The Governor’s Commission for Women, which aims to promote opportunities for women in Texas through outreach, education, research, and referral services, bestowed this prestigious award upon McCown. The State Agency Council, a staunch supporter of the Governor’s Commission for Women, also offers professional development training to its members.

The award ceremony, held on September 25, celebrated the accomplishments of the outstanding women in Texas government. Joining McCown as recipients of the 2024 Outstanding Women in Texas Government Award were Margo Richards from the Lower Colorado River Authority, Mary Landrum from the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Worker’s Compensation, Marie Cohan from the Texas Department of Information Resources, and Monica Huffer from the Texas Municipal Retirement System. Each of these women was recognized for their exceptional leadership, professional development, or rising star status.

Governor Greg Abbott expressed his admiration for the award recipients, stating, “Each of these women are trailblazers, inspirations, and role models for the next generation of leaders who will follow in their footsteps to serve and make a meaningful difference in the lives of Texans. Cecilia and I are grateful for their leadership and contributions to our great state. Together, we will continue to build a bigger, better Texas for all.”

The Governor’s Commission for Women, in collaboration with the State Agency Council, remains committed to empowering Texas women by providing them with opportunities and support. Through their combined efforts, they strive to create a brighter future for all women in the Lone Star State.



TDCJ board members Sydney Zuiker and Tom Fordyce; Angie McCown, TDCJ Victim Services Division; TDCJ board member Sichan Siv; and TDCJ Executive Director Bryan Collier (L-R)



Outstanding Women in Texas Government Award Honorees with Texas First Lady, Cecilia Abbott. Recipients Monica Huffer, Angie McCown, Marie Cohan, Mary Landrum, Margo Richards (L-R).

The Texas Board of Criminal Justice: The Victim Services Committee Chair

By Sydney Zuiker, Victim Services Committee Chair, Texas Board of Criminal Justice



As I write my inaugural entry for the Victim's Informer, I find myself reflecting on the deep honor it is not only to contribute to this newsletter but also to step into the role of Chair of the Victim Services Committee for the Texas Board of Criminal Justice.

When I joined the Board in July of last year, I was both humbled and exhilarated to work alongside the esteemed former Chair, Derrellynn Perryman. Derrellynn's name resonates deeply within the victim services community, and from our first meeting, it was clear that her wisdom and compassion set a benchmark I aspire to reach.

Governor Greg Abbott appointed Ms. Perryman to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice in 2015. Her impressive career included 21 years as the Victim Service Coordinator at the Arlington Police Department and as the Victim Advocate Director at the Tarrant County District Attorney's office. In 2006, she was honored as the Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers Tarrant County Branch. In her legacy, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Windham School District have established the Derrellynn Perryman Overcomer Award to celebrate her transformative impact during her time on the Board. Although her time with us was tragically cut short by her unexpected passing last year, I am grateful for the valuable lessons she imparted during our time together.

Ms. Perryman taught me the importance of active listening, offering encouragement, and asking thoughtful questions. While I wish I could have had more time with her, I cherish the moments we shared and am profoundly honored to follow in her footsteps, as well as those of other previous remarkable victim advocates on the

Board. Her memory will guide me as I continue to advocate for victims, often reflecting on "What would Derrellynn do?"

Allow me to introduce myself.

Hello! I'm Sydney—though on the Board, I'm often called "Mrs. Zuiker". Feel free to call me Sydney! I was born and raised in Austin and am a proud University of Texas alumna. I currently live in Houston with my husband and our two beloved dogs. I have a deep appreciation for animals and believe they play a crucial role in supporting victims. Alongside my role on the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, I also serve as the Senior Director of Programs and Special Projects at Crime Stoppers of Houston. There, I oversee the strategic growth and direction of many crime prevention and related programs including our Victim Services Program.

Throughout my career, I've primarily worked with surviving family members of homicide. My team and I support approximately 3,000 victims annually, with about 90% having lost a loved one to murder. We assist families and law enforcement in finding suspects, navigating trials, and providing post-conviction support. My experience with victims, many of whose perpetrators are currently in Texas prisons, provides me with a unique perspective as a board member. I am committed to amplifying the voices of those we serve and believe that my role involves listening to both victim advocates and victims themselves to advocate for meaningful improvements to TDCJ and the Windham School District. With that said, I really would love to hear from you about any ideas for improvement you may have.

Please, don't hesitate to reach out. If you or a victim you serve have ideas, questions, or concerns, I am eager to hear them.

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles: The Pre-Revocation & Hearing Process

By Libby Hamilton, Director Victim Liaison Program, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles



This article is a repost from Volume 26 Number 3 September 2021/October 2021 of the Victim's Informer Newsletter. The information in this article has been reviewed and approved for reposting by Libby Hamilton, Director of the Victim Liaison Program, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.



In May of this year Michael Adams, Director of Hearing Operations, and I conducted a webinar (with the help of the wonderful Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse staff) regarding the parole pre-revocation process in Texas ([webinar](#)

[recording link](#)). We had a wonderful, interactive audience with lots of great questions, but for those of you who missed it, I wanted to share some of the information in this edition of the Informer.

When I began working for the Board in 2017, I admittedly knew very little about the different steps and hearings that can be involved with the parole revocation process. Coming from a victim-focused background, I was surprised to learn the rights the offender has after allegedly violating the conditions of their parole. Many people assume that if a parolee does not follow the rules, they **will** be sent back to prison, but this is not necessarily true.

The current pre-revocation process is anchored heavily upon *Morrissey v. Brewer* (1972), where an offender was revoked without a hearing and filed a lawsuit. The Supreme Court ultimately issued an opinion outlining numerous rights for parolees in this situation (see box). Among these is a victim's least favorite: the parolee's right to confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses.

How is the hearing process initiated?

While on parole or mandatory supervision, an offender is supervised by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Parole Division, which is a separate agency from the Board. If a Parole Officer has information that leads them to believe that their client may have violated a condition of release or

committed a new offense, a Violation Report (VR) is completed. Note: Not every VR leads to a warrant or hearing. The TDCJ Parole Division has the discretion to use graduated sanctions, such as case conferences or compliance counseling, as an alternative to a formal hearing or issuance of a pre-revocation (blue) warrant.

If the decision is to proceed to a hearing, a Charging Instrument is provided to the offender. This document informs the parolee of the allegations, their due process rights, and the right to waive a hearing (if deemed competent to do so). *A hearing waiver can potentially be very frustrating for a victim who wants the opportunity to testify and be heard.* If a waiver is not requested or accepted, the Parole Officer will contact the Board's Scheduling Unit to arrange a date, time, and location for the hearing. Currently, hearings are being conducted in county jails and via video conference in many instances.

MORRISSEY V. BREWER- 1972

- PAROLEES MUST BE GIVEN NOTICE OF THE SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THEM, IN WORDS THAT HE OR SHE CAN UNDERSTAND.
- RIGHT TO A FAIR & IMPARTIAL HEARING OFFICER.
- RIGHT TO PRESENT OWN EVIDENCE.
- RIGHT TO DISCLOSURE OF ALL EVIDENCE AGAINST THEM.
- RIGHT TO CONFRONT AND CROSS-EXAMINE ADVERSE WITNESSES
- IF REVOKED, THE REASONS OR BASIS FOR THE REVOCATION

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What's the difference between parole review and parole revocation proceedings?

I want to point out that for victims, participating in a **revocation hearing** is very different from participating in an offender's parole review. To clarify, a revocation hearing would take place while an offender is on parole for one crime, then is alleged to have committed a new violation. A parole review takes place when TDCJ deems an offender who is currently incarcerated to be eligible for release.

As I have discussed in past articles, Texas does not conduct formal parole review hearings like we often see on TV. For more information regarding the parole review process and meeting with the Board, I invite you to review our 10-minute video and Frequently Asked Questions at the following link: <https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/bpp/VictimLiaison/VictimLiaison.html>.

During an offender's **parole review**, a victim may opt for an "interview" with the lead voter. This can be conducted by phone, via video conference, or in-person at one of the seven Board offices around the state. This is a completely confidential conversation and the offender is not present. [Government Code 508.117](#) defines who is considered a "victim" of the offender's current offense and who is guaranteed the right to speak with the Board. These are referred to as "statutory victims".

In contrast, during a **revocation hearing**, there is no confidentiality and the offender has the right to cross-examine the complainant. Victims of parole violations are referred to as "complainants" or "witnesses". Statutory victims of the offender's current prison sentence are not allowed to testify unless the specific alleged violations pertain to them. Hearings are always audio recorded, while parole interviews are not. The one thing these two processes have in common is that our Victim Liaison Program staff can provide accompaniment to help the victim or complainant prepare before the meeting and debrief afterward. This has proven to be a very beneficial service for those who are anxious about these often difficult situations.

Who are the Hearing Participants?

Preliminary and revocation hearings are conducted by Hearing Officers (HO), neutral and detached fact finders who are employed by the Board. They are responsible for gathering

information and determining if there is sufficient evidence to make a finding. The HO also makes a recommendation to the Board and puts all the information obtained during the hearing into a report. **They cannot consider any information from outside the hearing.**

Another important participant is the offender's Parole Officer (PO), who is employed by TDCJ. The PO must present both friendly and adverse evidence, as well as information on how the parolee has adjusted to supervision *outside* the unit.

The parolee may be appointed (or choose to retain) an attorney for defense. Additionally, the parolee does *not* have to testify but has the right to do so during both the violation and adjustment phases.

Witnesses can be called in to provide testimony regarding the allegations or the parolee's adjustment on supervision.

Special Circumstances sometimes arise, particularly if the hearing involves child victims or witnesses who are afraid to testify in front of the offender. It is important to note that the Board carefully trains its hearing officers in Fearful Witness Determinations and how to situate the room to maximize safety for all participants. In training we also highlight the sensitivity of working with child witnesses, protecting pseudonyms when applicable, and that the HO must never allow witnesses to be badgered by the offender's attorney. The attorney is, however, allowed to ask difficult questions if they are deemed relevant to the allegations.

Each HO is encouraged to contact my office if they anticipate any potentially difficult situations. For example, I have been able to work with a minor victim and her mother *prior* to the hearing, with the intention of preparing them for what the process will be like and addressing any concerns they have. In order to avoid any undue influence, my staff cannot be *in* the hearing, however, we can be available before and afterward to meet with witnesses and complainants.

What Happens Next?

There must be an affirmative finding (sufficient evidence) in a revocation hearing for the Board to take action. The Board's options include:

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- Continue parole supervision with or without additional sanctions (parole conditions).
- Transfer to an Intermediate Sanction Facility (ISF) for 60-180 days.
- Transfer to a Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) facility.
- Revoke parole or mandatory supervision and return to prison.

While a parolee is in county jail, registrants can receive notifications in two ways. One option is through the Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) system at www.vinelink.com, and the second is through the TDCJ Victim Services Division's Integrated Victim Services System (IVSS). IVSS registration can be completed by calling 800.848.4284, or online here <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov>.

Please feel free to call my office at (512) 406-5833 or email me at libby.hamilton@tdcj.texas.gov if you would like more information about the parole review or revocation processes.

Note from the Clearinghouse:

In August 2024, Ms. Hamilton presented another webinar for the TxCVC titled Post-Conviction Services for Victims & Survivors. Attendees had the opportunity to hear first-hand from a sexual assault survivor about her experiences, as well as gain information regarding the continuum of services and programs available to victims of violent crime in Texas. If you would like to view this webinar recording you may visit the following link: <https://tdcj.adobeconnect.com/p5y4a0jhyx5/>.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to hear victims and survivors tell their stories because their experiences of the system are what allow us to continue improving how we as victim service and criminal justice professionals can provide services. Please be advised that the webinar content may be triggering or cause an emotional response for some. If at any point you feel upset by the information shared, please take a moment to step away, take a breath, and resume viewing if you can. Thank you.

TDCJ Victim Services Division Resources

The TDCJ Victim Services Division provides services to victims, criminal justice and victim services professionals, and the public, including resources, publications, and information and referral services.

Brochures

All TxCVC brochures are available for free to download from the Integrated Victim Services System (IVSS) portal by visiting <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/publication-list/>. You may also use the "Request Publication Hardcopy" to place an order to be mailed to you. You must be signed into your portal account to place an order.

IVSS Links Library

The TDCJ VSD maintains a Links Library on the IVSS website to provide links to helpful tools, information, brochures, and help lines for victims of crime covering topics ranging from Crime Victims' Compensation and safety planning to suicide and self-harm prevention. The Links Library is accessible through the IVSS portal under the Resources tab, you may click the following link as well: <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/links-library/>.

TDCJ Victim Services Resource Directory

The Texas Victim Resource Directory is also located on the IVSS portal at <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/resource-search/>. This directory features a searchable database with over 1,100 service providers from governmental agencies and non-profit organizations that provide services to victims free of charge.

Informational Video Library

The Informational Video Library connects victims of crime to information they may need to navigate the criminal justice system, exercise their rights, and access support and assistance. The library also serves as a resource for victim services and criminal justice professionals who wish to receive training and information on specific subjects related to serving victims of crime. To access the library, click the following link: <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/video>.



Christi Lanahan

For the Love of Christi

By: The Christi Center

The Christi Center is named after Christi Lanahan, a University of Texas Junior and Westlake High alumna who was tragically killed by a drunk driver in 1985.

For her mom and stepdad, Susan and Don Cox, life was permanently altered in an instant. In a state of shock and consumed with grief, they found few community resources to support grieving families.

Drowning in grief and facing great personal and marital challenges, the Coxes and Christi's brother, Sean Lanahan, decided to reach out to others instead of retreating. On the two-year anniversary of Christi's death, they founded the nonprofit "For the Love of Christi", with a mission to provide free, ongoing grief support to Central Texans who have experienced a loss of a loved one.

Susan and Don organized grief support groups at various locations around Austin, eventually acquiring the property on Hancock Drive where the Christi Center currently stands. With the help of friends and supporters, they added an annex designed to accommodate more people and larger support group sessions, and later, a family building to provide dedicated space for children/teens and additional staff offices. Under Susan and Don's leadership, these buildings were completed with full community support and the Christi Center owns these buildings debt-free. In 2010, the Christi Center expanded to Williamson County with a satellite location in Georgetown, Texas.

Oftentimes, people who have been with a group for a while will go through the training to become facilitators or will continue with groups to help new people whose grief is still fresh. Group members learn from each other about how to cope with loss and find new purpose in helping others. That cycle is the basis of the peer-based model that the Christi Center uses.

The Christi Center is now in its 37th year of work helping Austin's grieving families. The Christi Center staff and volunteers will keep working to change the way people talk about grief and loss and care for those who are grieving. The center serves more than 6,000 people a year with 40+ peer-based support groups that range from those dealing with the death of a child to those who have lost someone to violent crime or suicide. There are groups for children, teens, and adults, and limited individual counseling is also offered.

For more information on services provided by the Christi Center, visit our [website](#), or call (512) 467-2600. One can also request services by submitting an online form through the following link: <https://christicenter.org/get-started/>.



Texas Victim Assistance Training Academy Class of 2024



By Kayla Smart, Program Supervisor V, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) hosted the ninth-annual Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Academy from July 22-25, 2024 at the Georgetown Public Safety Center. There were 42 attendees from across the state of Texas representing various government agencies and non-profit organizations that provide services to victims of crime. This year, the three-and-one-half-day training was reformatted to four full days to include additional information added to the curriculum and new interactive components to encourage attendee engagement and collaboration. The Exhibitor Round Robin was added to provide an opportunity for new victim assistance and criminal justice professionals attending the Academy to meet with various victim assistance agencies and form connections within the field. The participating agencies included the Department of Justice (DOJ) Victim Services, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Victim Services, Grand Canyon University

(GCU), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Texas Council on Family (TCFV), Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA), and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD). If your agency is interested in being an exhibitor during the TVAT Academy, you may contact TVAT Academy staff at tvatacademy@tdcj.texas.gov.

Preparations for the 2025 TVAT Academy are underway. For more information regarding the TVAT Academy please visit the TVAT Academy webpage at https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/tvat_academy.html.



Training Opportunities

The TxCVC provides training statewide for our partners in the criminal justice and victim assistance fields.

Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

The Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online is designed to provide a foundational-level training for new victim services professionals who routinely work with victims of crime. Topics include: crime victims' rights, ethics in victim services, stress management, compassion fatigue, crime victims' assistance standards, effective communication skills for working with victims of crime, and guiding principles and practices of the victim services field. For more information, please visit the TVAT Online web page https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/tvat_online.html.

Resiliency Module

Working as a victim service professional can be incredibly fulfilling and rewarding. However, assisting people who have endured horrible criminal acts and continued exposure to all the malicious things people do to each other can lead to burnout. Information, preparation, and positive self-care practices can help victim service professionals moderate any adverse effects they may experience. The TVAT Online Resiliency Module explores strategies that can help you recognize, reduce, and transform those effects that may come from working with people who have suffered extreme trauma, grief, and loss. This module teaches coping practices, skills, and techniques that can help you build a resiliency program and prevent or mitigate vicarious trauma. To register for the Resiliency module please go to [TVAT Online Resiliency Module](#) event registration page.

Webinars

The TxCVC hosts a webinar series designed to provide training on a wide range of topics for criminal justice and victim services professionals. Information regarding webinars and other victim services related trainings and events scheduled in Texas are provided through the search tool found here <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/search-training-event/>. The database includes trainings, conferences, memorial/

remembrance events, webinar recordings, and other relevant events hosted in the state of Texas. To keep abreast on all upcoming TxCVC webinars, please refer to the Upcoming Webinars page on the TDCJ VSD website: <https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/webinars.html>.

If you would like to share ideas for future webinars or would be interested in presenting in our webinar series, please email the TxCVC with your contact information at tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov.

Other Trainings Available

The TxCVC can provide training to your agency or coalition. Training content and topics can be developed and integrated to meet your specific training needs and can vary in length. The TxCVC is committed to providing training to meet the individualized needs of communities working to enhance services provided to victims. Trainings provided by TxCVC staff are free of charge. If you would like the TxCVC to present a training event for your organization, please go to the Event/ Training Request page found here <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/training-request/>.

Victim Impact Panel

The TDCJ VSD facilitates victim impact panels for criminal justice and victim services agencies and organizations. The attendees of the panels are usually either groups of criminal justice/victim services professionals or groups of offenders. Panelists are typically victims of crime who are also TDCJ volunteers. Volunteer panelists can indicate if they prefer to speak at panels with only criminal justice and victim services professionals, panels with only offenders, or both. Anyone interested in serving as a panelist may contact the VSD office at (800) 848-4284 and ask to speak with the Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue Administrative Assistant. Crime victims who wish to volunteer as panelists will need to apply to be a TDCJ approved volunteer. For more information, please visit https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/faq/victim_impact_panel.html. To request a Victim Impact Panel go to [IVSS Victim Impact Panel Request](#).

National Victim Awareness Dates

December 2024

National Impaired Driving Prevention Month

National Impaired Driving Prevention Month, observed in December, aims to raise awareness about the dangers of impaired driving, promote responsible behavior, and encourage the public to take action to prevent alcohol and drug-related crashes during the holidays.

For additional information you can visit Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) <https://madd.org/>.

January 2025

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month

Human Trafficking Prevention Month, observed every January, raises awareness about the ongoing issue of human trafficking and promotes efforts to prevent this global crime. To learn more about human trafficking prevention effort, resources, and assistance for victims, you can visit the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) [Human Trafficking page](#).

National Stalking Awareness Month

January 2025 marks the twenty-first annual National Stalking Awareness Month (NSAM). NSAM focuses on educating the public about the prevalence of stalking and the impact it has on victims. This month aims to empower individuals with resources and support, encouraging communities to take action against stalking and promote safety for all. For additional information contact [Stalking Prevention, Awareness, & Resource Center \(SPARC\)](#)

National Mentoring Month

National Mentoring Month is observed in January to recognize the importance of mentoring relationships and to encourage individuals to become mentors, fostering the growth and development of young people and communities. For additional information, contact [MENTOR](#).

February 2025

National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month

National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month, observed each February, aims to raise awareness about the prevalence of dating violence among teens and to promote healthy relationship behaviors. It encourages communities, schools, and parents to educate young people about the signs of abusive relationships and how to seek help. For additional information visit the [National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline](#).

Information About *The Victim's Informer*

The Victim's Informer e-newsletter is published quarterly. Articles and other submissions should be e-mailed to tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov. If you would like to submit materials or events, please email the TxCVC or call us at 512-406-5931.

Please Note: You may access the publication on the TDCJ VSD website by going to https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/publications/victim_informer_newsletter.html. If you wish, we will notify you via email each time *The Victim's Informer* becomes available on the TDCJ VSD website and provide a link to *The Victim's Informer*.

Subscribe/Unsubscribe/Update your email address here: <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov>.

Angie McCown, Director

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