



November 30, 2022

Jennifer Jones
Executive Director
Sunset Advisory Commission
Via email: sunset@sunset.texas.gov

Re: THLA Comment on The Sunset Staff Report on the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office and Office of State-Federal Relations

Dear Ms. Jones,

We are honored to have this opportunity to provide public comment on the Texas Sunset Advisory Committee staff report on the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office in advance of our public testimony at the Sunset Review hearing on December 6.

We will limit our comments to the recommendations related specifically to the Tourism Office and its operations in Issue 1 and Issue 3 of the report -- as these items most directly impact our interest in tourism and the hotel industry.

Issue 1:

Under Issue 1, the Sunset Commission provided several recommendations regarding the overall effectiveness of the Economic Development and Tourism Office.

1. The Sunset Commission references statistical data that supports the economic impact of tourism and its importance to the overall Texas economy. We wholeheartedly agree with this observation and the data that supports it.
2. The Sunset Commission concludes that no substantial benefits would result from transferring Economic Development and Tourism's functions to a different state agency. Again, we agree. The Tourism Office staff are subject matter experts in each of their work functions. The marketing contracts administered by this Office are overseen by with great consideration of the best interest of the State of Texas. We would also note that the staff of the Tourism Office have a strong and effective history of coordinating their efforts with other state agencies that work in related areas.

Issue 3:

Under Issue 3, the Sunset Commission provided several recommendations on how the Tourism Office could provide additional assistance to Texas communities to increase Tourism.

1. The Sunset Commission report recommends that the Tourism Office expand its "community tourism assessment services."

Our position is that expansion of this service would be beneficial. However, with the current limited staffing of this office at only 10 to 12 individuals, it would be difficult to expand these services without compromising the key marketing services that the Tourism Office oversees. The marketing program provides very direct benefits for Texas and all of our communities throughout the State.

Additionally, we would respectfully assert that there are other private sector consulting sources that could conduct tourism assessments for local communities on a fee basis to address this need.

2. The Sunset Commission report also recommends additional training be provided to enable stakeholders to better utilize the tourism research and data that is available on the office's website.

THLA would suggest that there could be additional information housed on the State Tourism Website, www.traveltexas.com on how to utilize the tourism research and data that is available on the office's website. Additionally, the research staff within the Tourism Office can continue to make themselves available to address any questions that arise in this context. We don't think that there would be demand for additional training if these two strategies are offered.

3. Third, the Sunset Commission Report recommends the State Tourism Office provide Texas communities with the opportunity to be awarded a "Tourism Friendly Community Designation."

The report suggests that the Tourism Office should model its community designation program after similar initiatives that have been implemented by the Texas Film Commission and the Texas Music Office. Our concern regarding this recommendation would be that implementing such a program by the Tourism Office is likewise to require substantial staff resources and would not be the best utilization of their limited time and staffing.

4. The final Sunset Commission Report recommendation is that the Tourism Office submit its strategic tourism plan biennially, instead of annually.

THLA fully supports this recommendation. This change would free up resources of the staff to focus on the essential work duties and ensure even stronger oversight of the marketing initiatives that they oversee.

Sincerely,

Garrett Coppedge
Associate General Counsel
Texas Hotel and Lodging Association