

Mr. Eric Beverly
Executive Director
Sunset Advisory Commission
1501 N. Congress Avenue
Robert E. Johnson Building, 6th Floor
Austin, Texas 78701



RE: Public Comment – Texas Workforce Commission

Dear Executive Director Beverly:

On behalf of the Texas Association for Behavior Analysis Public Policy Group (TxABA PPG), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report regarding the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). TxABA PPG is a 501(c)(6) organization dedicated to monitoring and engaging in legislative, regulatory, and policy issues that impact behavior analysts and the individuals they serve throughout Texas.

TxABA PPG represents behavior analysts and providers of all sizes across a variety of service settings and funding sources. Our members serve children, adolescents, and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), and other developmental disabilities in communities across Texas. Through this work, our members have firsthand experience with the opportunities and challenges individuals with disabilities encounter when accessing services designed to support greater independence, meaningful community participation, and successful employment.

We appreciate the Sunset Advisory Commission's attention to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program and welcome the opportunity to offer feedback informed by the experiences of behavior analysts and providers serving Texans with ASD and IDD.

Issue 3: TWC's Vocational Rehabilitation Program

TxABA PPG strongly supports the Sunset Staff Report's focus on improving the effectiveness of TWC's VR program. Sunset staff identified challenges related to integration, administration, and training that can hinder the program's ability to efficiently, consistently, and fairly serve Texans with disabilities.

These concerns are consistent with experiences reported by TxABA PPG members who provide ASD Supports and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services through TWC's VR program. Individuals with ASD and IDD may require specialized, individualized supports to develop the behavioral, communication, social, adaptive, and vocational skills necessary to prepare for and maintain successful employment. Ensuring that these services are accessible, appropriately utilized, and adequately supported should be an important component of efforts to improve the VR program. TxABA PPG supports all three recommendations identified by Sunset staff under Issue 3 and offers the following comments to further support their implementation for individuals with ASD and IDD.

1. Define TWC-VR integration and its objectives in rule.

TxABA PPG supports defining TWC-VR integration and its objectives in rule. Establishing a clear framework for integration will help create greater consistency across the state, clarify roles and expectations, and streamline coordination between VR and other workforce programs. Clearly defined objectives can also reduce unnecessary administrative barriers and help ensure that individuals are connected to appropriate services in a timely and efficient manner. Formalizing these expectations in rule provides greater transparency and accountability while helping ensure integration is implemented consistently across programs and locations.

For individuals with ASD and IDD, a more coordinated system can make it easier to navigate services and access the specialized supports needed to prepare for and maintain successful employment. TxABA PPG encourages TWC to ensure that ASD Supports and ABA services are appropriately incorporated into this integrated framework so that individuals who may benefit from these services can be efficiently identified and connected to them.

2. Abolish the VR regional structure and redistribute regional personnel and resources.

TxABA PPG supports efforts to improve efficiency and direct resources toward service delivery. As TWC redistributes personnel and resources, we encourage the agency to consider opportunities to improve access to ASD Supports and ABA services, including addressing barriers related to provider capacity, reimbursement rates, and the amount of services available to individuals. Sunset estimates that restructuring could make

more than \$10.6 million annually and approximately 200 full time equivalents (FTE) available for more efficient use within the VR program.

3. Update training for new VRCs to improve curriculum and better prepare staff.

TxABA PPG strongly supports this recommendation and encourages TWC to specifically include training on ASD Supports and ABA services available through the VR program. Our members have experienced variability in Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors' (VRC) knowledge of these services. Training should ensure VRCs understand the purpose of ASD Supports and ABA services, eligibility and referral processes, and how these services may be appropriately utilized to help individuals achieve their employment goals. An individual's access to an appropriate service should not depend upon a VRC's familiarity with that service.

Taken together, these recommendations provide an important opportunity to improve VR services for Texans with disabilities. TxABA PPG encourages TWC to use implementation of the Sunset recommendations not only to improve the structure and administration of the VR program, but also to ensure individuals with ASD and IDD have meaningful access to the specialized services necessary to prepare for and succeed in competitive integrated employment.

Additional Recommendations Regarding ASD Supports and ABA Services

In addition to supporting the recommendations outlined in Issue 3, TxABA PPG encourages TWC to address two additional barriers consistently identified by our members who provide ASD Supports and ABA services through the VR program: provider reimbursement rates and limitations on authorized service hours. These issues directly affect provider capacity and the ability to adequately prepare individuals for successful employment. Addressing them would complement the Sunset recommendations and further improve the effectiveness of VR service delivery and employment outcomes for Texans with ASD and IDD.

Provider Reimbursement Rates

We encourage TWC to reevaluate reimbursement rates for providers delivering specialized services to individuals with ASD and IDD. Current rates can make it difficult for providers to sustain these services and maintain the qualified workforce necessary to serve individuals who may have significant behavioral, communication, adaptive, and

vocational support needs. Adequate reimbursement is essential to maintaining a strong provider network and ensuring individuals have access to qualified professionals.

Authorized Service Hours

We also encourage TWC to reevaluate limitations on the number of service hours available to each individual. Individuals with ASD and IDD have highly individualized needs, and some require additional time to acquire, practice, generalize, and maintain the skills necessary to be successful in a workplace. When available treatment hours are exhausted before an individual has developed these skills, providers may be unable to adequately prepare that individual for successful job placement.

We believe the measure of success should not simply be whether an individual has completed an allotted number of service hours, but whether the individual has developed the skills necessary to be successful in employment. Whenever possible, the intensity and duration of services should reflect the individual's assessed needs, progress, and employment goals.

Providing sufficient services before job placement is an investment in long-term success. Individuals who enter the workforce with the skills and supports they need are more likely to obtain and sustain meaningful employment, increase their independence, and participate more fully in their communities.

Conclusion

TxABA PPG appreciates the Sunset Advisory Commission's thoughtful review of TWC and its recognition of the need to improve the administration and delivery of VR services. We respectfully encourage the Commission to adopt the recommendations under Issue 3 and to consider the additional concerns identified above regarding reimbursement rates, authorized service hours, and VRC knowledge of ASD Supports and ABA services.

Ultimately, the success of the VR program should be measured by its ability to help Texans with disabilities develop the skills and supports necessary to obtain and sustain meaningful employment. We believe these recommendations will help ensure that individuals with ASD and IDD have access to appropriate, individualized services that prepare them not simply for job placement, but for long-term success in the workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and for your continued commitment to improving services and employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities.

Sincerely,

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