

The Arc of Texas Written Testimony to Sunset Advisory Commission on Sunset Review of Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

Overview

The Arc of Texas is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advocating for the rights of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Founded in 1953 by a group of parents of children with IDD, The Arc of Texas advocates for policies that expand opportunities for people with IDD to participate fully in their communities and the workforce.

Feedback Provided to Sunset Advisory Commission on Experiences of Texans with IDD with the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program

To inform The Arc of Texas's comments to the Sunset Advisory Commission on its review of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), The Arc of Texas gathered feedback directly from Texans with IDD and their families. In November 2025, the Public Policy and Advocacy team hosted a statewide listening session focused on three areas: access to services, quality of services, and oversight and accountability. The team also surveyed Texans with IDD about their experiences with the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, including satisfaction with job coaching and VR counseling and whether VR services helped them achieve their employment goals.

In December 2025, The Arc of Texas staff met with Sunset Advisory Commission staff to share this feedback. Participants identified barriers to accessing VR services, including delays in connecting with counselors, high caseloads, staff turnover, and difficulty navigating the VR system. They also reported inconsistent service delivery and limited transparency regarding available services, with experiences often varying by counselor or region. Families emphasized that these inconsistencies can delay or disrupt progress toward employment goals, particularly for individuals with IDD who may benefit from continuity and individualized support. The Arc of Texas also identified a need for greater stakeholder involvement in VR policy and program decisions, particularly when changes may directly affect customers.

At the same time, participants shared examples of how effective VR services and job coaching can help Texans with IDD obtain competitive integrated employment, increase financial independence, and participate more fully in their communities. These experiences underscore the importance of an effective VR program in helping Texans with IDD and their families achieve meaningful employment goals and improved quality of life.

Additional Areas for VR Improvement

The Arc of Texas identified several areas that warrant continued attention as the Sunset Commission considers recommendations to strengthen the VR program.

I. Improving the VR Experience for Customers and Families

Families consistently report that the VR process can be difficult to navigate and that information about available services and supports is not always clear or readily accessible. Many families were uncertain about which services VR could provide or fund and reported learning about available supports primarily through other families or community organizations rather than directly from VR staff. While improved training for VR counselors may help address these concerns, TWC should also prioritize a customer-centered approach that makes the VR process as accessible, transparent, and collaborative as possible.

This should include clear and consistent communication about available services and the process for obtaining approval, proactive assistance to help customers understand and navigate their options, and meaningful collaboration with customers and families in developing employment plans. The Arc of Texas also recommends that TWC develop user-friendly decision-tree tools outlining available services and the VR process as one mechanism for improving access to information and supporting informed decision-making.

II. Ensuring High-Quality and Accessible Contracted Services

The Arc of Texas recognizes the challenges TWC faces in ensuring an adequate network of VR vendors, particularly in rural areas and communities experiencing provider shortages.

The Arc of Texas supports the intent of Staff Recommendation 3.6 to expand vendor options by allowing alternative certifications for job skills, job coaching, and supported employment services.

The staff report appropriately identifies the cost and length of the current credentialing process as barriers to becoming a VR vendor. Reducing unnecessary barriers to entry may help strengthen the availability of services, particularly in areas with limited provider capacity.

At the same time, families identified the quality and effectiveness of contracted job coaching as a significant concern. Employment supports for Texans with IDD can involve distinct and specialized needs related to communication, learning, adaptive skills, and ongoing support that may differ from the needs of other VR customers with disabilities. Families of VR clients with IDD reported that some contracted providers lacked the training

The Arc of Texas and Texas Advocates Feedback for the Sunset Review of the Texas Workforce Commission

Overview

The Arc of Texas and Texas Advocates work directly with Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. Our organizations support policies that expand access to competitive integrated employment, which refers to individuals with disabilities working at or above minimum wage in community settings. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is a key pathway to employment for many Texans with IDD. Through our direct support of Texans with IDD and our policy work, we have identified several challenges that limit access, consistency, and transparency within VR services.

Issue 1: Barriers to Accessing Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Families report that it is often difficult to begin VR services. Many experience long delays before connecting with a counselor. Federal timelines require eligibility decisions within 60 days and development of an Individualized Plan for Employment within 90 days after eligibility. In practice, families describe waiting far too long to be connected to services.

Many families also find TWC's VR system confusing and difficult to navigate. Requirements and paperwork are often unclear. High counselor caseloads and frequent staff turnover create additional obstacles. For people with IDD, consistency and relationship-building are essential, and repeated changes in counselors can halt progress entirely.

Quotes from Families on Their Experiences with TWC VR:

- "We felt very lost and confused navigating the programs in our area. The process was not easy, even as a social worker in the field of disability. I certainly do not know how someone with disability and little support would be able to navigate these programs."
- "In our area, TWC VR has been very difficult to work with. We attempt to link individuals to these supports but VR is not very responsive. They seem less than willing to work together to overcome barriers and seem to delay things as much as possible expressing overwork and high caseloads."

in community life. When VR successfully supports Texans with IDD to achieve competitive integrated employment, the outcomes are lifechanging.

Story Highlight: April Campbell's Successful Transition Out of Subminimum Wage



Texas Workforce Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation Division and the University of North Texas received a five-year, \$13.3 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration to develop the Texas Beacons of Excellence program, which supports individuals with disabilities in moving from subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment.

From 2023 to 2025, April was one of approximately 2,500 Texans with disabilities working in a sheltered workshop at Goodwill of Dallas, earning \$3.25 per hour sorting clothes, before becoming a participant in the Texas Beacons of Excellence program in 2025.

With support from Texas Beacons of Excellence and Vocational Rehabilitation, April secured a new job at a DHL shipping distribution center that ships Nike products nationwide, increasing her earnings to \$18.25 hour.

April shares that working at DHL Nike has helped her feel better about her life, and she loves her job and the pride it brings to her and her family. Her story demonstrates what is possible when individuals with disabilities are provided adequate supports in the workplace.

Issue 3: Insufficient Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Decisions

Stakeholders have limited opportunities to provide meaningful input into TWC's policy and program decisions. The Rehabilitation Council of Texas is the only formal venue for feedback, but these meetings generally serve as informational updates rather than collaborative spaces where stakeholder expertise can inform policy.

Recommendations

1. Ensure Consistent Service Delivery and Transparency in VR Services:

- Enforce accountability measures so VR counselors consistently follow service planning and communication standards, ensuring all participants and families have clear, comprehensive, and transparent guidance for developing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs).
- Develop user-friendly decision-tree tools outlining available services, eligibility, and next steps to ensure informed, equitable access.

2. Strengthen Oversight and Quality of Contracted Services:

- Strengthen policy standards for contractor qualifications, performance metrics, and compliance monitoring to ensure high-quality, effective job coaching and placement supports for Texans with IDD.

3. Increase Stakeholder Engagement:

- Develop proactive engagement of individuals with IDD and their families in policy and program decisions.
- Provide early notice of upcoming program changes so families are not harmed by sudden shifts in policy.

Our Shared Vision

The Arc of Texas and Texas Advocates responsive and high-quality VR program is essential to ensuring that Texans with IDD can pursue meaningful employment and participate fully in their communities. Strengthening consistency, transparency, and stakeholder engagement will help Texas fulfill its Employment First commitment and open pathways to opportunity for thousands of Texans with IDD.

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