

Vernon Max Arrell

October 21, 2014

Mr. Ken Levine, Director
Sunset Advisory Commission
1501 North Congress,
6th Floor
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mr. Levine:

The following comments are offered in response to the Sunset Advisory Commission's Staff Report for the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and System Issues.

My history with Health and Human Services in Texas state government spans over forty five years. For twenty five of my forty five year history, I served as the Commissioner of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission. Since retirement I have remained involved in advocating and working in the community to assist people with disabilities understand and maneuver the myriad of programs and services available for people with disabilities.

I support any practical effort to streamline efficiencies that will yield ideal and specialized services for people with disabilities. However, in my professional opinion, the recommendations in this report do not serve this purpose. This recommendation as written by Sunset, will negatively impact people with disabilities who are 'eligible' to receive Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. People with disabilities look for DARS services to provide that 'unique' and 'specialized' one/one interaction between a 'vocational' rehabilitation counselor and the disabled client. VR counselors are certified professionals in their field who are trained to concentrate on the vocational (return to work) characteristics of the disabled client. In turn, the VR program successfully rehabilitates and returns disabled individuals into the workforce, becoming independent tax paying citizens. There is no other program like or similar to the VR programs in Texas. As a result, I emphatically disagree with Sunset Issue 1, to include the identified recommendations 1.1-1.3. The recommendations as presented will dilute services for people with disabilities in this state. VR clients looking for DARS programs will be 'lost' in a much larger *system* where fiscal and operational needs are diametrically different. Disabled clients seeking DARS programs will become a number, lost in a very large bureaucratic 'system'.

Additionally, services currently administered by DARS must be aligned and organized as a separate and distinct functional structure. Federal partners including the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and Social Security Administration (SSA) federally fund a large majority of DARS programs, VR (DRS and DBS) and Disability Determination Services. These federal partners have absolute regulations that not only govern the way the programs are administered, but also dictate how the respective policies, funding, and programs are implemented.

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Any dilution, fragmentation or minimizing (even through organizational placement) will have catastrophic outcomes for some of the most significantly disabled populations and potentially jeopardize the availability of much needed federal funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this report. If I may offer any clarity to the content of my comments, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,


Vernon "Max" Arrell
Rehabilitation Consultant