



Testimony on Sunset review of HHSC

October 13, 2014

I appreciate the Sunset Staff's work, and the opportunity to provide comments on the report.

Issue 1, Recommendation 1.1

I understand that the intent of this recommendation is to improve accountability, and to streamline and improve service delivery to Texans. The report also mentions fragmentation, so I am writing to point out another place in our health and human service delivery system that is fragmented. Please note I am not weighing in on the consolidation recommendation itself, but am suggesting another area of streamlining and consolidation that the commission should consider.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) houses the child care subsidy program, which provides child care vouchers to low-income families that qualify. Though it is housed at TWC, child care is very much a health and human service function. The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant that funds the programs originates from the federal Office of Child Care, under the Administration of Children and Families, which is a Division of the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

It is very unorthodox to have federal Child Care Development Fund administration at a workforce agency. Only four states house this function in a workforce agency, and most are housed in the same agency that licenses child care facilities.

The fragmentation causes the following problems:

- A disconnect between the child care regulatory agency, the Department of Family and Protective Services, and TWC, the child care subsidy administering agency. There are reports of centers still receiving subsidies (managed by TWC), despite many severe licensing violations (managed by DFPS). If the functions were housed together, it would facilitate better communication and increased safety and quality in child care.
- Child care is not mentioned anywhere in the purpose or mission statement of TWC. Administering child care subsidies is much more related to child care licensing than it is workforce activities, and, to quote the Sunset report "Separation of these services in different agencies as opposed to a more unified location complicates serving the range of persons' needs and creates inefficiencies in eligibility

Texans Care for Children is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fulfilling the promise of children through improved state policies and programs on child protective services; juvenile justice; mental well-being; health and fitness; and early childhood education and opportunities.

determinations, as clients qualifying for one type of service often qualify for others." This is absolutely true for families qualifying for child care subsidies, and for other programs HHSC administers, such as Medicaid, SNAP, or WIC.

- The Texas Rising Star Program is the only Quality Rating Improvement System we have in Texas, and is housed at TWC. A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. All but 10 states have launched a statewide QRIS, to ensure that quality can be measured and improved in all licensed child care facilities. However, our Texas Rising Star Program is only available to the 60 percent of centers that take kids in the subsidy system, making it difficult to ensure that quality improvements are available and happening statewide, since the program is not administered by DFPS. If Texas intends to have a statewide QRIS, it should consider housing these functions together so the program can be integrated and offered to all child care providers.

Given the relatedness to DFPS' Child Care Licensing Division, the Sunset Commission may wish to consider merging the TWC child care subsidy program into HHSC, along with the other human service agencies. Reviewing all related pieces on the front end will help the Commission meet its intent to reduce inefficiency and fragmentation in the health and human service system.

Andrea Brauer
Early Education Policy Associate
Texans Care for Children
512.473.2274
abrauer@txchildren.org
www.txchildren.org