

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Cecelia Hartley](#)
Subject: FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)
Date: Monday, June 09, 2014 12:40:47 PM

-----Original Message-----

From: sundrupal@capitol.local [<mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local>]
Sent: Monday, June 09, 2014 8:39 AM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Monday, June 9, 2014 - 08:39

Agency: DEPARTMENT ASSISTIVE AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES DARS

First Name: Christine

Last Name: Cowan

Title: Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments

Organization you are affiliated with: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Email:

City: Austin

State: Texas

Your Comments About the Staff Report, Including Recommendations Supported or Opposed:

I am opposed to two recommendations related to DARS, Issues 1 and 3:

ISSUE 1 Sunset recommendation - The Separation between DARS' Divisions for Blind Services and Rehabilitation Services Causes Unnecessary Duplication and Impedes Access to Service. I am opposed to this recommendation for these reasons:

1. Although blindness is a low incidence disability, there is a need for extensive and ongoing specific training to provide specific rehabilitation services that will match this population's needs. Managers need to be able to supervise the quality of the services and monitor that they reflect best practice. It is important to have leadership and administrative support from people who are informed and trained on the needs of people who are blind or visually impaired.
2. Rehabilitation training for those without vision loss is often less costly; there will be an incentive to get faster results to meet rehabilitation goals by serving those without longer term specialized training such as orientation and mobility and instruction in assistive technology. Blind consumers might be overlooked in favor of less intensive non-blindness related cases if their services are merged into a more generic vocational rehabilitation system.
3. There is current data to support separate structures: The primary conclusions of Mississippi State University 2010 research on the outcomes of separate blindness-specific versus combined agencies is highlighted below:

Consumer Outcomes - "...Separate agencies, compared with General/Combined agencies, close a higher percentage of consumers in employment in integrated settings and in self-employment."

Competitive Employment - "...Separate agencies, compared with General/Combined agencies, close a higher percentage of consumers in competitive employment..."*

4. Attitudes towards blindness and adjustment to blindness by consumers dramatically influence the need for specialized services from rehabilitation professionals with in-depth knowledge and skills in blindness related issues. Distinctive needs of the population with vision loss will get overlooked in a larger administrative structure meeting more generalized needs.
5. DRS has never had a children's program; the Blind Children's Program would lose the leadership and oversight of knowledgeable supervisors who can meaningfully direct these critical support functions for families and young children and for transition services

ISSUE 3 Sunset recommendation - DARS Offers Many Independent Living Services Consumers Could Easily Access Through Local Centers for Independent Living. I am opposed for these reasons:

1. The number of seniors who are visually impaired is growing exponentially and services need to expand, not become more limited. Specific assistance to function with visual loss is critical for the increasing number of seniors who lose vision as they age. The Texas Silver Haired Legislature called for expanding funding and staffing for the older blind program as one of their top priorities. The need has grown - as of April, DBS exceeded the number of people served through the whole year already - their numbers are up by 25%.
2. There aren't readily available independent living centers locally in all parts of the state. Their catchment areas are enormous and transportation to these centers is a real barrier.
3. There is limited expertise available at the centers to assist people who are blind or visually impaired.
4. There is a need for specialized assistance in the home (not at a center) for many newly blinded Texans who need training in independent living skills and orientation and mobility to remain safely at home.
5. There is a concern that the funds that are now earmarked for blindness related services will be dispersed within the larger general community and services will suffer

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: Keep the current system in place.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree