

OCT 17 2014



Veronda L. Durden
Commissioner

October 17, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Levine:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report for the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and System Issues.

As the Commissioner of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, I support all efforts to reduce fragmentation and increase accountability of state agencies serving persons with disabilities and families of children with developmental delays. However, in these efforts, it is important that the structure of a new HHSC include a visible organizational unit with programs that this population can identify as focused on providing the specialized rehabilitative and habilitative services needed to live independent and productive lives. Many of these programs are smaller in size relative to programs such as Medicaid and provide distinctive services with federal regulations on service delivery, operational structure and administrative functions. I have concerns that including these programs for persons with disabilities and children with developmental delays in an agency division which includes Medicaid, eligibility determination, public health benefits and numerous health delivery programs will not provide the appropriate functional structure for programs intended to meet the specialized needs of this population.

A division within the reconstituted HHSC to house programs that serve people with disabilities and families of children with developmental delays is critical. Adding this division to the proposed structure will support the objective of the recommendation to have one agency with functional units to house programs for all Texans seeking services, while providing a visible organizational unit within that structure to serve people with disabilities. This structure would allow the head of this division to focus on these unique programs and federal regulations and state laws governing their operation.

Partnerships for Independence

PO Box 12866, Austin, Texas 78711 * Administrative Building * 4800 North Lamar, Austin, Texas 78756
Tel (512) 377-0601 * Fax (512) 377-0682

Mr. Ken Levine, Director
October 17, 2014
Page 2

Therefore, I'd like to propose a modification to staff recommendation 1.1 to include a division within the reconstituted organization to house all programs that serve people with disabilities and children with developmental delays.

I continue to appreciate the hard work and effort of all the Sunset staff and look forward to working with the Sunset Commission in the coming legislative session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronda L. Durden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Veronda L. Durden, M.S.
Commissioner, DARS