

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Cecelia Hartley](#)
Subject: FW: Sunset Commission Review of the Health and Human Services Commission
Date: Monday, October 13, 2014 7:48:11 AM

From: Ann Drake
Sent: Friday, October 10, 2014 6:36 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Re: Sunset Commission Review of the Health and Human Services Commission

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on proposed changes to a deeply flawed agency. My comments can be summed as follows: are as follows: You get what you pay for.

Section 11: Services to Family

Obviously and sadly, the Department of Family and Protective Services is underfunded and overwhelmed. Therefore, vulnerable Texans are getting, at best, a minimum level of service.

I find that an apologetic if not abject suggestion of \$181,000 in additional expenditure, to fix a department faced with massive systemic problems, in a state with an annual budget of over one trillion dollars, is ridiculous. Three new positions, funded at about what an assistant manager at a fast food restaurant can expect in compensation (\$20 an hour before taxes) will not go far in attracting energetic and innovative managers. Additionally, when considering the number of workers in the Department, let us also consider the number of employees these three will manage. Not going to happen at all well at \$20 an hour, and an impossible task anyway given the enormity of the turnover//dissatisfaction/morale problem the department faces and the number of people the three new employees will be expected to transform from burned-out discouraged job-seekers to energetic, motivated, effective go-getters.

SUGGESTION: Spend some money on raises, ensure reasonable commutes and working conditions, stop managers from imposing ridiculous punitive measures, some of which inevitably will lead to failure (in plain language, driving all over Houston and other petty harassment) without adequate review, due process, and appeal. The focus should be on training, not punishment and expectations of performance must be reasonable..

The punitive nature of the present management process is, I fear, a by-product of the dual attitude expected of the overwhelmed caseworkers; supportive helper to overwhelmed families, and enforcer of laws and requirements that overwhelm the vulnerable. I am not banging the drum for abusive parents; far from it. I CANNOT FAIL TO NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT SOME OF THE DEMANDS PLACED ON PARENTS SEEKING TO REUNITE WITH THEIR CHILDREN ARE EXTREMELY BURDENSOME in terms of expense...costs which are probably beyond the reach of parents on the very edge of economic viability, in terms of loss of wages, as they engage in therapy, drug treatment, demands for child support, testing (hair tests cost, as I understand, over \$100 each time and where does your minimum wage earner get that money and the time off to meet the demands), arrangements for transportation..(will Aunt Joan take me? Does her car even work? Does Uncle Pete need the car to get to his job???) and in terms of completion. I sincerely wonder, as should we all, how many kids wind up in the foster care system because their parents, however well meaning, cannot meet the demands DFPS and the courts place on them. I see

vivid parallels between the punishments meted out to caseworkers as they struggle with unmeetable goals...(whose bright idea was it to reassign overdue cases to new workers and then blame the new workers for the delays they neither oversaw nor created?) and the punishment meted out to parents who simply cannot comply with what I see as difficult if not unmeetable demands made of them. As a side note, I wonder if the death of poor little Coulter, reported as an abused child and ignored by the department, may not be due to a caseworker, fearful of punishment for failing to close cases in a timely if impossible fashion, putting his case to the bottom of the pile as she/he coped with longer-standing cases to escape punitive action. One might want to check out that possible side effect of a punitive and authoritarian system out. Firing a few people and a photo-op or two will not fix the horrific lives of the Coulter's of this world.

Suggestion: Offer financial support to parents in poverty struggling to meet demands made by the department and the courts.

Ensure that services are conveniently located so that even people walking can reach them.
Offer services at times that parents can access them.

Suggestion: Hire someone with the expertise (this will cost) to examine the management style of the department and make suggestions for overhaul. Do away with the chain of command nonsense. It exists to tamp complaints down at the lowest levels, not solve problems. I will offer in evidence how poorly it has worked in the military dealing with rape. What happens to an employee who complains OVER the head of their immediate supervisor? Are they driving all over Houston in an effort to force them out?

I understand that peer training was eliminated due to budget constraints.

Suggestion: Fund it.

There are some concerns with the way merit bonuses are awarded.

Suggestion: Define QUALITY and then reward it...leave quantity in the hands of the legislature...a body which will have to fund this department more adequately or have their collective conscience prodding them in the middle of the night about what they failed to do.

Where, you may ask, will the money come from? God forbid we should raise taxes.

Suggestion: Divert some of the daily million dollar expense of keeping the National Guard on the border to an effort to making Texas a safer place for children. Almost a billion dollars will be spent there in a year. How about half of that going to the children of Texas?

Suggestion: As I see it, and putting aside sadistic monsters as care-givers, most of the children in the system are there because of their parents' poverty. How about some direct financial help to such families...such as is needed to ensure security in shelter, food security (food stamps do not do it), transportation, bedding, clothing...all the demands what children place on families, made more traumatic when the family system is severely strained? You know, the kind of assistance that foster parents receive. Do not gasp. I have heard caseworkers, demand from their lofty heights, that we do not pay people to raise their children.

Suggestion: Perhaps we, like most first world countries, should. Might be a whole lot cheaper in the long run.

On Tue, Oct 7, 2014 at 4:20 PM, Sunset Advisory Commission <Sunset@sunset.state.tx.us> wrote:

October 7, 2014

Dear Recipient:

The Sunset Staff Report on the Health and Human Services Commission, as submitted to the Sunset Advisory Commission, is available for your review on our website, www.sunset.texas.gov. To request a hard copy of this report, contact our office. The Sunset Commission has scheduled a public hearing on this report for November 12 and 13. At that time public testimony will be taken. An agenda specifying the meeting time, location, and the order of agencies scheduled for discussion will be available on our website as soon as the meeting has been posted.

If you would like to comment on this report, the Commission would appreciate hearing from you. Your feedback would be most helpful if it includes the following elements:

- your position in support or opposition for any recommendation in the staff report;
- a clear, brief statement of suggested changes, if any, to these recommendations; and
- a clear, concise summary of any new issues or recommendations not included in the report that you would like the Sunset Commission to consider.

If you submit your response by Friday, October 17, we can provide this information to the Sunset Commission members before the public hearing. Comments received in response to a staff report are considered public records, and will be posted on the Sunset website and released to the public upon request.

Thank you for your assistance with the Sunset review process.

Ken Levine
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