



Jay Dunn PRESIDENT & CEO

17 November 2014

Mr. Ken Levine
Director, Sunset Advisory Commission
P.O. Box 13066
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Mr. Levine:

Thank you for your considerable efforts on behalf of the State of Texas and your dedication to the Sunset Advisory Commission. I am writing to ask the Sunset Advisory Commission to reconsider Issue 9 of the Staff's Report on the Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC). I am confident that the NorthSTAR integrated mental health care and chemical dependency treatment system should be built upon rather than eliminated.

My experience is rooted in The Bridge, a unique public-private partnership. The Bridge is a multi-service collaboration for the vast majority of adults experiencing homelessness in the Dallas area, providing:

- Emergency food and shelter
- Transitional care with coordinated:
 - Medical services
 - Mental health care
 - Chemical dependency treatment
 - Criminal justice services
 - Benefits services
 - Job seeker services
 - Housing seeker services

Our efforts to reduce homelessness and its associated public costs have been positively impactful. Our collaborative network including City of Dallas, Dallas County, First Presbyterian Church/The Stewpot, LifeNet Texas, Parkland Health & Hospital System, Veterans Affairs, ValueOptions NorthSTAR, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas, Social Security Administration, WorkForce Solutions Greater Dallas, Dallas Housing Authority, and Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance member organizations is endeavoring to expand our services, with the help of the State of Texas.

In order to do so, we will benefit from the expansion of North Texas' standalone managed Behavioral Health Organization (BHO) service delivery model: NorthSTAR. Administered by ValueOptions Texas, the NorthSTAR system, since 2008, has collaborated with us to:

- Improve outreach and expand access to services

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- Integrate funds and enhance programmatic flexibility
- Enhance care coordination
- Integrate mental health care and chemical dependency treatment
- Broaden the provider base for people struggling through the crisis of homelessness
- Separate service authorization from service provision in order to ensure both quality and affordability of services

Steered in recent years by both the Dallas County Behavioral Health Leadership Team and the North Texas Behavioral Health Authority, the integration of The Bridge's collaborative network's services with those of the NorthSTAR system has helped those experiencing homelessness increase access to and benefits from not only mental health care and chemical dependency treatment, but also medical services. Simply put, NorthSTAR has been and continues to be a foundational resource for homeless recovery in the Dallas area. Accordingly, I am very concerned about the possibility of losing a system with such positive collective impact. Specifically, I am concerned about the prospects for our indigent participants, inasmuch as discontinuing NorthSTAR could lead to their:

- Lacking access to outreach and access to services
- Lacking access to enhanced programming made possible by the integration of diverse funds
- Lacking access to community-wide care coordination
- Lacking access to integrated mental health care and chemical dependency treatment
- Lacking access to a broad provider base for people struggling through the crisis of homelessness
- Lacking access to a managed network that separates service authorization from service provision in order to ensure both quality and affordable services

I hope the Sunset Advisory Commission will reconsider Issue 9 of the Staff's Report on the Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC). I agree that improvements can be made in order to improve our local service delivery system. I am willing and able to help with such further developments. But eliminating our model in order to start over does not seem like the best way to ensure future success.

Sincerely,

Jay Dunn
President & CEO
The Bridge

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Cc:

Senator Brian Birdwell
Representative Dan Branch
Dawn Buckingham, M.D.
Representative Cindy Burkett
Senator John Carona
Senator Donna Campbell
Representative Harold V. Dutton Jr.
Representative Larry Gonzales
Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa
Representative Eric Johnson
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Senator Jane Nelson
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Senator Royce West