

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Cecelia Hartley](#)
Subject: FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)
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-----Original Message-----

From: sundrupal@capitol.local [<mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local>]
Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2014 11:32 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Wednesday, October 15, 2014 - 23:31

Agency: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION HHSC

First Name: Will

Last Name: Francis

Title: Government Relations Director

Organization you are affiliated with: National Association of Social Workers
- Texas Chapter

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State: Texas

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

Comments Regarding the Sunset Commission's Report on The Health and Human Services Commission

The National Association of Social Workers/Texas Chapter (NASW/Texas) approves of the Sunset Commission's overall efforts to ensure that services are streamlined and that collaboration occurs between the various divisions. It is encouraging to see that by reshaping the organization along functional lines the Sunset Commission recognizes the value in communication among providers. As long as this is truly a first step towards true wrap around services for consumers NASW/TX is supportive of the changes.

However, there are concerns that this new structure will not guarantee cost savings for the agency and that the internal organization still has the potential to create distinct silos of service delivery. We are hesitant to say that the new agency actually goes far enough in creating a paradigm shift among the various areas of focus. Public Health Services and Medical and Social Services still reside under separate divisions per the organization chart, and yet actually combining Regional and local health services and Public benefit programs would yield a much more integrated approach to care.

If the goal is to cut the waste that comes from multiple agencies delivering overlapping services due to their lack of knowledge, then the new agency should strive to blend services, delivery and structure into a seamless whole.

We know that physical health and behavioral health are directly linked to each other and need to be addressed as interlocking parts. As an example, depression often manifests as physical discomfort, and a physician with this knowledge and direct resources available for referral will impact the well-being of an individual immensely. By creating a system that places a person's well being on a continuum of services rather than separate points of entry,

exit and re-entry, we will see healthier people and more targeted interventions that will ultimately save our state millions of dollars.

Another major gap left by the report was the placement of the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. The Sunset's Commission's Report on the Department of State Health Services ultimately recommended leaving the board within that department and rejected moving it to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. The licensing boards are only mentioned in regards to duplicative background checks done by the Office of the Inspector General. This report does not indicate where it will be placed, and lists no guidance as to what division it should be placed under. If the current structure remains, we would like to see the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners placed under Medical and Social Services. Furthermore, investigations due to licensing complaints take about a year on average due to low staff at the board, and we would like to see more of the licensing fees go directly to the board. A greater revenue split between the General Revenue Fund and the board, with the board being funded at a higher level than it is currently, would greatly reduce the wait for a hearing and strengthen the social work workforce.

Social Workers are integral to the design of the Health and Human Services Commission. Our profession serves at every level: from direct services to supervision to policy. We are on the front lines assisting with basic needs and we are at the highest administrative levels ensuring that the agency continues in its mission to serve Texans. We want to ensure that this new bureaucratic structure is not just functional but truly collaborative. We applaud the efforts of the Sunset Commission and the work of the legislature, but experience shows us that without a true dedication to outcomes that involve a completely integrated agency approach, fragmentation will invariably occur. In 2002, HB 2292 created the divisions within HHSC that this report is seeking to remediate with the full intention of creating a better service delivery approach for our communities. If that work is being deemed a wrong direction, it is our sincere hope that the new course will fundamentally change the way the agency operates as well as the manner in which it is organized.

We also take issue with the cost savings calculations in the report. When HB 2292 was passed there were cost savings projections made that were wildly inaccurate. In fact, to this day the cost savings of HB 2292 is nil, it has cost the state monies to reorganize. We believe that this will also be the outcome of the proposed restructuring of HHSC. While we understand that there are costs to reorganization, but to say there will be cost savings is not responsible nor diligent.

NASW/Texas stands ready to provide input and support to any organizational questions that might arise. We represent over 5,700 social workers in Texas, and have a vested interest in ensuring that the new HHSC is able to utilize many of them to their full potential. For more information, please contact Government Relations Director Will Francis at wfrancis@naswtx.org or (512) 474-1454.

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: If the current structure remains, we would like to see the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners placed under Medical and Social Services. Furthermore, investigations due to licensing complaints take about a year on average due to low staff at the board, and we would like to see more of the licensing fees go directly to the board. A greater revenue split between the General Revenue Fund and the board, with the board being funded at a higher level than it is currently, would greatly reduce the wait for a hearing and strengthen the social work workforce.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree

Will Francis



Sunset Advisory Commission

November 13th, 2014

Senator Nelson and Members of the Sunset Advisory Commission: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Budget Hearing for the Health and Human Services Commission. My name is Will Francis. I am the Government Relations Director for the Texas Chapter of NASW (NASW/TX). I represent around 6,000 NASW/TX members who serve Texas residents across the state.

NASW/TX is recommending that as part of the Sunset transformation, the Commission consider the state of the mental health workforce and ways to improve service delivery. We face a mental health workforce crisis in Texas. Government sources indicate that **60% of mental health professionals are clinically trained social workers**. The population in Texas is increasing and yet the number of social workers has remained at a level rate, thus decreasing the ratio of providers in the community. The Statewide Health Coordinating Council's 2011-16 State Health Plan reported that border and rural areas are most at risk due to the shortages. A large number of social workers are nearing retirement, and there are currently 48 counties in Texas that do not have a single licensed social worker.

The National Association of Social Workers reported an average loan debt for MSW graduates ranging from \$30,791 to \$47,094 for regular two-year programs, with one-year advanced standing graduates having loan debt between \$28,816 and \$36,728. With the average starting salary of a social worker at around \$36,000, it is evident why loan debt is a significant barrier to expanding the workforce.

Therefore, NASW/TX encourages the Sunset Commission to expand the mental health workforce through a statewide loan repayment program for mental health providers. This would include mental health professionals other than social workers, and could be augmented by the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) administered federally through the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. So far, this program has distributed \$12,734,904 to 38 states through a 50% match.

It requires a minimum two year commitment that can be expanded, is not taxable and only eligible to citizens or permanent residents. It would require them to work in a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) – see chart – and can be uniquely tailored by Texas to meet our needs. Texas has 207 counties either wholly or partially classified as an HPSA.

A major concern for our state is that Louisiana already participates in the SLRP and offers compensation of \$15,000 a year for three years. New Mexico has a similar reimbursement plan, and if the agreement is completed, they will pay back 100% of loan debt. They also offer repayment of student loans for practicing health professionals up to \$35,000 per year. Our state

risks losing new social workers to our neighbors. With loan repayment programs on either side of us, Texas is now competitively lagging in building a mental health workforce, and there is the real possibility that our workforce may migrate out of a state that desperately needs them.

A major gap left by the HHSC Sunset report was the placement of the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. The Sunset's Commission's Report on the Department of State Health Services ultimately recommended leaving the board within that department and rejected moving it to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. The licensing boards are only mentioned in regards to duplicative background checks done by the Office of the Inspector General. This report does not indicate where it will be placed, and lists no guidance as to what division it should be placed under. If the proposed structure remains, we would like to see the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners placed under Medical and Social Services. Furthermore, investigations due to licensing complaints take about a year on average due to an understaffed board, and we would like to see more of the licensing fees go directly to the board to address this issue. A greater revenue split between the General Revenue Fund and the board, with the board being funded at a higher level than it is currently, would greatly reduce the wait for a hearing and strengthen the social work workforce.

Finally, the role of prevention in regards to children, families and communities has not always been placed in a position of prominence from a funding and policy perspective. If the proposed interagency merger is approved, we are advocating for the elevation of prevention as a seventh division among the other six areas, thus creating a Prevention and Family Strengthening division that could impact the lives of Texans before they reach crisis.

Recommendations:

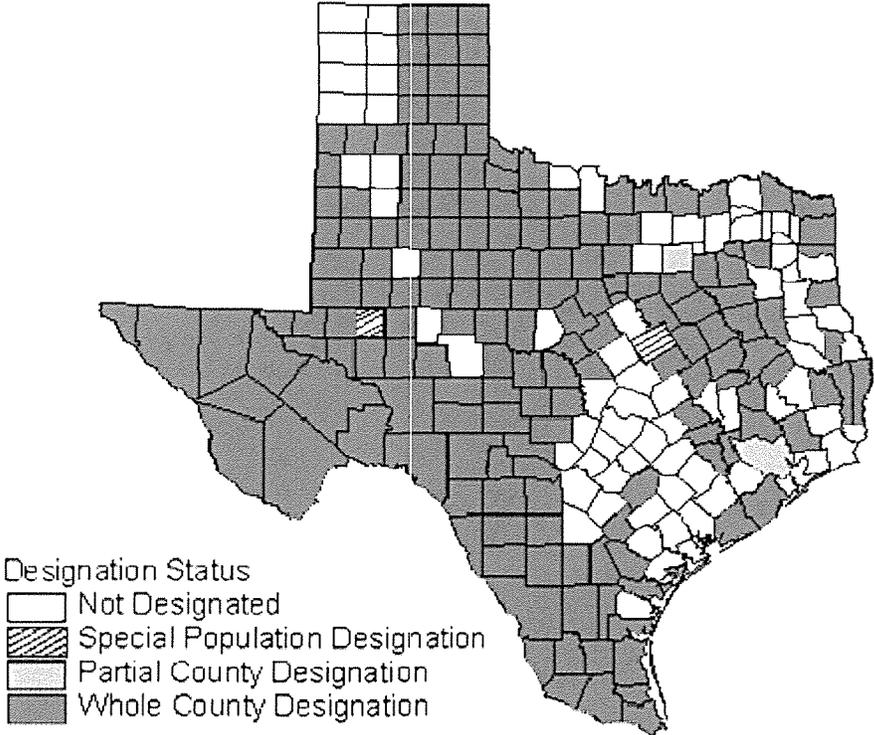
- Develop a loan repayment program through the Health and Human Services Commission that utilizes matching federal funds to expand the mental health workforce shortage
- Increase funding to the Social Work Licensing Board so that it can function with greater efficiency
- Create a division for Prevention and Family Strengthening to fund and support programs in the community that intervene before

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. Please feel free to contact NASW/TX with any additional comments or questions. We hope to become a valuable resource for this committee.

Sincerely,

Will Francis, LMSW
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Austin, Texas 78701
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Federally Designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas in Texas, October 2009



From: Texas State Health Plan Update 2013-2014