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**Sunset Advisory Commission
Testimony by Kaili Goslant, Chair, The Arc of Texas
Governmental Affairs Committee Volunteer
November 13, 2014**

My name is Kaili Goslant, and I serve as Chair of The Arc of Texas Governmental Affairs Committee. The Arc of Texas is a statewide non-profit organization that creates opportunities for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to actively participate in their communities and make the choices that affect their lives in a positive manner. I am also the Director of Agency Services for The Arc of the Capital Area, an affiliate chapter located here in Austin, Texas. Our agency empowers Central Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families through compassionate case management and innovative programs. Currently our programs serve over 2,000 individuals and family members in Central Texas

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the Sunset Advisory Committee Report regarding the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). My comments will be directed at Recommendation 1 to consolidate the five HHS system agencies into one agency and recommendation 13 to remove advisory committees from statute and allow the executive commissioner the discretion to re-establish advisory committees in rule.

In regards to Recommendation 1.1, The Arc of Texas supports the continuation of a state agency to provide appropriate oversight of long term services and supports (LTSS) programs and facilitate the maximum independence of individuals with I/DD. While we support organizing services based on the function of service to be provided, we are concerned how this would work practically. The volume and depth of the programs and the amount of oversight needed seems too large to be effectively managed by one agency and the scope of expertise needed for best-practice, value based programs too broad.

Additionally, putting all services in one "mega agency" risks that some populations and programs may not get the attention and focus of the agency that they require. Individuals with I/DD have diverse and unique needs. We are concerned about a potential loss of knowledge, values and program principles through consolidation and reorganization. We are concerned that if all programs for individuals with I/DD are directed by HHSC, the programs will become too health and safety focused in the managed care medical model, with attention to self-determination, quality of life and community engagement diminished. The focus of the medical model of traditional Medicaid is to "fix a problem," while the focus on the Medicaid long term services and supports system is to "support a life." These are different goals and need to be acknowledged by the agencies that administer them.

We believe that a shared vision of the health and human services agencies should include individuals receiving services in the most integrated setting and, if that is clearly communicated, then policies and programs can be aligned with skills and knowledge to identify and fix problems through coordination, but not necessarily further consolidation.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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The Arc of Texas recommends that the impact of the consolidation on specific populations and programs, including LTSS programs for individuals with I/DD be studied before decisions for consolidation are made to ensure that the needs of individuals are taken into account, not just the efficiency of the agency.

In recommendation 13.1, the Sunset Staff recommends removing advisory committees from statute. This recommendation to combine or eliminate some advisory committees provides an opportunity to reduce duplication and increase the effectiveness of advisory bodies. However, this reorganization creates a risk that the input of some populations or specialized issues will be lost. For any advisory group proposed for consolidation or elimination, the state should examine what functions would be lost as a result, and if those functions are or could be performed by another group. This is especially critical for advisory bodies including self-advocates and their family members. HHSC staff and management cannot fully comprehend every program's effect on an individual's life. Therefore, HHSC must rely on the valuable experiences and expertise of individual consumers, and advocates who represent them, to ensure that proposed changes in policies and programs achieve the outcomes desired.

Additionally, removing advisory committees from statute and leaving the creation of committees and appointment of members to the discretion of the executive commissioner, who is appointed to a two year term, creates a potential lack of continuity at best and a potential loss of stakeholder input at worst. Historically, individuals with I/DD, their families and advocates worked for years for the right to be heard in public policy conversations and decisions that affect them. We believe that it is crucial that these stakeholders continue to have some level of statutory protection to ensure meaningful advisory opportunities exist, and are maintained and utilized.

Finally, the long term services and supports system is currently being redesigned. During a time when decisions are being made about what the new system will look like and how it will function for individuals that depend on these services, it is critical to maintain an adequate number of statutorily-mandated advisory committees and governing bodies, in order to provide HHSC with the expert knowledge, experience and perspective necessary to guide the agency through the redesign process. HHSC and the health and human services agencies make potential life and death decisions that require real stakeholder input to ensure the continuity and quality of care necessary for people with disabilities to live healthy and independent lives.

The Arc of Texas recognizes the need for review of individual committees for duplication and impact, and possible consolidation of some of these committees. However, we do not support the elimination of all of the listed advisory committees from statute and ask that the Commission ensure that individuals with disabilities, their families, advocates and other stakeholders continue to have meaningful input into agency's development and implementation of policies and programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input today.

Respectfully,

Kaili Goslant, Chair
The Arc of Texas Governmental Affairs Committee