

Hello. My name is Megan Harding and I am here today to speak on behalf of Texas Rehab Action Network. I want to voice my opposition and offer an alternative to the Sunset Report's Issue 1, which proposes to consolidate the DARS with other HHS agencies.

As a person with a visual impairment, my disability significantly limits my functioning in daily activities such as seeing regular print without magnification, crossing streets, and driving. My vocational rehabilitation counselor at DBS, a subdivision of DARS, helped me to achieve my academic and professional goals by providing me with orientation and mobility services, assistive technology, and support. Without the guidance and support of my vocational rehabilitation counselor, I would not be standing here today with a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. As such, I have the unfortunate luck of addressing the proposed consolidation from the perspective of a consumer and a provider.

I fear that the proposed blending of DARS services with other HHS, such as eligibility determination, will further marginalize people with disabilities by making it more difficult for people like me to access services in order to begin or maintain employment. In addition, the proposed consolidation will place Texas at risk of losing millions of dollars in federal funding by violating federal regulations required in order to receive those funds.

As a Texan with a disability, I strongly support of TRAN's alternative proposal for a separate division within HHSC dedicated to providing employment services for people with disabilities, and administering all other HHSC employment-related programs.

Thank you for allowing me time to voice my concerns.