

**From:** [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)  
**To:** [Cecelia Hartley](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)  
**Date:** Thursday, June 26, 2014 8:47:18 AM

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-----Original Message-----

From: sundrupal@capitol.local [<mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local>]  
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 8:08 PM  
To: Sunset Advisory Commission  
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Wednesday, June 25, 2014 - 20:08

Agency: DEPARTMENT ASSISTIVE AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES DARS

First Name: Vivecca

Last Name: Hartman

Title: Vice President

Organization you are affiliated with: The Deaf Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas ("DBMAT")

Email:

City: Houston

State: Texas

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

Issue #1: Being a low incidence disability causes deafblindness to be understood by few people. The reality of the impact due to the dual loss is rarely understood by those who are not aware of the involved needs of a deafblind individual. Those who serve the deaf, have the ability to utilize sight, and those who serve the blind, have the ability to utilize hearing.

However, for a deafblind individual, these options do not exist or are limited and there for communication and development has to be approached in an entirely different manner, most commonly, in a tactile manner. Although you may find ways to eliminate inefficient duplications in some areas, our deafblind community's primary concern is that there always needs to be service providers specialized in deafblindness. In fact, there needs to be more deafblind specialists than there currently is, as there are numerous families with a deafblind loved one that are not receiving services from either DBS or DARS. To improve access to information and services we recommend:

- Allowing families with a deafblind loved one to be routed to the right specialized location for help. A current item that would help achieve this recommendation would be to have, on both the DARS Home page and site with the list of services to have a direct link to deafblind services. It would be more direct and helpful to have a line that references deafblind services with a link under the "Help for Texans" section, the same place as the blind and the deaf links, which is both of these sites:  
[www.dars.state.tx.us](http://www.dars.state.tx.us) and [www.dars.state.tx.us/services/index.html](http://www.dars.state.tx.us/services/index.html)

- The report summary sounds great that the case workers would have access to more services, our major concern is that a case worker would be aware enough to ask if the child has both a vision and a hearing loss that specialized services would apply. As soon as it is identified, then make a referral to a specialized case worker.

- Having both a vision and hearing loss be a required test at birth should be required for as specialized services would be most effective started early on.
- It is unfortunate that ECI is not being addressed at this time, as the same concerns for deaf blind community apply to ECI services as well. ECI should have more deafblind specialized services start from the beginning so that communication and development can start at a more natural age for a deafblind individual, to avoid years lost while a family floats around not knowing how to serve their own child.
- Deafblindness is a low incidence disability, therefore the need for extensive and ongoing specific training to provide specific rehabilitation services that will match this population's needs is critical. Keep in mind, when you have a medical need for a specialist like a cardiologist or eye doctor, you do not just stop at your general practitioner. You get referred to a specialist. We, the deafblind community, ask for the same treatment here.
- For specialized services to be truly effective, administration and management must have a clear understanding to be a strong support of the needs so critical for employment and independent living for Texans with the rare occasion to be deafblind.

Issue #3: The Living Services for the DB community-based Apartments is great!

There is, however, a change in the guidelines that is needed. As per DBS Chapter 12.4.5 Deafblind Community-Based Apartments

(<http://www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/vr/ch12.htm#12.4.5>) currently this services is only to be considered preparatory and therefore, not a permanent or long term option. For a deafblind person to have the opportunity some basic supports could mean they can live mostly independent lives in an ongoing supported living arrangement. A similar comparison could be made to an assisted living environment for senior citizens versus a nursing home. The living arrangement can be a healthy option for those who need some assistance and can live quite well without having to be institutionalized or moved off to a group home with full supports.

- However, for those that want to stay in their family's community, there are no day programs that support the deafblindness and its unique communication needs locally in all parts of the state. With Waiver program, many deafblind individuals will have an Intervener, but what are they to do with their days?

- Keep in mind, if you make some day programs that accommodate the deafblind person, you will need to consider their catchment areas to try to reach areas across the state.

Issue #5: DBMAT would ask that you incorporate a mechanism to ensure deaf or blind clients referred to you were all evaluated for deafblindness to ensure none fall through the cracks and miss out of key services that could help them be able to live enjoyable lives with the ability to interact with those around them and be successful in their communication efforts!

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency:

- ECI should have more deafblind specialized services start from the beginning so that communication and development can start at a more natural age for a deafblind child. This would avoid years lost while a family floats around not knowing how to communicate with their own child.
- Our Families with deafblind loved ones living in their home communities need a place to go for activities. A Day Program would help give them purpose each day, or at least a few days a week. There currently are no Day Programs that support the deafblindness and its unique communication needs locally in all parts of the state. The benefit of the Waiver program providing Interveners or SSPs for deafblind people would ensure the success of these day programs and ensure success for the service providers by participating in enriching activities.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree