

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: Thursday, October 16, 2014 11:46 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Thursday, October 16, 2014 - 23:46

Agency: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION HHSC

First Name: Carlos

Last Name: Higgins

Title: Chair, Legislative Action Committee, Texas Silver-Haired Legislature

Organization you are affiliated with: Texas Silver-Haired Legislature (TSHL)

Email:

City: Austin

State: Texas

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

OPPOSED to the proposal for more consolidation within the HHSC

Consolidation v. Specialization and a Recommendation: Restore the Texas Department on Aging

Delivering help to those who need it is important. But sometimes, HOW the help is delivered can be even more important. For example, Meals-On-Wheels delivers nutritious food, but that's not all. They also deliver the only social contact too many of their elderly clients ever get. This other kind of nourishment delivered by Meals-On-Wheels just might preserve and extend more lives than the food.

Senior citizens need a variety of helping hands to cope with the long list of challenges they face. Some of their challenges are unique; some apply equally to other groups. Whether a particular group is made up of abused or forsaken children, people with specific disabilities or special challenges, abused women, or seniors with diminished faculties, they have this in common:

some of their challenges are alike; many are dramatically different. But an even greater difference is that different groups respond much differently to the way help is given to them. That means a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the way help is delivered is destined to be inefficient and ineffective.

Helping hands in this discussion includes dedicated employees of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), together with untold numbers of volunteers. All these extra care-givers became volunteers because they are personally motivated to help. Matching the way help is delivered is extremely important, whether the help is delivered by paid workers or volunteers.

Volunteers typically give help in a way that best fits both the person and that person's unique needs, and that's because either (1) the volunteer is helping a loved one, or (2) the volunteer's own experience in dealing with

specific problems inspired that volunteer to help people facing those same kinds of problems. In either case the typical volunteer is not motivated to help just anyone needing any sort of help. Instead, the motivation moves the volunteer to help people facing a more specific set of problems. This personal motivation and dedication inspires them to tailor both the help and the way the help is delivered.

As for paid care-givers, they're motivated by having a paying job, but many of them choose a care-giver career path and continue in it despite the relatively low pay because their own personal 'callings' give them even stronger motivation. If paid caregivers are allowed to specialize within a more narrow range of needs, they'll develop a greater understanding of those needs and of the people who have those needs, and that familiarity allows them to become much more effective and efficient in responding to those needs.

HHSC has a herculean task in responding to the unending and diverse calls for help. If the agency is to be successful, HHSC must equip its paid care-givers with a high level of understanding and expertise in their individual roles. When the attention of these care-givers is spread more and more among diverse problems, behaviors, age groups and needs, the care-givers tend to become Jacks of all trades and masters of none. This loss of care-giver focus and expertise in specific problem areas produces a predictable outcome: the agency is less efficient and effective in responding to disparate groups of people and to their specific needs.

Consolidation simply means the work-force will be compelled to divide their attention among a much wider array of clients and problems. Too much consolidation is counter-productive; not only because it tends to convert care-givers into generalists, but also because it can discourage volunteers.

That's because volunteers motivated to work within specific arenas of needs and people will be less motivated to volunteer if the agency has consolidated away the specific arenas.

As senior citizens ourselves, we members of the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature (TSHL) are painfully aware that a lack of experience and focus leaves too many care-givers with too little appreciation for the complexities and impacts of age-related problems.

Our major contention is that if these complexities and impacts are to get the level of attention they deserve, it will require more focus and specialization at the HHSC - not less. That's why the TSHL opposes more consolidation, and instead, urges that the Texas Department on Aging be revived. That small Department operated very efficiently and effectively for many years on behalf of Texas senior citizens and Texas taxpayers. It could do so again, and do it economically.

The population of senior citizens in Texas is growing rapidly, with the addition of the Boomer generation. Helping them meet the challenges of aging can be achieved most effectively, efficiently, and economically by re-establishing a separate state agency – the Texas Department on Aging.

Carlos Higgins
Chair, TSHL Legislative Action Committee

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: RESTORE THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT on AGING as a separate state agency with the sole mission of helping the millions of Texas senior citizens meet the ever-increasing challenges they encounter as they grow older.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree