

11/16/14

Dear Sunset Advisory Commission:

My name is Kayleigh Joiner and I am a senior in college studying elementary education. I serve as Second Vice President of the Texas Association of Blind Students, a division of the NFB of Texas. (<http://www.nfbtx.org>) I am writing in opposition to recommendation 1.1 found in the Sunset Commission Staff Report for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, August 2014, which would bring significant changes to the way services are delivered to blind consumers in the state of Texas. These changes would personally affect me by possibly causing a delay in getting my textbooks for school. I could also be reassigned a new counselor who has no training in dealing with blind people.

The staff report asserts that recommendation 1.1 would result in a more integrated model of rehabilitation services, with the goal of delivering such services more efficiently to Texans with disabilities. However, under the current structure of vocational rehabilitation through the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS,) general vocational rehabilitative services constituted 69% of the budget for fiscal year 2013, while vocational rehabilitative services for the blind only constituted 15% of the budget during the same timeframe. This stark monetary difference accurately illustrates the low-incidents status of blindness, and helps make the case for separate and specialized services for Texans who are blind.

Recommendation 1.1, as is currently written, does not accurately identify specific services for Texans who are blind. By placing the functions of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, (DARS,) and the DARS Division for Blind Services, (DBS,) within the context of a much larger department under the auspice of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, blind Texans are in serious jeopardy of losing critical rehabilitative services specifically tailored to us; services that ultimately help lead to employment.

However, should the Sunset Commission choose to continue to move down the current path of further consolidation, I would urge the Commission to amend the recommendation to reflect DARS/DBS as a separate and distinct department within HHSC.

Maintaining a separate agency tasked with providing quality rehabilitation services is my preferred outcome once the Sunset Commission has completed its deliberations. However, if that cannot be achieved under the HHSC umbrella, I respectfully request that the Commission consider moving all of DARS/DBS rehabilitation services including: transition services, adult rehabilitation, and Business Enterprises of Texas under the auspices of the Texas Workforce Commission so that blind and disabled Texans seeking employment will have a partner agency that is tasked with providing employment services to all Texans. Creating a rehabilitation department within the Texas Workforce Commission will allow blind and disabled Texans to



seamlessly transition from training to work, which seems to be the problem that issue 4 of the staff report aims to address.

Sincerely,

Kayleigh Joiner