

Kenneth Semien, Sr.
Beaumont, Texas

Sunset Advisory Commission Hearing

Wednesday June 25, 2014 9:00AM

Re: Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

Greetings Mr. Ken Levine, Director and Staff Members:

It is my pleasure to greet you today with brief comments regarding the Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report with respect to the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. The recommendations entered into the report present several concerns that I would like to address.

Issue 1: The separation between DARS' Division for Blind Services and the Division for Rehabilitation Services causes unnecessary duplication and impedes access to services.

Response: While it is imperative and most appropriate to strategically plan and implement responsible practices that include safeguards to ensure that all qualifying consumers are given the opportunity to have their needs met with personal independence in the forefront of all plans for success, I urge you to consider the adverse effects of consolidating or streamlining to the point where specialized services that are currently being provided are diminished by employing those who aren't fully aware of methods and techniques that promote successful outcomes for children who are blind and the parent who finds it hard to understand necessary steps to take to acquire adequate help for their child, while not knowing of the best alternatives. Consider the working age adults who loses a significant amount of vision and are unable to maintain their current employment. They are distraught and they seek to identify services from an agency that immediately recognizes what can be done to share expertise in the field of blindness. Seniors who experience vision loss later in life are suddenly left at the mercy of an individual who can't comprehend the magnitude of the loss of direction as they attempt to move forward with feelings of hopelessness and despair. I trust that you will agree that the presence of administrative duplication should not affect every aspect of an agency.

Issue 3: The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services offers many independent living services that consumers could easily access through local Centers for Independent Living.

Response: In order for Centers for Independent Living to be able to come close to providing adequate services to persons who are blind or visually impaired, there would be a need for modifications to the facility, hiring and training of new and/or additional personnel, and a lot of time and effort to actually get the program going. Building on the foundation that is already established could be rather successful with enhancements to meet the needs of those needing orientation and mobility training for independent and safe travel and assistance to independently live in an environment that promotes personal growth. The current independent living program provides that with offices throughout

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the state in local communities to meet consumers in their home as they are taught to personally perform daily tasks. Additionally, those residing in rural areas would have to travel miles to access services from a Center for Independent Living, thereby causing an undue burden to locate accessible and affordable transportation. Turning the independent living program over to a Center for Independent Living would omit crucial in home care and services for Seniors who have age related health issues other than their vision loss, and those with multiple disabilities could be prompted to refrain from accessing needed services due to unnecessary stress and frustration. It would be better to have safeguards in place to ensure that gray areas are omitted in order for consistency to allow a Counselor to provide services to meet the specific needs of each consumer.