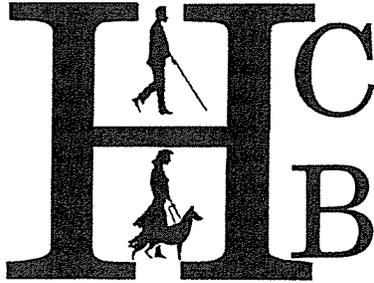


JUN 05 2014



Houston
Council
of the Blind

1475 West Gray
Suite 183
Houston, Texas 77019
Phone (713) 520-9237

June 1, 2014

TO: State of Texas Sunset Commission and Honorable State Legislators

FROM: The Houston Council of the Blind (HCB)

Honorable Commissioners and Legislators:

As an organization which consists of over 100 members, the overwhelming majority of whom are blind or visually impaired, we have observed with great interest and trepidation current recommendations related to changes in the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Our primary concern centers on the proposed requirements that would essentially consolidate the Division for Blind Services (DBS) into one agency with the Division for Rehabilitative Services (DRS).

--PROPOSAL 1: Require DARS to integrate administrative, management and oversight functions of DBS and DRS to eliminate duplication and better serve consumers.

We have already witnessed the integration of some administrative and management functions for the two divisions. In our opinion, here is where the integration should stop. We have grave concerns because we believe that such a single source agency would only have minimal impact on eliminating duplication, but more important, it would exclude expertise. Contrary to the opinions of some, the rehabilitation teachers and counselors who work with individuals who are blind or visually impaired are specialists in their field. Individuals who are blind or visually impaired would not be better served in a single source environment. In states where this model has been employed, the majority of blind consumers receive lower quality service delivery compared to Texas because those providing service are not adequately equipped to meet the unique needs of a blind or visually impaired person.

--PROPOSAL 2: Define DARS' role in the provision of independent living services (ILS) as support and monitoring independent living centers by outsourcing IL Services and establishing DARS' role as monitor of funds and performance.

Historically, independent living centers have not been adequately equipped to serve consumers with vision loss. Even if IL services were outsourced, it is highly likely that specific programs such as the Older Blind Program might be either phased out or minimized. As our population grows older and the number of people experiencing vision loss increases, it will become even more critical to have workers trained specifically in rehabilitation of the blind.

--PROPOSAL 3: Require more coordination with the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Education Agency.

-DBS has counselors who are acutely familiar with employment of the blind and visually impaired. They are able to survey a job site and assess the accommodations needed for someone who is blind or visually impaired. In addition, the DBS Transition Program is better equipped to reach out to schools in every area of the state where students are passing on to the next stage of life. In fact, where they are lacking is in having enough resources to adequately serve the growing number of students throughout our state.

In closing, our primary desire is that there will always be "a Division for Blind Services" in Texas. Our state is too large; our state too great to have its blind or visually impaired citizens short changed from the specialized services we deserve.

For further information, please contact our organization at:

c/o Michael E. Garrett

1475 West Gray Street

Houston, Texas 77019

Thank you for your consideration.

The Houston Council of the Blind.