

**From:** [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)  
**To:** [Cecelia Hartley](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)  
**Date:** Friday, June 06, 2014 8:18:45 AM

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

From: sundrupal@capitol.local [<mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local>]  
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2014 10:29 PM  
To: Sunset Advisory Commission  
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Thursday, June 5, 2014 - 22:29

Agency: DEPARTMENT ASSISTIVE AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES DARS

First Name: Michael

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Organization you are affiliated with: Disability In Action, Inc (Abilene Center for Independant Living); National Federation of the Blind

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

IN GENERAL, the report is incorrect or imprecise in stating that services to the blind or other disabilities only began in the late 1920's. Rather, Texas began its efforts to serve the needs of the blind, the deaf and other disabilities in the 1850's. Only later, did the federal government play an involved role. (I have a family ancestor that attended the School for the Deaf in the 1870's.) Since then, as it is almost everywhere, the specific disability drives the solutions, as each disability is different, and each person is different. It is a huge mistake to assume a counselor, supervisor, or manager is actually doing identical work and lateral movement or reduction is without peril. We have specialist doctors; we have specialist military and branches, and so on. Though many have the same title, and what they do may, in some cases, appear to the uninformed, to be something of the same, in reality they all perform that "similar" duty differently, and usually to better serve the intended customer or patient or citizen.

The premise that consolidation would yield cost and service benefits was simply flawed then as it is today. There is no fat in the day-to-day operations and the report does not identify any, but rather simply implies that there is somehow extra work being done that should not be. In reality, there were lower costs when the Commission for the Blind, the Commission for the Deaf, etc., were active. Why? Because they were specific to the needs of the disabled they served and did not have to compete for resources with other disability groups. There were issues, yes, but there were not great opportunities to save money. Why? Because the people who thought by "consolidating", money would be saved because they saw "disability" as something singular without a deep understanding of what the word means. In reality, money is saved whenever you cut a budget, regardless of what is said to justify the action. Of course, the people served by an agency suffer and their goals often go unrealized. The great challenge in leadership is to hire and emplace forward thinking managers who can do the work of improving the process of

delivering services, and not in just cutting people and budgets and then let things happen.

The most basic for-profit leadership decision is to re-engineer the process, trial it, make improvements, and roll it out. The second most basic for-profit leadership decision is to focus the re-engineering effort on what makes best business sense and that can mean having more focused business units or subsidiaries, rather than fewer. Every person with experience in the disability arena will tell you that the end customer, the person with the disability, is best served by an organization that concentrates on that person AND has the ability to pull in other resources, when and if needed.

It also means having a management staff that is tuned to that delivery system, understands the process and the customer, and has the power to quickly act in the best interests of all.

What the legislature did a number of years back was add DARS, an added level of additional bureaucracy and cost. Money would have been better spent on specific re-engineering of service provisioning and engaging the legislature to find ways to incent both public and private business to employ those with disabilities. The full-stream cost vs. benefit analysis of a combined approach would be the measure, not just departmental or agency budgets.

Opposed: Issue 1; Sunset recommendation - The Separation between DARS'

Divisions for Blind Services and Rehabilitation Services Causes Unnecessary Duplication and Impedes Access to Service.

Discussion: In Abilene, that is not true. There is no duplication and there is no impediment to receiving needed services. If the consumer is blind, all other services – such as doctors for other medical issues, rehab, equipment, and so on, to address the other disabilities are readily provided.

Efficiency occurs because two agencies do not have to be involved with the same person. Duplication is avoided and good communication between agencies in the same town exists. While such service problems as noted might have occurred at some point, it is not an ongoing issue. There is no duplication of effort between the agency because the effort to manage a case is rather consistent driven by the case, not by the number of agencies. (i.e. – If one consumer's case gets created, managed, etc., it is the same amount of work and the same amount of management time is needed. The only way to reduce case management overhead is either to reduce the number of consumers with disabilities, or re-engineer the entire service delivery process while improving the knowledge and skills of the involved individuals to improve their effectiveness dealing with the needs of those with a specific disability type.)

The report does not actually review workload burdens by job type, supervisory duties, and redistribution of workload and case management coordination, budget decision methodology, disability priority, appeal processes, and many other factors common to instances when multiple disabilities are attempted to be managed by a single organization. Long term evidence from other states found that combined agencies result in lower employee performance, less quality care, increases in case backlog, higher turnover, consumer frustration, and the inability to keep up with the demands of all of the disabled in a fair and impartial manner. In other words, budget decisions on a daily basis drove who got services along with decisions about which consumer had the most pressing disability and need. In some cases, the decider chose consumers who had a disability they were most familiar with.

Many times, in for-profit businesses, such simple approaches to reducing costs by consolidating departments or disparate processes has yielded financial disasters and a loss of market share with customers abandoning the products and services for something better. Here, we have no other options but to improve what we have.

The issue should not be how to cut the budget, but how to reduce the backlog of the disabled waiting to be served and how to improve the number and quality of the outcomes being sought (i.e. – employment). For much needed agencies, budget cutting and staff reductions in line management and support, as a strategy, never improves on the outcomes that the agencies were intended to address. What does happen is that workloads increase, work goes undone, turnover increases, along with lower employee morale. Budget cutting is not leadership; it is an accounting decision meant for a perceived short-term gain that benefits some leader rather than those that actually receive the services.

It is very dangerous to allow decisions to be made based on a perceived cost per disability. Each disability has its own needs. Consolidation allows and even encourages executives and management to increase the number of cases closed and show lower costs per case. It is so easy to manipulate the cases and the numbers when it all is in one system. The result is that people with lower cost of service type disabilities will be inappropriately favored over those with higher cost. Consolidation in management systems and review breeds “disability gods”, whether

knowledgeable, intentional, or not. If consolidation were such a great thing, why do we keep the senate and house separate? Why not get rid of one house of the legislature? Or, consolidate with the executive branch?

Opposed; Issue 3 Sunset recommendation - DARS Offers Many Independent Living Services Consumers Could Easily Access through Local Centers for Independent Living.

As a President of the Board of a Center for Independent Living in Abilene, and a person who is involved in the community and with DBS and to some degree, DRS, along with other agencies and non-profits, there are substantial differences at all levels between a C.I.L. and a state agency. Some issues are:

There aren't readily available independent living centers found locally in all parts of the state. Our service catchment area is huge and transportation to these centers is a real barrier to the consumer and sometimes a barrier to employees traveling to remote areas.

Employees do not receive the training, certification, and support that DARS employees receive. The ability to provide focused and comprehensive services that duplicate what the agencies are already doing is not productive or efficient for any C.I.L. The agencies are partners and referrals and follow-ups are made, sometimes in both directions. There are few things that occur that may be perceived as duplicative, but usually, that is incidental to the provisioning of some other service to the consumer.

Independent Living Skills are specialized, in many cases, to the disability, and specialist are hard to come by, as we are in a large, rural area of west central Texas with a lower population density per square mile. DBS will provide such in-home services. Our C.I.L. does not have the people or financial resources to develop specialized services for the blind, though we can easily deal with a blind person who is in the need of a wide variety of services that we do offer. The same goes true for the profoundly deaf.

However, we do have some in-home and relocation services related to some other disabilities where it does not conflict with what DRS does.

In many cases, an employee will quickly understand that the consumer needs specialized services and help. A referral is made with follow-ups. Our community cannot support another operation duplicating what is already done better in a state agency. On the other hand, there are real and practical things that the C.I.L. does that is not done or forbidden from being done in a state agency.

Where there is opportunity is in the area of assistive technology and adaptive equipment sharing and common resource rooms, and access to specialized trainers (usually contractors to DARS).

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency:

IN CONCLUSION: While I appreciate the efforts and intents of the Sunshine work, I believe that the essential focus is to see whether an agency should be abolished or kept due to its relevance in serving the needs of today's and future Texas citizens. The need for state services that help the blind, the deaf, and all the other disabilities is something very much needed and the need is growing. From every report, federal, state, and private, the number of people with disabilities is a growing number, in total and in percentages. The government cannot just keep paying more per disabled person as a strategy to address the need. That doesn't really work. The government does not need to reduce the budget for the disabled – that really doesn't work out fairly. Consolidating agencies, when those that are served have very different needs and employees and management need to be specialized, never works, and has not in the disability arena anywhere in the United States. (Note: Yes, budgets were cut, but service levels dropped dramatically, leaving more people with disabilities unemployed and without needed training, services, and equipment.) What is needed is a serious re-engineering effort that focuses first on the outcome desired (i.e. employment, or independent living, etc.) and develops the service provisioning processes needed to fulfill that outcome. Second, there does need to be an ongoing dialog within that effort on how to best avoid any additional costs that go beyond that which is needed but does not jeopardize the delivery outcome. I can assure you from long years of working in corporate America, there will be less management levels, more empowerment, faster response to needs, and overall, lower costs when compared with today's model using a full-stream cost and benefit view. In the meantime, you do not have to dismantle the world to get going. Many companies have done such. Accountability is key - along with responsibility and practical measures.

After talking with the US RSA and with the US DOL on these same subjects over the years, there can be no great

leap forward until those who employ are incented to hire the disabled and programs are developed that actually change the attitudes of employers about people with disabilities. We have a long way to go.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,  
Michael Vandervoort

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree