



October 30, 2014

Mr. Ken Levine, Director
Sunset Advisory Commission
P.O. Box 13066
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Mr. Levine:

We, the undersigned members of the board of directors of NAMI Dallas, wish to take this opportunity to express our urgent concerns in regard to what we see as a matter of the preservation of many hard---won gains achieved in establishing an efficient and responsive public mental health system in the 7 county NorthStar region. We have been witnesses to and participants in the long process of construction, and remember all too well what existed before. We do not wish to lose what has been so very difficult to obtain and so long delayed.

In reading the Sunset staff recommendations we find ourselves wholly at a loss in reconciling our own experiences of how well this system works and effectively serves its constituency with what we find to be a grossly mistaken and significantly deficient assessment.

We wish, therefore, to join in the process of setting the record straight. Rather than responding to all the inaccuracies we find in the staff report we will concern ourselves with repudiating a few we recognize as consumers, family members, and advocates to be the most blatant.

- A system Sunset staff disparage as "outdated" is in fact constantly adapting and refining itself while remaining highly responsive to providers and consumers. We find it curious that Sunset staff so vastly underreports the service array NorthStar provides for its target population and manages to completely overlook a quite long history of implementing integrated care across the system.
- On one hand, Sunset staff identifies the obvious correlation between robust provider choice and positive consumer outcomes, but on the other actually criticizes the NorthStar system for having too many entry points for consumers! Through some strange logic, actual embodiment of the "No Wrong Door" philosophy is improbably deemed a liability.
- We cannot overemphasize a point the staff recommendations seem to have missed: NorthStar's open access to care ensures, through blended funding, that there is no gap in needed care. When individuals need to be seen they are, and providers are able to have full confidence that continuity of benefits will ensure they will receive appropriate compensation for the services they deliver.

- Sunset staff discusses structural barriers imposed upon NorthStar that constrain its efforts in drawing down Delivery System Reform System Incentive Payment (DSRIP) funding from the federal government, but only presents half the story. The authors fail to disclose that the NorthStar system has repeatedly appealed to the Department of State Health Services in the past for support in effecting rule changes that would allow it to do so, but has to date received no relief. Absent also from the staff assessment is the fact that despite these ongoing obstructions, NorthStar, through intrepid ingenuity and perseverance, has managed to facilitate some 41 behavioral health DSRIP projects in the NorthStar region valued at over \$200,000,000.

Is NorthStar a perfect system? No, it is not. We hold no illusions to the contrary. But is it one that is committed to constant innovation and aggressively seeks evidenced--- based remedies to all known deficiencies? To this question we can offer an emphatic yes.

We hope that you will disregard the flawed majority of staff recommendations and allow NorthStar to respond to and build upon those few that do provide some level of constructive criticism.

We find ourselves at this time far more confident in the prospect of building upon the solid and proven foundation we know we already have in place than in trusting the illusive promises of ill---informed notions that "could", assert the Sunset staff, result in some imprecisely outlined enhancement at some unspecified later date.

Respectfully,

National Alliance on Mental Illness
Dallas Board

Adam Jock

Sherry Cusumano, President

Leon Keese

Claudia Smith

Juliet [Signature], Vice President

*Marsha Rodgers
Exec. Director*

*David Whitley
DAVID WHITLEY*

Ann Presly - Secretary

Katrina Adler

* One board member is currently not available due to medical issues.