



November 10, 2014

The Honorable Jane Nelson, Chair  
The Honorable Four Price, Vice-Chair  
Texas Sunset Advisory Commission  
P.O. Box 13066  
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Comprehensive regional collaboration

Dear Chairman Nelson and Vice-Chairman Price:

As the Sunset Commission's Staff Report definitively states, "now is the time" to address the issues that have, for far too long, challenged the state's health and human services system. One of the most important opportunities before us now is broad-based regional mental health collaboration.

There are many good people, entities and organizations doing excellent work in the State of Texas. The lack of access to services and the often disorganized and disjointed way in which the needs are addressed (or often not addressed) may not reflect the abundance that exists.

The abundance of resources goes unrecognized, untapped and unable to grow and thrive because we do not encourage partnerships or innovative collaborative efforts to form. Most of our state systems function in isolation.

Instead of offering a highly specific and inflexible course of action in this letter, the National Alliance of Mental Illness Austin (NAMI Austin) is asking that as you craft legislation—Sunset or otherwise—please make every available effort to expand collaborative opportunities beyond what exists now.

Imagine the change we could see in addressing the health needs of Texans if we moved beyond scarcity-minded models and incentivized collaborative solutions. Will we still need increased funding for address the needs? Of course. Will we continue to be challenged by a limited workforce? Without a doubt.

Last session the Texas Legislature passed HB 2887 and SB 1804 to focus on homeless collaboratives. We are asking that you bring that level of thinking and creative energy to mental health.

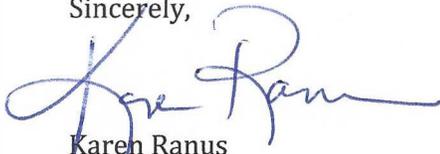
By way of example, we would encourage the Sunset Commission to take a close look at the Medicaid 1115 Waiver's Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program in Region Health Partnership 7 where Central Health is the anchor entity. The changes we are seeing in Central Texas are developing slowly, and there is still much work to be done. But, the shift in recognizing we can do more by working in partnership is having a significant impact.

"Now is the time" when the Sunset Advisory Commission stands poised to address a wide array of issues. "Now is the time" when this Commission can change the vision and approach of our system to one in which we stand together to face the needs and challenges of our most vulnerable citizens. I trust you'll consider this possibility thoughtfully in the days ahead.

The Sunset Advisory Commission and the Texas Legislature have the opportunity to bring more existing resources to bear on mental health simply by expanding collaboration. The State of Texas should foster and reward innovation, especially when public and private resources can come together to produce better outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our thoughts. You have a tough job ahead but NAMI Austin stands ready to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen Ranus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "R".

Karen Ranus  
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission  
Ken Levine, Director, Texas Sunset Advisory Commission