

Ruth Mason



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**Sunset Advisory Commission
Testimony by Ruth Mason, The Arc of Texas
Governmental Affairs Committee Volunteer
June 25, 2014**

My name is Ruth Mason. I am from Houston, Texas. Our son, William, has Down syndrome and is the owner of a small business. I am here to speak on behalf of the Arc of Texas. I also serve on the board of the Down Syndrome Association of Houston and the MHMRA IDD-PAC.

I am here to talk about the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) staff report Issues 1, regarding the separation between DARS' Divisions for Blind Services (DBS) and Rehabilitation Services and how this affects access to services and issue 4, regarding DARS school transition services.

This is a white cane that I borrowed from a friend who is 18. He is Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired and has an intellectual disability (ID). A few weeks ago, I was sitting in a meeting in a school reading about his vision services. According to his documents, DARS Divisions for Blind Services was expected to provide his specialized transition services. The DARS School Transition Program representative was present. I asked her how DARS could help the student based on his evaluations.

She told our team that the student would not be served by her division. She would refer him to the Division for Blind Services. I read the denial from DBS. She then told the parent that they really do not want to hear from parents until one year from graduation. That is three years from now.

I then asked, do we need to get the denial from the school into the minutes of the meeting and then bring the document to you to request services? She said, yes. And this white cane is the extent of his Orientation and Mobility Blind Services. No evaluation. No training.

After a couple of calls to Austin and talking to a few advocates long distance, the DARS field office called and they are willing to coordinate between DARS and DBS. I must emphasize, the student is 18.

Coincidentally, a survey called me yesterday when I was driving here to Austin. I let her know that we are still waiting for our son's DARS representative to return my five phone calls in Houston and an additional two to Austin. I gave up last fall. Our son is 23.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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I would also like to address the Sunset Advisory Committee Report regarding the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). I want to thank the members of the Sunset Commission for carefully looking at both sides of Issue 1 regarding the State Supported Living Center (SSLC) system. The Arc of Texas supports the Sunset staff recommendations to right-size the SSLC system.

We support the recommendations to close the Austin SSLC and then responsibly reform the system so that (1) the state institutions, both in number and size of facilities, more efficiently reflects the number of individuals being served, and (2) community capacity is strengthened to meet the needs and numbers of those who transition into the community.

During the last legislative session, I testified that our family was told that while our son was on the Medicaid community based waiver waiting list, we had two choices: we were entitled to nothing or a SSLC. My neighbor was told the same thing. I have heard this story echoed. When I asked the gentleman why the state was willing to spend over \$100,000 to accept my son into institutional care but not willing to provide supports in our home, he told me to ask my Legislators. If it is going to take the Sunset Staff setting up a State Supported Living Center Closure Commission to make recommendations to right size the system, and provide more opportunities for individuals to receive the services they desire, I say... let's get started.

Thank you for listening.

Ruth Mason
The Arc of Texas Governmental Affairs Committee