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Pat Smith
Executive Director
Little Dudes Learning Centers
Austin, Texas

Public Comment On TWC Sunset Review

I would like to thank the Sunset Commission for their recommendations to TWC related to the childcare subsidy program. The several recommendations for more stake holder input including the modification for recommendation 3.3 that recommends establishing a quarterly advisory committee, are especially welcomed.

Management Action Recommendation 3.4 addresses measuring childcare program's effectiveness in monthly performance analysis. I would like to see included in those performance analysis a breakdown on the children served by ages, infant to 2 years, 3 years to 5 years and school age. From what I can gather in my board there is a very large number of school age children served by the subsidy program. Reimbursement rates for school age children are part time for most of the year so much lower than full time care which helps boards meet the performance measure for the number of children served. The greatest need for care for working parents is full time care for young children. While consistent, quality care is important for all children, those with the greatest need are children from birth to 4 years. Quality early care and education supports sound emotional development as well as school readiness. Low income working parents who are on a waitlist for subsidized care are in many cases forced to resort to unlicensed, low quality childcare. Subsidy dollars are precious few in relation to the need and should be used to serve our youngest, most vulnerable children.

This takes me to the topic of rates. I was sadly surprised to read on page 33 of the report that the average reimbursement rate is \$368 per child per month. That averages out to \$17.52 per day divided by 11 hours of care per day comes to \$1.59 an hour per child for early education. For reference Head Start is paid over \$7.00 per hour per child to educate essentially the same population. The numbers are staggering.

Little mention is made of the rate structure in the report. Each of the 28 boards set their own rates. TWC can make recommendations to boards for rate adjustments but they are only recommendations. Most states have set rates for example, an established urban rate and a rural rate, only 2 rates compared to 28. Recommendations for more establishing more consistent and equitable rates are an urgent need if Texas is going to really support quality early care and education.