

Members of the Sunset Commission:

Good afternoon, I am Dr. Mary Tijerina, a proud member of the Executive Committee of the Texas Office for Prevention of Developmental Disabilities. I am here to talk about the Office, which is currently administratively attached to HHSC and overseen by the Executive committee.

I want to thank the Sunset staff for their work in the interest of developing better, more efficiently run services, and systems of care that will save tax payer money and improve the health and well-being of all Texans.

The Report rightly notes that there has been little progress in the prevention of various problems facing Texans. Among these problems are Developmental Disabilities. My many years of social work practice made very clear to me that people with DDs are at increased risk for needing services including health care, child welfare, juvenile justice, substance abuse, and mental health, indeed across all of the HHSC service systems. While those systems are primarily geared to deal with the effects and problems that are secondary to developmental disabilities, no agency other than TOPDD is exclusively charged with prevention. I trust that you all understand the importance of prevention, especially as a fiscally responsible approach to budgeting.

TOPDD was created as a public-private partnership to coordinate activity among many public and private agencies that work to prevent developmental disabilities. The Office stands alone in its work and its approach to its mission. The proposed recommendation to absorb TOPDD's functions into HHSC runs the risk of losing this focus on prevention and the flexibility made possible by its current independent organizational structure. I urge you not to do this.

The recommendations to eliminate several advisory groups and programs cite the potential for overlap, duplication of services, ineffective services, created fragmentation and silos. However, these are not observations that apply to TOPDD. In fact, it is quite the opposite; TOPDD's work specifically involves eliminating silos and fragmentation and mobilizing partnerships for action. For example, TOPDD facilitated the establishment of a 75-member collaborative representing a diverse cross-section of professional and personal connections to the prevention of disabilities due to alcohol exposed pregnancies. Through the efforts of this collaborative, TOPDD has realized implementation of system wide training for caseworkers, development of a network of trained volunteers and the application of model prevention programs at treatment centers.

As a previous, long time state employee, I understand the restrictions that TOPDD would have were it not independent. It would never have been able to meet impossible deadlines set up by funders in order to bring in the kind of support it has. It would never have been able to organize the start-up and subcontracting of desperately needed services within a matter of weeks. It would never have been able to quickly organize a ground breaking national research project. Why? Because these accomplishments required a nimble organization and quick action. We all know that decision making in government entities moves slowly, requiring multiple approvals and following a formal chain of command. And the larger the organization, the bigger the chain of command. While funders are increasingly providing less lead-time and demanding immediate responses, currently, it can take a month at a state agency to get approval to even apply for a grant. The Sunset recommendations will transform HHSC into being one of the biggest state agencies in the country, if not the biggest. Under this structure, the same decisions that TOPDD and its executive committee can make in hours, will undoubtedly be prolonged and make it difficult to meet funders' timelines. What this means is that potential resources for preventing the pain and suffering

associated with preventable developmental disabilities in Texas would be lost. I am here to tell you that subsuming TOPDD's functions would not increase the state's ability to prevent developmental disabilities.

Every day, children are being born with preventable disabilities and the clock is ticking. We cannot afford to slow down our work. Eliminating TOPDD's independence and therefore its ability to draw public and private funds not otherwise available to the state, actually has the potential to damage the state's efficacy in preventing developmental disabilities. We cannot afford to make changes unless there is a clear benefit for the people of Texas. I urge you to maintain the independence of TOPDD and allow its good work to continue.

Respectfully submitted,

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