



November 12, 2014

The Honorable Jane Nelson
Sunset Advisory Commission
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Senator Nelson and members of the Sunset Advisory Commission:

On behalf of its more than 450 member hospitals and health systems, the Texas Hospital Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Texas Sunset Commission's review of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and Texas Department of State Health Services. As the Sunset Commission considers the future structure and function of health and human services agencies in Texas, we would respectfully request that the Commission consider the following points to strengthen the delivery of behavioral health care services, meaning both mental health services and substance use disorder services.

One, having the appropriate model of care in place is fundamental to providing needed behavioral health care services. In other words, we should determine what delivery system provides high-quality, cost-efficient care to Texans with behavioral health needs. In developing that model, we should build on the existing system so that there is statewide alignment on quality measures and outcomes but allow flexibility so that local providers can decide the most appropriate ways to achieve stated outcomes. While that model of care is developed, we need a surge of additional state-funded hospital beds for the most acute patients who now sit in hospital emergency departments and in jails because they cannot get access to the level of care that they need due to a shortage of state hospital beds. The House Bill 3793 advisory panel reviewed data and has recommended that an additional 720 beds are needed during the upcoming biennium to begin to address the current shortage with additional beds needed over time to meet demand and accommodate population growth. As we move to the appropriate model of care, which presumably would include additional outpatient services and services available to individuals closer to their home, hopefully the demand for state hospital services will decline.

Two, maintaining a strong focus on behavioral health services is paramount. It is essential that behavioral health remain a priority in any new agency structure. The model of care is moving towards integration of physical and behavioral health but behavioral health services have lagged in Texas due to poor funding and coverage. Thus emphasis on behavioral health will continue to be important as it catches up with the physical component of overall health.

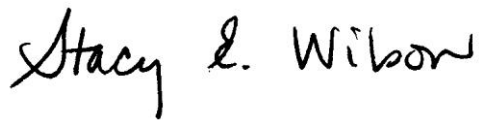
Three, an adequate workforce is critical for the delivery of behavioral health care. As part of its House Bill 1023 report, entitled "The Mental Health Workforce Shortage in Texas – September 2014," the Texas Department of State Health Services has recommended a number of actions to

increase the number and variety of professionals to provide behavioral health care services, including:

- instituting training stipends for psychiatric trainees, psychologist trainees and other mental health professional trainees;
- providing early exposure to career opportunities in the mental health and substance use service fields;
- emphasizing the value of telemedicine and ensuring that medical students and interns receive appropriate training in the use of telemedicine; and
- increasing funding for crisis intervention training for law enforcement personnel who are on the front line and encounter individuals who have a mental health condition or substance use disorder.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. THA looks forward to continuing to work with the Commission as it completes its review of the state's health care agencies.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy E. Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stacy E. Wilson
Associate General Counsel