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**Testimony**  
**Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report**  
**HHSC Department of Aging and Disability Services**

24 June 2014

I disagree with the SAC report's recommendations regarding State Supported Living Centers, which are, in summary,

- Close Austin SSLC by Aug 2017
- Create a commission to identify five additional SSLCs to close
- Close those SSLCs by Aug 2022

1. The arguments are made on either the basis that other states have long-since closed their institutional care facilities and that significant cost savings could be achieved. Regarding the first, Texas has long and wisely chosen its own path, looking to neither California nor Florida for leadership or direction. Regarding the second, the attractiveness of achieving a 50% per capita reduction in cost assumes that the SSLC population (older, more fragile in health, with higher levels of disability and need) could be served at substantially lower cost in the community than in an SSLC. The report goes on to note that the community is not prepared to serve our population, and that reimbursement rates would have to rise to accommodate them, yet there is no analysis of what the expected savings would be and the timeframe in which they would be achieved. This seems inexplicable, since two SSLCs (Travis and Fort Worth) were closed in the 1990s, and cost data could surely be recovered from those experiments. The report also notes that community providers do not share the level of oversight that SSLCs receive, or the amount of training given to SSLC employees, or numerous other aspects that contribute to SSLC cost; elevating community care to a higher standard would increase costs in that venue substantially.

2. The creation of a commission would relegate the legislature's statutory responsibility to adjudicate the closure of an SSLC to an appointed commission. Texas rightly regards with skepticism the dictates of federal agencies staffed by unelected people, because the election process makes legislators accountable to their constituents. We feel the same way about this commission.

3. The commission is not tasked with determining if any SSLCs should be closed, or how many SSLCs should be

closed, but which five. There supposition is that we have too many, and the commission, aside from the representation by a single family member of an SSLC resident, would surely embrace that view. The people most directly affected are minimally represented.

4. The report suggests the declining census of SSLCs is an indication that demand has decreased in favor of community options. The declining census is the result of a mandated reduction by DADS, exacerbated by the refusal of MRAs to present SSLCs as an option to parents who desperately need help. I and many other parents could relate disheartening tales of tortuous paths to finding safe haven for our children.

5. The report is disingenuous to suggest that the incidence of abuse, neglect, and exploitation is 1½ and 2½ times higher in SSLCs than in HCS and private ICFs respectively. The zero-tolerance culture, video surveillance, and high level of oversight of SSLCs make it likely that if those venues were subject to the same level of oversight and reporting that those figures would be reversed.

6. The published positions of TCDD, Disability Rights Texas, and other organizations would lead one to believe that there is unanimity among those that serve and advocate for people with disabilities that community care is the preferable venue to serve all. The notable exception is the people that SSLCs actually serve and their families. We don't argue that funds spent on paratransit and personal care attendants be redirected so we don't need to raise money to buy wheelchair vans and x-ray machines for our SSLCs. It seems unseemly.

Texans are justifiably of our beautiful, sunset-red marble capitol building. We should be equally proud of our SSLCs; the buildings are not beautiful, but they say a great deal about who Texans are as a people and how we care for our own.

Respectfully,

