From: Sunset Advisory Commission
To: Dawn Roberson
Subject: FW: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)
Date: Monday, June 30, 2014 4:34:00 PM

-----Original Message-----
From: sundrupal@capitol.local [mailto:sundrupal@capitol.local]
Sent: Monday, June 30, 2014 3:38 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission
Subject: Form submission from: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Submitted on Monday, June 30, 2014 - 15:37

Agency: DEPARTMENT AGING AND DISABILITY SERVICES DADS

First Name: Sarah

Last Name: Watkins

Title: Board member

Organization you are affiliated with: Community Now!

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City: Austin

State: Texas

Your Comments About the Staff Report, Including Recommendations Supported or Opposed:
In the interest of limiting the length of my comments, my input on the Sunset Commission Recommendations will be limited to Issues 1, 2, and 4.

Issue 1:

I, both as an individual and member of Community Now!, am in full support of all recommendations made as part of Issue 1. With regard to Recommendation 1.1, however, I feel that it is necessary to reiterate that transitions from Austin State Supported Living Center (and any other Centers chosen for closure and consolidation) must be managed in a way that allows the individual and/or their guardian sufficient time and resources for a successful transition. We have heard reports that recent transitions from AuSSLC have been rushed, and that individuals and guardians have been pressured into making quick decisions in order to speed the transition process. While it is unacceptable that the transition process languish beyond 180 days, it is equally unacceptable that the choice of a community placement be a rushed or pressured decision. Unnecessarily speeding the transition process increases the likelihood of of an unsuccessful transition to the community or to another setting. This is of great concern, and should be addressed in Sunset recommendations.

In addition, I as an individual feel that it is unlikely that retention bonuses of $2000 will incentivize current and future SSLC employees to commit to the important work of caring for individuals with disabilities during the transition and closure of the Austin State Supported Living Center. I believe that all SSLC employees who commit to seeing a facility through to closure should be guaranteed the transfer of their job either to a community setting or another state-run facility at a minimum of the pay rate and benefits they are receiving when the SSLC is designated for closure. This will alleviate many of the valid concerns about the economic impact of closure on employees,

especially since employees who choose to transfer from working in an SSLC to working in home and community-based setting will see a significant reduction in their take-home pay due to ongoing disparities between pay rates for staff in institutional settings versus home and community-based settings.

With regard to Recommendation 1.2, I believe that it is also paramount that we develop a long-range plan for consolidating and repurposing the seven remaining Centers, as their censuses will also inevitably decline and create a situation similar to the one we are currently facing at some point down the road.

Issue 2:

I, both as an individual and member of Community Now!, am in full support of Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2. Crisis intervention has been long underfunded in Texas and has real impacts on real individuals and real families who desperately need services. In addition to expanding the availability of crisis intervention, significant investment needs to be made in the availability of both behavioral and mental health supports for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Availability of comprehensive behavioral and mental health supports for this population will decrease the need for crisis intervention services over time and prove to be cost-effective. With regard to Recommendation 2.2, it is not only individuals with high levels of medical needs that need additional reimbursement to support community living, but also individuals with complex and challenging behaviors. In general, I as an individual believe the reimbursement system should be completely overhauled to reflect not only the cost of care for an individual but the cost of making sure that they have a decent place to live and the means to engaging in meaningful activities. Current reimbursements do not allow many home and community-based service providers to do more than the minimum required repairs to the residential settings, and high reimbursements could allow many home and community-based services providers to update furnishings and appliances or purchase vehicles that would allow residents to more meaningfully engage with the community around them.

I do not have enough specific expertise to offer an opinion on Recommendations 2.3 and 2.4.

With regard to Recommendation 2.5, I believe that whenever possible, expertise gained by employees of the SSLC system should be shared to the benefit of providers and individuals living in community settings.

With regard to Recommendation 2.6, please see my comments with regard to Recommendation 1.1. The Sunset Commission must encourage DADS to partner with local authorities in developing an appropriate time frame for transitions from SSLCs that does not allow individuals waiting to transition to languish unnecessarily nor forces individuals and/or guardians to make uninformed or rapid decisions about their care.

Issue 4:

As an individual and as a member of Community Now!, I am in full support of all recommendations made under Issue 4. It is also my opinion that in addition to provider sanctions, any staff in either community-based or institutional settings who commit or permit acts of abuse, neglect, or exploitation against the individuals they serve should be prosecuted to the full extent of local, state and/or federal law.

Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: See above for relevant suggestions.

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree