



JASON VILLALBA
STATE REPRESENTATIVE • DISTRICT 114

November 12, 2014

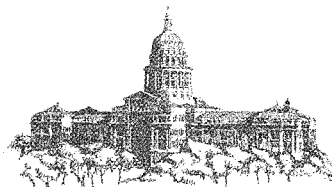
Mr. Ken Levine
Director
Sunset Advisory Commission
1501 North Congress, 6th Floor, Robert E. Johnson Building
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mr. Levine:

Thank you for your diligent work on behalf of Texas as the Director of the Texas Sunset Advisory Committee. I am writing to express my concern regarding the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission's staff report recommending the discontinuance of the NorthSTAR system. This system of care has consistently demonstrated that it can provide quality mental health and substance use disorder treatment and services in a cost-effective, fiscally conservative manner.

As your committee has determined, there is most certainly room for improvement to the system with respect to oversight, accountability and efficiency. But, I am hopeful that instead of discontinuing the program, you might instead consider re-tooling the system to meet the high standards of the State of Texas, while continuing to provide much needed services to the North Texas Region. I implore you to allow us to work together with the local leaders, stakeholders and NorthSTAR to build an enhanced model that preserves what works and develop improvements where needed.

The data is clear. NorthSTAR succeeds where many programs fall short. Below are some of the system's many achievements:



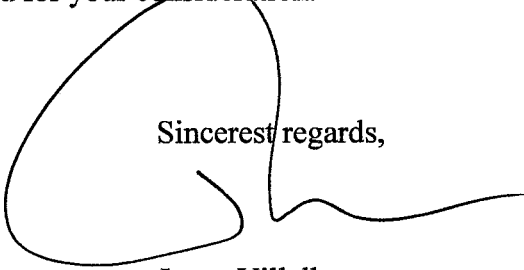
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- **Access** – Since its inception in 1999, the counties served by NorthSTAR are the only region in Texas that have never had a waiting list for mental health or substance use disorder services.
- **Public-Private Partnership that promotes consumer choice and quality care** – There is full range of providers at every point along the continuum of care. The more than 350 providers that comprise the NorthSTAR network have a proud entrepreneurial spirit that has supported not only quality of care, but innovations in care that have allowed the NorthSTAR model to evolve and mature.
- **Innovation** – Over the past 15 years, NorthSTAR has continued to adapt, innovate and change to best meet the needs of beneficiaries and providers alike. In fact, since its inception, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Department of State Health Services have repeatedly come to NorthSTAR to pilot innovative initiatives. Most recently, NorthSTAR consulted with the state and county partners to develop Ebola quarantine counseling and services.
- **Cost Effectiveness** – The cost of providing mental health care per person under the NorthSTAR system in 2014 is approximately \$1,587 annually, compared to an average cost of \$3,684 person annually in the rest of the state.
- **Blended Funding** – By combining federal, state and local funding sources, treatment decisions are based on clinical needs and not the funding stream. NorthSTAR members do not have to understand or navigate a complicated system to access care. They just have to ask for help from any NorthSTAR provider and they are enrolled in a program that best suits their needs. In essence, there is “no wrong door” to access the system. While the Sunset Commission staff report appears to indicate that this funding arrangement is problematic, NorthSTAR’s 1915(b) Medicaid waiver has been renewed every two years since its inception 15 years ago, most recently in May of this year.
- **Accountability** – Public quarterly reports show that outcomes for NorthSTAR members have been in the top 15% of the state of Texas.
- **Community Partner** – During a community crisis or disaster, you can count on NorthSTAR to help. NorthSTAR facilitated the behavioral health response in community disasters, especially in Hurricanes Katrina, Rita,

Gustav and Ike, to insure that the needs of people with mental illness and substance use disorders were met regardless of the challenges.

NorthSTAR works. It is an efficient, effective and an economical system of care for qualified residents of Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Kaufman, Navarro, and Rockwall counties. Yes, it can be enhanced, and NorthSTAR is always looking for ways to do so.

With greatest respect, I am pleading with you to reject the Sunset Commission's staff recommendations and allow NorthSTAR to work with North Texas Behavioral Health Authority, state leaders and other interested parties to build on the systems' many strengths and shape the NorthSTAR of the future. Our citizens are counting on this program. Thank you for your consideration.



Sincerest regards,

Jason Villalba
Texas State Representative
House District 114