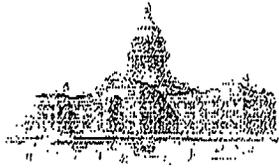


The Senate of The State of Texas

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November 10, 2014

Via Facsimile

Sunset Advisory Commission
Hon. Jane Nelson, Chair
P.O. Box 13066
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Chairman Nelson, Vice-Chairman Price, Members:

In order to put what I have to say into proper context, I should begin by reminding those who may not know that I was an early and vocal critic of NorthSTAR. I have had the honor of representing all or part of 4 of the 7 counties in the NorthSTAR region for almost twelve years. Prior to that, I served for over 10 years on the Hunt County MHMR board. I was, therefore, a principal witness to the extreme disruption the changeover to the present system wrought at its inception and for some time afterward. Quite frankly, in the early years of my tenure in the Senate I spent a good amount of time, often working with current and former legislative colleagues in the Dallas delegation, looking for ways in which the program could be dismantled or reversed.

Why then am I writing a letter in its support now, as NorthSTAR is finally being called to account by a Sunset Commission staff report which has recommended dissolution—an action I sought for years? Lest anyone sense incongruity in my 2003 position in comparison with my present view, let me say that my expectations are substantially the same today as they were then. It is rather the NorthStar system that has changed, growing and evolving over time, with ongoing stakeholder collaboration, to become one that serves its community admirably.

I find the criticism offered by Sunset staff to be rife with critical flaws and to miss the mark on most aspects of its appraisal due to some rather conspicuous omissions and distressing factual misunderstandings. Despite these deficits, some facets of the staff recommendations may yet be useful. They do, for example, draw welcome attention to certain needs that NorthSTAR has already recognized and is well on the way to addressing through its own efforts at transformation but may still necessitate additional assistance from the Legislature in resolving fully. These lay primarily in the areas of integrating behavioral and physical care and removing statutory artifacts

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of the original pilot legislation which make it much harder than it need be to draw down federal funds under various past and future Medicaid waivers.

Were the Sunset Commission to force the communities in the NorthSTAR region to demolish the system in place in favor of some unproven and vague model alluded to, it is my fear that many tens of thousands of lives in recovery would be needlessly disrupted and a smaller but fiscally significant population, whose acuity proves more intractable, would be greatly disserved. The current system provides a hard to reproduce safety net for this latter group. Without it they are extremely likely to fall through the cracks, placing undue burden on our hospital emergency rooms and jails and effectively denying these Texans dealing with serious and persistent mental illness adequate treatment. I find that potential outcome unacceptable.

Having served on Sunset I know the tremendous pressure placed upon the members and staff to accommodate diverse constituencies and interest across the state. I would suggest the correct thing to do here is to keep the focus on the needs of the specific local community affected and grant them their desire to maintain an innovative system that they know meets their needs. The structure in place provides an ideal platform upon which to build even greater and more effective arrays of service. To cast it aside at this juncture would seem to me eminently foolish.

Sincerely,



Senator Robert F. Deuell, MD

Cc. Hon. Brian Birdwell
Hon. Charles Schwertner, MD
Hon. Donna Campbell, MD
Hon. Juan Hinojosa
Hon. Cindy Burkett
Hon. Four Price
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