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Sunset Advisory Commission
PO Box 13066
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: Sunset Commission Recommendation regarding the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission

Greetings:

I recently reviewed your report and recommendations regarding the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) and while I respect your opinions on this matter, I find no justifiable reasoning for the abolishment of TJPC.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this matter and therefore request that you accept the following as my sincere attempt to provide constructive comments regarding your recommendations.

Sunset Recommendation 1.1

- **“Abolish TYC and TJPC and transfer their functions to a newly created state agency, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, with a Sunset date of 2015.”**

Comment:

TJPC works with the counties in providing community based services while TYC runs institutions for the more serious offenders in addition to providing specialized services to those offenders. It appears that the reasoning for the recommendation for abolishment is a result of the issues surrounding TYC not TJPC. When the new agency is created, the main focus will be on the areas which need improvement by TYC meaning that the majority of the combined funding

will be used toward maintaining the state institutions and addressing those areas of concern while the community based programs suffer. This will not only be detrimental to the state of Texas, but to our juvenile offenders as well. The probation field will suffer greatly in that less attention will be focused on them because there are no real areas of concern that need to be corrected at this time thanks to the efforts of TJPC. Therefore, I am forced to oppose this recommendation and further feel TJPC does not need to be abolished.

- **“Modify state funding for probation services by consolidating funding streams, considering past performance in awarding grants, and establishing a pilot program to encourage counties to keep lower-risk offenders in their communities.”**

Comment:

The majority of the counties already keep the lower-risk offenders in their communities. Consolidating funding streams will not benefit county probation departments. The majority of these funds will be directed toward correcting the issues within the current state institutions causing lack of funding for community based services.

Sunset Key Findings:

- **“State funding of the juvenile justice system is not targeted toward programs that work.”**

Comment:

Determining which programs work will always remain questionable. Whether a program works depends on the offender and their ability/desire to change their behavior. TJPC and probation departments have worked hand in hand to implement programs to divert juvenile offenders. The creation of a new agency will not change how an offender responds to a program and therefore cannot ensure that the programs they design will work effectively and monies will still be targeted to programs that may/may not work. Once again, this is not a justifiable reason to abolish TJPC.

- **“TYC has failed to provide adequate services to youth in its care or correct critical management problems.”**

Comment:

This is merely a correction that needs to be made with TYC. The state should implement strict standards and monitoring visits with TYC in an effort to correct these issues. This is an issue that does not involve TJPC and therefore TJPC should not be abolished as a result.

Sunsets Conclusion:

- **“Lack of information sharing.”**

Comment:

Sunset discusses TJPC’s development of an information database for juveniles on probation in a secure web-based system. Sunset further states that TYC has not participated in the initiative, either to directly connect to the system or to obtain the information it will provide. Once again, this is an issue that needs to be corrected with TYC. TYC can be required to participate in this sharing of information. TJPC is constantly working toward improving their functions. Therefore, TJPC should not be abolished due to TYC’s lack of cooperation.

- **“Lack of opportunities for training.”**

Comment:

Sunset discusses that probation officers and TYC parole officers could benefit from shared opportunities to gain new skills, learn about community-based services for youth, and exchange expertise. Sunset further states that TJPC hosts and assists with statewide conferences on topics of importance to juvenile justice practitioners. The events are well attended by the probation community, but TYC does not participate regularly. Once again, this is not a justifiable reason to abolish such an effectively functioning agency as TJPC.

TJPC has worked diligently with the county probation departments over the years providing leadership, funding, training, and teamwork. Probation departments would be at a loss without them. TJPC has developed strict standards and guidelines for probation departments to follow in an effort to provide all juvenile offenders the appropriate supervision and program services. TJPC conducts on-site monitoring visits to the county probation departments to ensure that the standards are being followed as required in fiscal, case management, and data submission. TJPC and the county probation departments have established great working relationships to effectively serve the juvenile offenders. The TJPC staff is very familiar with the functions of probation and they are quick to listen and find ways to address each county’s unique problems that may arise in probation services. It is this type of relationship that is rare among different agencies and that is why I feel that abolishing TJPC would create a negative impact on that state of Texas, county juvenile probation departments, and juvenile offenders.

Why abolish TJPC, which has proven to be a well functioning agency, in an effort to create a new agency which will take years to function as well as TJPC, if it reaches that point at all? There is no guarantee that the new agency will ever be able to provide the same level of service to juvenile probation departments as TJPC has. It is clear that the recommendation to abolish TJPC is being provided as an attempt to correct the issues surrounding TYC. I see no justifiable reasoning in abolishing an agency which has worked diligently toward improving the juvenile

justice system in an effort to correct the wrongdoings of another agency. It's like punishing an innocent juvenile for the wrongdoings of a guilty juvenile.

The Sunset report repeatedly discusses the accomplishments of TJPC and complains that TYC has failed to cooperate. We can't abolish laws just because some refuse to cooperate with them, therefore why abolish TJPC just because TYC has chosen not to cooperate? The issues surrounding TYC need to be dealt with independently, not in conjunction with TJPC. Allow time for the new Executive Director of TYC to correct these issues and make the necessary changes rather than making drastic changes that could devastate the entire field of Juvenile Justice.

Thank you in advance for taking these comments into consideration. I trust that you will consider these in your reasons to recommend that the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission remain a separate agency overseeing the county juvenile probation departments in the state of Texas.

Sincerely,

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Bowie County Juvenile Probation