

Health and Human Services Transition Legislative Oversight Committee

March 31, 2016

DARS/TWC Transition

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What is transferring?

- SB 208 transfers five services from DARS to TWC on September 1, 2016:
 - the vocational rehabilitation program for people who are blind or have visual impairments, including the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center;
 - the vocational rehabilitation program for people with all other disabilities;
 - the Business Enterprises of Texas program; and
 - the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind grant.

Scope of the transfer

- 1,860.9 full-time equivalent employees in Austin and across the state in 130+ field offices.
- \$309 million in state and federal funds.
- Roughly 96,000 consumers of DARS services.

Managing the transition

- In carrying out the transition, the agencies are working together to ensure:
 - No disruption of services to consumers
 - No disruption to staff salaries and benefits
 - All federal requirements are met to maintain current level of funding
- DARS and TWC have set up a structure for managing the transition, including:
 - Steering Committee – agency executives meet monthly to monitor progress
 - 10 Focus Area Teams – agency staff work together to perform a wide array of tasks
 - Transition Management Office

What to expect with the transition

- Upon successful completion of the transition, Texans with disabilities who are seeking employment will benefit from a team approach to service delivery in which VR counselors and workforce specialists, leveraging their combined strengths, experience, and established relationships with Texas employers, will obtain the best possible employment outcomes.
- The VR and BET programs will continue to operate as they currently do. VR counselors and other program staff will continue to operate in their current locations until TWC can integrate them into the Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices. Consumers will continue to work with the same counselors and staff and receive the same services.
- TWC plans to send the Older Blind grant funds to HHSC through an interagency contract to be pooled with the other independent living funds and have a greater impact for consumers needing those services.
- TWC is working with DARS, HHSC, and the Texas Facilities Commission on transferring leases of 68 stand-alone field offices and developing pro rata cost TWC will pay for 63 colocated field offices.

Communicating with stakeholders

- We are conducting field visits to regional DARS offices, along with local workforce Board staff, to answer staff questions about the transition.
- TWC and DARS communications teams are working together to identify key stakeholders and develop strategies for communicating key messages to them.
- We will be implementing a multifaceted communications campaign that features direct email notices, print materials, social media messaging, and traditional media releases to keep all stakeholders informed about the transition.

2015 public meetings

- DARS and TWC held seven public meetings around the state from July through September 2015 to gather stakeholder input on the development of the WIOA State Plan and the transition of DARS programs to TWC.
- More than 100 individuals provided comments at these meetings.
- The most commonly raised subjects at the public meetings were:
 - the need for the agencies to communicate with DARS stakeholders about the transition;

- the need for qualified counselors to continue serving consumers;
- the need for continued pre-employment services for children, specifically those with visual impairments;
- positive comments about VR services being a good fit for the workforce system;
- the need to provide training and build the expertise of the centers for independent living; and
- the need to increase accessibility at Workforce Solutions Offices.

Transition Plan

- SB 208 requires us to develop a transition plan to ensure the transfer is accomplished in a careful and deliberative manner.
- TWC developed this plan in coordination with HHSC and DARS and submitted it to the Legislative Oversight Committee on September 29, 2015.
- On March 1, TWC published an amended transition plan that includes more detail about DARS' leased office space.
- TWC has created a transition page on its website where you can find a copy of this plan: <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/news/departments-assistive-rehabilitative-services-program-transition>
- Overview of the plan:
 - Executive Summary – lays out the requirements of SB 208 and how the plan complies with those requirements.
 - Overall Approach to the Transition – discusses our vision for the transition and how we will manage the process over the next year.
 - 10 individual sections that lay out the major objectives and timelines for the transfer to be successful. These sections address focus areas such as communications, human resources, IT, and policy and service delivery.
 - Attachments include an org chart, the data use agreement, written comments received, and the recently added leased space plan.

Beyond September 1, 2016

- SB 208 requires changes to the programs beyond the transfer to TWC.

- By October 1, 2017, TWC must integrate into a single program the blind and general VR programs. TWC will hold public hearings later this year and early 2017 to gather input from stakeholders on this merger.
- By August 31, 2018, TWC must integrate its vocational rehabilitation staff into the Local Workforce Development Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices. These staff will continue to be state employees of TWC, but will be housed with and integrated in other ways with the Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices.

Challenges

- TWC is working with DARS now to identify expenditures that qualify for the federal requirement to spend 15 percent of its VR grant on pre-employment transition services. We are concerned that the state may not have met the expenditure level for 2015 or is not on track for 2016 and that failure to meet these spending levels could result in a reduction in the grant.
- The Departments of Labor and Education do not expect to issue final WIOA regulations until June 2016, creating uncertainty for TWC's workforce programs, including vocational rehabilitation.