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Agency News

Sunset review at TDCJ

The mission and performance of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP), Windham School District (WSD) and the Correctional Managed Healthcare Committee (CMHC) are currently under Sunset review by the Legislature. Sunset review is a periodic assessment of a state agency by the 12-member Sunset Advisory Commission, which consists of five members of the Senate and one public member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, and five members of the House of Representatives and one public member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Legislature established the Sunset review process in 1977 to ensure that state funds are spent efficiently and to eliminate duplication in state government. The Commission asks whether the state needs an agency's functions, and helps create legislation to make necessary changes to its mission and operation. The Sunset process can also set a closing date for agencies determined to be obsolete or redundant. Agencies are typi-

cally reviewed once every 12 years, although larger state agencies may be reviewed more frequently, and those that perform similar functions are reviewed at the same time.

Sunset review: a three-step process



The review process begins when Commission staff evaluates an agency's mission and determines whether the agency has effectively achieved its goals. Information is

collected from many sources, including a Self-Evaluation Report, which allows the agency under review to participate in the process. The Commission then issues a report recommending either abolishment or continuance of the agency. If continuation is recommended, the report may contain recommended operational changes. For TDCJ, BPP, WSD and CMHC, this report will be published in April 2012.

Step two of the agency's upcoming Sunset review is currently scheduled for June 2012, when the Commission hears public testimony and comments from Sunset staff. After consideration, the Commission issues recommendations during September 2012 for the Legislature to consider when it convenes in January 2013.

Step three of the review process takes place when the Legislature considers the Commission's recommendations and concludes when laws are enacted to make the final changes.

Most recommendations from the Sun-

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set Advisory Commission involve matters of policy, organizational structure or agency operations. One very unusual example of a Commission recommendation regarding legislative appropriations occurred in 2007, when the Commission recommended additional funding for TDCJ's treatment and diversion programs.

That same year, the 80th Legislature allocated more than \$200 million for community corrections, substance abuse treatment and mental health care for offenders. These additional funds greatly expanded treatment opportunities for probationers, parolees and prison inmates.

Given the tight fiscal climate and Sunset's emphasis on issues other than appropriations, TDCJ Executive Director Brad Livingston said he would be surprised if any recommendations speak directly to funding, but emphasized that doesn't mean the recommendations wouldn't be beneficial to the agency.

"Sunset review brings a fresh perspective to many issues, and many useful recommendations typically emerge from that process. In order to maximize the benefits, it is important for the agencies and staff who participate to treat this as an opportunity for improvement. That perspective has served us well in prior sunset reviews and in all our dealings with Internal Audit and the State Auditor."

To learn more about the Sunset process, go to the Sunset Commission website at www.sunset.state.tx.us. To share your ideas about agencies under review, you may send a letter to: Sunset Advisory Commission, P.O. Box 13066, Austin, Texas, 78711, or e-mail your views to sunset@sunset.state.tx.us. ●