



Sunset Advisory Commission Texas Workforce Commission

August 12, 2026

Sunset Advisory Commission: Opportunity Youth & Young Adult comments for Texas Workforce Commission

Chairwoman Kolkhorst, Vice Chair Hull and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Mandi Kimball, and I serve as Vice President at Children at Risk.

Children At Risk appreciates the Sunset staff's thoughtful review of TWC, particularly its recommendations to strengthen accountability, performance measurement, technology modernization, and cross-agency coordination. We encourage the Commission to build on this work by strengthening how Texas serves Opportunity Youth and Young Adults—Texans ages 16 to 24 who are disconnected from school and work.

Today, almost 500,000 youth, more than 13 percent of Texans in this age group fall into that category. Many have experienced foster care, juvenile justice involvement, housing instability, behavioral health challenges, or interrupted education. They must navigate the tenuous bridge between our education system and Texas' future workforce. Too often our youth encounter fragmented systems instead of coordinated pathways to education, training, and employment.

Children at Risk has provided district-specific Opportunity Youth data for each member of the Commission. We used this information during the last legislative session to help inform policymakers about the scope of youth disconnection in their communities, and we appreciated the Legislature's partnership in passing Senate Bill 1143 by Sunset member Senator Blanco. This important new law increased transparency by requiring TWC to report how WIOA Youth funds are spent and required Local Workforce Development Boards to address Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in their strategic plans. Those were important first steps, but more work remains to ensure Texas is building the workforce our economy will depend on. We are currently creating new profiles for the 90th Legislature.

Today, services for these young people are spread across multiple agencies—including TEA, THECB, TWC, HHSC, DSHS, DFPS, TJJD, and TDHCA—with different eligibility requirements, funding streams, and data systems. The result is a patchwork of programs that makes it difficult

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for young people to navigate services, for agencies to coordinate support, and for the state to measure outcomes and maximize its investments.

To better understand these challenges, Children At Risk conducted focus groups with workforce partners, young people, nonprofit providers, and state and local agencies across rural, suburban, and urban Texas. **Regardless of geography, participants consistently identified the same barriers: fragmented systems, inconsistent coordination, unclear accountability, and limited support during critical transitions.**

Policy Recommendations:

Based on these findings, we respectfully recommend that the Sunset Advisory Commission direct TWC to:

- Strengthen cross-system alignment by developing a statewide strategy for Opportunity Youth and Young Adults that expands career pathways, increases credential attainment, and strengthens workforce participation as well as family financial stability. This proposal builds on the Legislature's recent work on transparency and accountability.
- Establish a formal cross-agency advisory structure to align workforce, education, child welfare, juvenile justice, higher education, and health.
- Create an Opportunity Youth Ombudsman within TWC to coordinate implementation, identify service gaps, and improve accountability.
- Adopt a statewide definition of Opportunity Youth and Young Adults, establish a shared data framework and youth-focused performance measures, modernize technology to improve coordination, strengthen transitions between public systems, and expand navigation supports, work-based learning opportunities, and industry-recognized credential pathways. Without a clear definition, accountability for taxpayer money is so much more difficult.

Texas has already made significant investments in education, workforce development, child welfare, housing, and behavioral health. The opportunity now is to ensure those investments function as a coordinated system rather than a collection of separate programs. Our future workforce depends on us getting this right.

By building on the Sunset Staff's findings and recommendations, Texas can create a more accountable, coordinated, and youth-centered system that reconnects young people to

education and employment while strengthening the skilled workforce our state's economy depends on.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mandi Kimball

Vice President of Children at Risk