



# **A Message From the Chair**

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—*Susan Stahl*  
*Chair, Texas Board  
of Protective and  
Regulatory Services*

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Serving as chair during the first year of the Texas Board of Protective and Regulatory Services' existence has been an exhilarating yet sobering experience. Exhilarating because of the numerous opportunities to start fresh, make changes, try new things, and assess where we are going as we head into the 21st century. Sobering because we see first hand the overwhelming needs for protecting Texas children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

I believe we have laid a solid foundation for the long-range improvement of services to vulnerable Texans. We have developed a framework in which the state, in partnership with communities, can respond to the individual needs of each person who is abused, neglected, or exploited.

Even before the board officially came into existence Sept. 1, 1992, members had organized into a functional unit. Orientation to our role and responsibility was intense, including a workshop, a seminar, a retreat, and frequent board meetings. Within weeks, we had adopted a concise mission statement and set down the strategic direction for 1993 to 1998.

The board adopted a set of 36 initiatives that became the thrust of our legislative appropriation request and a blueprint of our vision. We committed ourselves to open communications at all levels and demonstrated this commitment through traveling the state and holding frequent public hearings. Citizen testimony was and continues to be a major item on the agenda for board meetings. During this first year, more than 1,000 citizens addressed the board. The board initiated meetings outside Austin to bring the agency to the communities it serves and improve public access to the board. Another initiative established a mechanism to review all policies and consider changes where appropriate.

An ombudsman office was created to respond effectively to consumer concerns. The board encouraged creation of the position of deputy executive director whose primary function is external affairs, including improved relations with consumers, families, organizations, public officials, community leaders, and the news media. Board members made numerous visits to service delivery sites, where they familiarized themselves with the daily activities of staff, visited clients, and accompanied staff on investigations.

Perhaps the most profound realization from serving on the board is that people must be served one at a time. You have to look beneath the million dollar numbers and the tens of thousands of cases. You have to focus on one person at a time, one family, one neighborhood, one community. This is clear to anyone who observes our caseworkers providing outstanding service to those who suffer abuse and neglect. Caring happens every day, outside the glare of publicity or attention. As a board member, I am proud of the noble work that PRS performs. As a citizen, I am grateful.

Susan Stahl  
*Chair, Texas Board of Protective and Regulatory Services*