



**DPW Testimony for the House Human Services Committee on the Lifesharing Program**  
**February 8, 2012**

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Thank you Chairmen DiGirolamo and Cohen for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Lifesharing Program. Unfortunately, we are unable to have a representative of the Department be there in person, but want to make sure you are aware of some of the work we have done in these areas.

The Office of Developmental Programs has operated a Lifesharing program since 1982. *Lifesharing*, also known as "Family Living" (licensed under 55 Pa Code §6500), officially began in Pennsylvania in 1982 with a family in Berks County who wanted to support their friend in their own home. The program has grown from a small initiative to a statewide program serving over 1600 people annually. Currently, approximately ten percent of all individuals enrolled in residential services are enrolled in the Lifesharing program.

Through the Lifesharing program, individuals with intellectual disabilities are matched with families to live in their home and participate in the community as a family member. The family caregivers are reimbursed through a stipend for providing daily assistance to individuals with intellectual disabilities. These relationships are developed through an extensive matching process, and on-going supports with small caseloads that allow for pro-active interventions to maintain stability for both the individuals and the families they are living with.

This model has proven to be highly successful for a large number of individuals – in some cases the relationships have been maintained for over ten years. Due to a consistent environment, and the caring relationship developed, some individuals with previous challenging behaviors have stabilized their environments and been without incident for years.

While traditional community homes can be challenging for some individuals due to regular shift changes, high staff turn-over and limited choice in roommates, the Lifesharing program offers a community based alternative where individuals can thrive.

The Independent Monitoring 4 Quality Consumer Satisfaction survey has reported this program as having the highest satisfaction level across all living arrangement options, including one's own family. The Office of Developmental Programs Lifesharing model is nationally recognized for its progressive model. Despite

the intensive supports available in this program model, lifesharing is a cost effective alternative that costs an average of one-third the amount of traditional community homes.

Recently, the Department of Public Welfare issued a Request For Information to determine the interest level for the establishment of a shared living program across offices – including the Office of Long Term Living, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services and expansion within the Office of Developmental Programs to include the Bureau of Autism. Over 70 responses were received with strong recommendations to improve and expand this program, as well as personal comments supporting the importance of this program.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments, but should you have any questions or need anything further, please contact the DPW Office of Legislative Affairs (717) 783-2554.