



Letter from Director Maria Montanaro

Hi folks,

I have been concerned about some misunderstandings that came out of my testimony to the House Finance Committee regarding Shared Living Arrangements (SLA). I want to address some concerns you may have and let you know where we, as a department, are coming from.

As you may know, **SLAs are not a new concept**. They are a supportive home environment for individuals once they need to move from the family home. We currently have 267 individuals in SLAs and nearly all of them moved from a group home. As the individuals will attest, they are very happy and living a more independent life. This feedback is consistent with the experiences of the vast majority of SLA residents across the nation, on whom such satisfaction has been well documented. **SLAs are run by our Developmental Disabilities (DD) providers, who have numerous quality standards** which must be met. **Our department both regulates and licenses the SLA programs**. The comprehensive matching between the individual and the SLA is extensive and is done by the provider and can include family members, friends, advocates, and our social case workers.

Our incident reporting shows that **we have less adverse incidents in SLAs than in group homes**. SLA providers meet numerous safety standards which BHDDH oversees and enforces, including inspections of the home environment, fire safety, health care, and behavior management.

Matching a client to a SLA home is an extensive process, conducted by the DD provider and overseen by our department. The requirements include extensive personal interviews, character references, BCI/NCIC check on each adult household member, DMV license status, home inspection report, personal preferences, cultural and religious values, compatibility with animals and children, and smoking preference.

All SLAs must participate in training on the roles and responsibilities of the shared living arrangement contractor, Human Rights of Adults with Developmental Disabilities. Additionally, there is mandatory training regarding the reporting of abuse, community integration, annual Individual Service Plan process, access to medical and psychiatric supports, self determination, CPR and first aid, individualized specific person centered planning, confidentiality, and a training on the neglect and mistreatment of adults with developmental disabilities to both the department and all appropriate law enforcement agencies.

With regards to our plans to increase the use of SLAs in RI, please know:

- The move to SLAs for clients currently residing in a group home is **voluntary**
- Many of the same providers who run RI's group homes **simultaneously oversee SLA's**
- **Day services will continue** to clients who reside in a SLA
- The DD providers we have spoken with are **in support of this plan**
- **SLA's are NOT foster homes**, nor do they replace a family. They are a supportive home environment for individuals once they need to move from the family home.



There was a time when the professional community believed that nothing short of an institution would be a safe and effective residential setting for adults with developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, even though this notion has been discredited, many states still use institutions. RI closed its institution, the Ladd School, and replaced it almost exclusively with group homes, which offered homes in a community-based setting. While that was the state-of-the-art practice 35 years ago, **group homes are no longer the most integrated place an individual can live safely and successfully**. SLAs are more integrated and stable, providing interaction in the home along with friends and neighbors.

People have said that our department is "balancing our budget on the backs of the most vulnerable in our society." Nothing could be further from the truth. **I take my responsibility as a steward of those living with a disability very seriously and that responsibility is at the core of everything we work to achieve at BHDDH**. We are trying to better use our limited resources by promoting this best practice model in residential care. **There will always be group home placements for individuals for whom other types of residential settings are not appropriate**.

My hope is that if we do the right thing by providing **the right service, in the right setting and at the right time**, we will be able to **invest in services that are in short supply**; services such as integrated employment, transitional assistance and integrated day programs, which support SLA living. By making the proposed changes, I hope that we can sustain better service to our clients instead of making cuts that would devastate the current system and prevent us from progressing in our commitment to support individuals in order to live their lives with fuller integration in our society.

I hope this information helps...Sincerely, *Maria*