

Sharon Lofton Testimony for Senate Bill 238

Chair Gelser and members of the committee, my name is Sharon Lofton and I am a Direct Support Professional. I am employed by PCL, Partnerships in Community Living, and have been for 8 yrs.

When I began this career 8 years ago, I didn't know how I would like it. It has proven to be a very satisfying career because of the difference you can make with the quality of life for the ones you support.

I have considerable experience in the healthcare field as a CNA, certified nurse aid, and I have raised my family. Both of these experiences have been valuable and applicable to my role as a DSP. (I researched the wage at the former care facility that I worked and the CNA wage is \$14.74.

From my perspective, a DSP has a lot of responsibility. A DSP performs tasks that are like a CNA, MA, (medical Assistant), counselor, (helping people work through difficult times of their lives), family, and friend all rolled into one job description. There IS much responsibility but not compensation.

I have observed a balance between wage and longevity. DSP's wage of today doesn't encourage longevity. There is a high turnover because employees, not being compensated fairly for their work, are looking for better paying jobs. Thus low retention and this in turn drastically affects the ones supported. People supported that have staff that remain for long periods of time, seem to thrive and are secure. Likewise, the inverse is true as well. High turnover of staff causes a rise in challenging behaviors and ultimately feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and the lack of trusting relationships.

To further illustrate the emotional impact, one analogy helps to clarify it. In regards to childcare and the caregiver relationship, can you imagine the impact of changing caregivers every other month? There is not enough time to build trust and barely enough time for the child to feel comfortable.

Last year I was given the wonderful opportunity of training by my employer. PCL made it possible for me to study, work, and achieve my DSP level 1 credential through the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals. This organization is from the east coast and last year was the first group of 10-12 DSPs that achieved this credentialing on the west coast. Our study was accomplished through online classes, approx 60 hours, and this is a valuable tool for the DSP because study can be integrated into the work schedule.

I wholeheartedly support and encourage you to support SB238 not only for the advancement of the DSP but the trickle down effect of increasing the quality of life for adults supported with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.