



STATE OF ALASKA
THE OFFICE OF THE LONG-TERM CARE
OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT



FFY 2023

Message from the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Dear Friends –

What does the resident want? This question drives our mission to protect the rights, health, safety, and welfare of residents living in long term care (LTC) facilities. Our complaint process generally begins with the resident and ends with the resident. All residents in long term care desire to have good care and supports as well as an enhanced quality of life where residents' personal well-being, happiness, and preferences are considered and residents are generally satisfied with how and where they are living.

Our amazing staff and volunteers work to empower residents to advocate for themselves, educate residents and their family members about their rights, investigate complaints on behalf of seniors in LTC settings and report regulatory violations. We bring residents and facility staff together to solve problems without the fear of retaliation or the fear of an eviction for the resident.

Our work continues to make a genuine difference for residents in long-term care facilities. During this past year, we accomplished most of our priorities which were to increase facility visits, increase quarterly visits to assisted living homes, increase attendance at resident council meetings, increase community education and outreach, advocate for systems change and employ effective recruitment strategies to recruit new volunteers.

As indicated by the data, the number of seniors in Alaska continue to increase and thus the LTC Ombudsman program will continue to promote quality supports and cares within the continuum of care system for seniors. With the increasing needs of seniors, we have also observed an increase in the development of larger assisted living facilities across Alaska. Our goal is to ensure that every assisted living home that serves seniors receives a visit once or twice a year and every skilled nursing facility receives a quarterly visit from a LTC Ombudsman. Services of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program are free and available to residents, residents' representatives, families, facility staff and the general public.

The LTC Ombudsman program will continue to strive to leverage our resources through our volunteer program. After experiencing a major decline in the number of volunteers during the pandemic, we are gradually rebuilding our volunteer program and working to identify more effective recruitment strategies. This year brought us five new compassionate and committed volunteers.

It is indeed an honor to represent residents and their families, our staff, and volunteers of the LTC Ombudsman Program – and we are looking forward to strengthening our advocacy in the years to come.

Thank you for your support and we hope that you will continue to stand with us as we advocate together to enhance the lives of seniors across Alaska.

Please visit our website at www.akoltco.org and follow us on social media to see all the updates from the LTC Ombudsman's Office.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Wheeler, Ph.D.
State Long-Term Care Ombudsman
State of Alaska, The Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

The Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO)

Core Values



Respect



Resident Focused



Resolution Focused



Advocacy



Professionalism

Mission Statement

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman program is mandated by the Older American's Act and state law to provide resident centered advocacy designed to protect the rights, health, safety and welfare of Alaskan's living in a skilled nursing facilities and assisted living homes.

WHAT WE DO	WHEN TO CALL A LTC OMBUDSMAN
 Information and referrals	 To report problems or concerns
 Educate about resident rights and empower with self advocacy	 If an older Alaskan is being discharged from a facility against their wishes
 Investigate complaints	 To get information about long term care
 Visit residents ages 60 and over	 To ask for help addressing systemic issues
 Advocate to Improve quality of life	 To volunteer as a LTC Ombudsman

Staff



Stephanie Wheeler
State LTC Ombudsman

Systems Issues
Public Education
Program Administration



Alvin Ancheta
Deputy LTC Ombudsman

Volunteer Management
Partner Agency Coordinator
Case Consultation
Facility Coverage in:
Palmer



Kerri Tanner
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:
Southeast
Anchorage



Leana Christy
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:
Kenai Peninsula & Kodiak
Anchorage



Christina Saeteurn
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:
North and West Interior, Valdez
Anchorage



Stephanie Welsh
LTC Specialist

Intake Processing & Referrals
Tech/Admin Support
Volunteer Program Assistance



Julia Greenfield
Assistant LTC Ombudsman
(Temporary Position)

Facility Coverage in:
Eagle River, Chugiak, Wasilla
Anchorage

OLTCO Highlights of Program Activities (FFY 2023)

In 2023, the Alaska Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) program continued to educate, empower, and advocate for seniors in licensed long-term care settings.

Briefly, the LTCO team completed over 800 in-person facility visits (including 75 quarterly visits to facilities), investigated and addressed over 300 complaints, resolved 80% of complaints to the satisfaction of the resident, attended more than 25 resident council meetings and recruited new volunteers.

The Office is deeply appreciative about the integral role of Long-Term Care Ombudsman staff and volunteers coupled with the collaboration of community partners who work to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of seniors in Alaska.



355

Complaints investigated



827

Facility Visits



265

Interagency Coordination



30

Community Education

↑ 100%

increase in resident council meetings attended from 14 to 28 FFY 2023.



444

Information and Assistance activities provided to facility staff



1244

Information and Assistance activities provided to the public

Top Five (5) Complaints

Received by OLTCO in FFY 2023

Assisted Living Home

Skilled Nursing Facility

Autonomy, Choice and Rights	1	Quality of Care
Quality of Care	2	Admission, Discharge and Evictions
Admission, Discharge, and Eviction	3	Systems and Others
Systems and Others	4	Autonomy, Choice and Rights
Financial; Property - Exploitation	5	Financial; Property - Exploitation

1


Autonomy, Choice, & Rights



This includes the adult be treated with dignity and respect and advocate for their rights

2

Systems and Others



Concerns that a resident's family or legal rep are interfering with their rights, self determination

3

Quality of Care



Quality issues include response times or failure to respond, hygiene care not provided, medication errors, and failure to follow the care plan

4

Admission, Discharge & Eviction



When there is a facility initiated discharge or the resident is not given sufficient notice. May include room changes

5


Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation



Failure to protect a resident from harm or failure to meet the needs of the resident results in a risk to health & safety

6

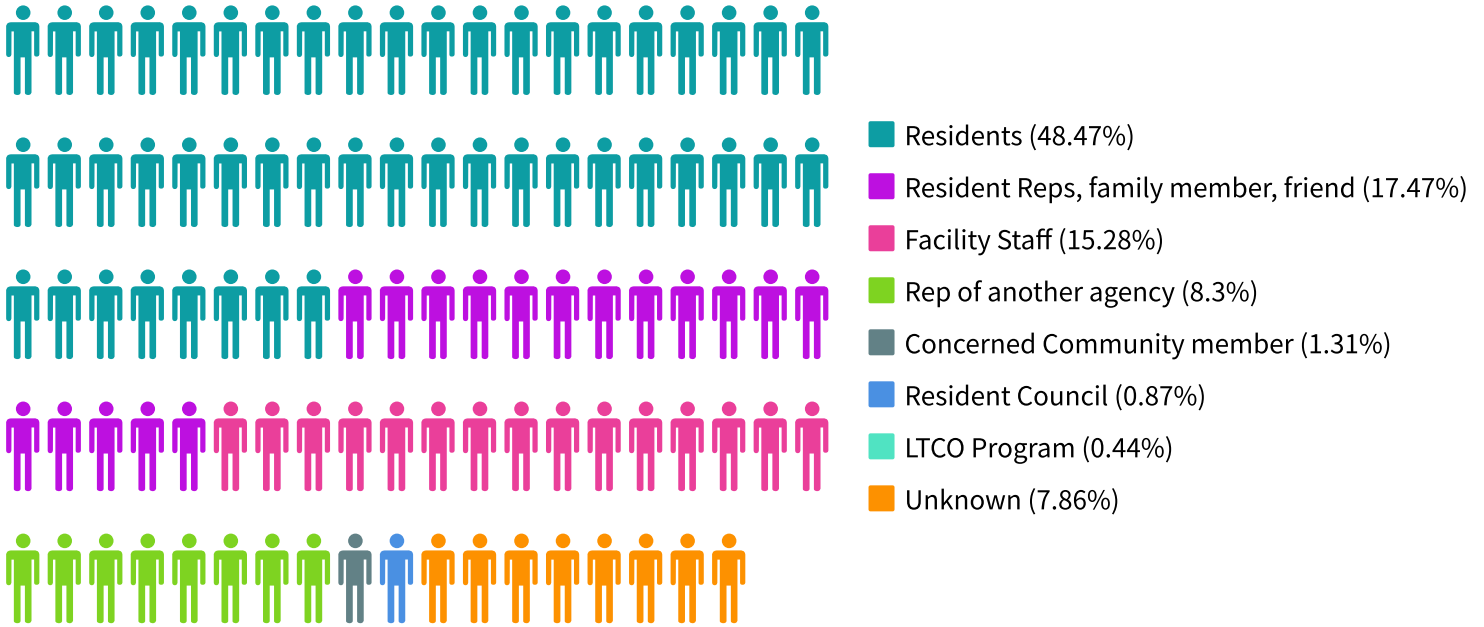
Financial, Property



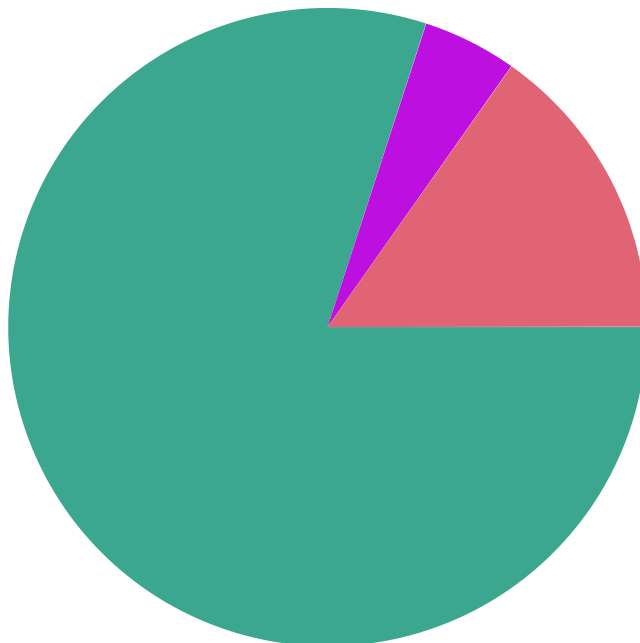
Incorrect billing for services or raising rates without notice.
Loss/mismanagement by the facility of a resident's money or property

Who Submitted Complaints in 2023?

A complaint is defined as a concern brought forward to the Ombudsman's Office



OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS (2023)



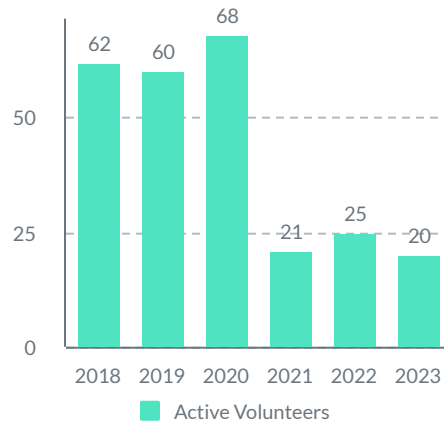
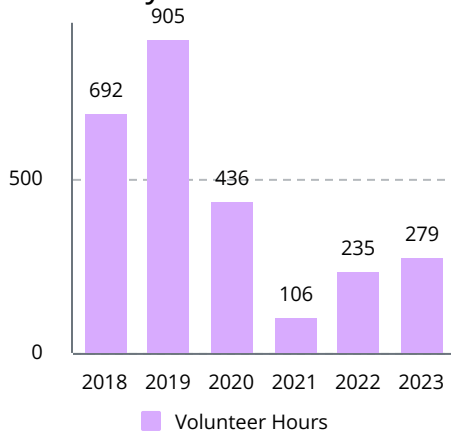
- Fully or partially resolved to the satisfaction of the resident, resident rep, or complainant (80%)
- Withdrawn or no action needed (4.79%)
- Not resolved to the satisfaction of the resident, resident rep, or complainant (15.21%)

The Heart of Our Mission: Celebrating Our Dedicated Volunteers

"Nothing liberates our greatness like the desire to help, the desire to serve" -Marianne Williamson

This year, the OLTCO program highlighted the contributions of many LTC Ombudsmen volunteers on social media. It is an honor to have volunteers walk with us daily to make a difference in the lives of seniors in long term care facilities. We have such respect for our volunteers. Our volunteers serve across Alaska including the communities of Valdez, Kenai/Peninsula, Homer, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Anchorage to advocate for seniors. In 2023, 20 amazing volunteers donated nearly 300 volunteer hours to make friendly visits to residents in *Skilled Nursing Facilities* and *Assisted Living Homes*. Volunteers helped residents to problem solve concerns and to learn about their rights. Volunteers encouraged self-advocacy and provided a listening ear to seniors who shared their amazing life stories. Volunteers amplify the voices of seniors in long-term care settings.

It is often said that volunteering is a work of the heart. We can attest to this as our volunteers' commitment to seniors reflect their own joy, compassion, and generosity. While our volunteers help to leverage the resources of the LTC Ombudsman's Office, they are the true meaning of making purposeful impact to seniors in our communities. They are sharing their time and talent to increase the social interactions of seniors and to be a trusted friend to seniors in our long-term care facilities. Thank you *Volunteers* for all that you do!



A Huge Thank You to our OLTCO Volunteers

- Margaret Varlamos
- Janet Long
- Rebecca Gundunas
- Joyce Courtney
- Cortney Bramwell
- Malan Paquette
- Dr. Deborah
- Jeanne Berger
- Laurie Ann Lavigne
- Mimzy Wellburg
- Mikki Easley
- Victoria Winne
- Malia Hayward
- Carl Gressel
- Terri Crawford
- Joe Morgan
- Jan Stiers
- Taylor Rukes
- Marcia Watson
- Aviva Borenstein

For 2023



LTC Volunteer, Rebecca Gundunas, and LTC Deputy Ombudsman, Alvin Ancheta

LTC Volunteer, Janet Long, and LTC Deputy Ombudsman, Alvin Ancheta

[Complete an application online
www.akoltco.org](http://www.akoltco.org)

LTC Ombudsman Volunteers Solve Problems: A Case Example

An Ombudsman volunteer conducting an unannounced routine visit to an assisted living home witnessed a resident having challenges in the facility. The volunteer also spoke with the resident's family who expressed concerns about the resident's quality of care. The family member indicated that the resident's health had declined during his time in the facility and attributed the decline to the lack of consistent care and monitoring.

The Ombudsman volunteer consulted with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program staff for guidance to address the concerns. The Ombudsman also communicated with facility management, at which time the staff at the facility increased the monitoring of the resident. The family also decided to hire a private caregiver to provide for the resident's increasing needs. After thoughtful consideration and meeting with the care team, it was discussed that the resident would benefit from moving to a special unit at another assisted living home. Care team members concurred that this would be a good fit given the resident's current condition.

The resident transferred to the new assisted living home where he received care conducive to the resident's emerging needs. The Ombudsman volunteer visited the resident in the new facility where it was confirmed that the resident was settling in nicely. The Ombudsman volunteer in collaboration with Ombudsman staff provided the family and resident with the advocacy support to address concerns at the first facility including level of care, monitoring and medication management. The Ombudsman volunteer provided further support to the resident and family when the decision was made to move the resident to a facility that could meet the resident's increasing needs. The advocacy efforts of the Ombudsman volunteer helped to identify and address concerns, talk with facility staff and care team about the increasing needs of the resident, coordinate with the family on possible solutions and options and support the decision to move the resident to a facility that could meet the resident's intense needs.

The resident is currently doing better in the new facility and the family was appreciative of the efforts of the Ombudsman volunteer in collaboration with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program staff.



LTC Volunteer, Joyce Courtney, speaking about her volunteer experience for Volunteer Appreciation week

Recruitment Plan for Volunteers FFY 2024

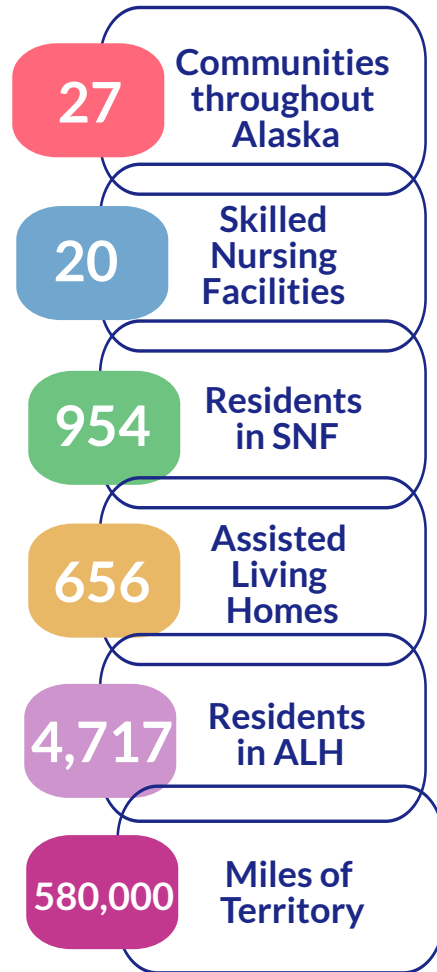
Goal: Recruit 10 New Volunteers

- Increase volunteer recruitment ads through social media, newspapers, and other venues
- Attend community and health fairs
- Make presentations at community events

Goal: Maintain Current Volunteers through Engagement, Support and Training

- New volunteers receive 36 hours of initial training
- Volunteers are mentored by a staff LTC Ombudsman
- Volunteers receive ongoing monthly training and support
- Continue volunteer spotlight on social media
- Honor and appreciate the compassionate work of volunteers

Long-Term Care Ombudsmen in the Community



Testimonials:

"Thank you, Julia. As usual, you are a wealth of information. I will pass this information on to the family. I appreciate you very much."

"If Leana is on it, it will be handled! She is a force!"

"Alvin, I want to thank you and your staff from the Alaska Long Term Care Ombudsman Program for all the help you provided my family with our concerns about an abrupt increase to my mom's monthly rent at a local Long Term Care Facility. It felt like my mom had no rights, and we had no choice but to accept the unfair rent increase without question. I'm so happy I reached out to your Program for help! Your advocacy included in-depth discussions with me about my mom's concerns and issues, in person visits to discuss our concerns with staff, and participation at our meeting with the staff about my mom's proposed rent increase due to her increased level of care.

Thanks to your advocacy, the meeting resulted in a positive outcome for us! After our meeting, the facility staff concluded it was not fair to arbitrarily increase my mom's level of care from a 4 to a 5 with a \$1100 monthly rent increase without prior consultation with us. Upon reevaluation, after the meeting with you, my mom's rent was reduced by \$500 per month. Without the advocacy from your office, I am certain that the facility would not have considered reducing their proposed monthly rent increase. I highly recommend contacting your office to anyone who needs help in resolving issues or concerns with long term care facilities!"

Case Example of Advocacy for a Resident in an Assisted Living Home

An Alaskan Native resident was living on her own in a rural village. She utilized a wheelchair for mobility and received some assistance from local family members when she needed to enter or exit her house, but otherwise was independent. The resident developed heart health issues and came to Anchorage for treatment and further care in 2022. She was admitted to an assisted living home after discharge from the hospital in October of 2022.

The OLTCO conducted a visit of the assisted living home and met the resident in the summer of 2023. The resident said it was fine living at the assisted living home and the staff were very nice. However, she missed her home in the village and the quietness of her prior lifestyle. She had family in the Anchorage area but was unable to visit them due to lack of wheelchair accessibility at the family residences. The resident explained her health had improved greatly and she was ready to return to her village. She was not sure of how to do this or if she had permission to leave, and so requested assistance from the OLTCO. The resident had explained she needed approval from her heart doctor to travel, travel escort to return home, and an update on the ramp that was being built at her private residence.

The OLTCO reviewed the resident's documentation available on-site and discussed the situation with the assisted living home administrator. It was confirmed the resident's heart health was improved and stable. The resident said the ramp construction was being overseen by her brother, but she would like to oversee completion herself. LTCO and the resident jointly contacted the Bering Strait Regional Housing Authority and were able to confirm her housing assistance was current and the ramp was scheduled for construction. The resident confirmed she would be able to access her residence with family assistance until the ramp was completed. LTCO and the resident then contacted Norton Sound Hospital and spoke with the travel coordinator who confirmed the resident was approved for return travel to her village, but additional information was needed to arrange for an escort to accompany the resident during travel. The resident contacted her sister who agreed to act as escort, and details were provided to her sister and the travel coordinator. Travel was arranged quickly.

The resident said she would need an additional suitcase or box, transport for final errands before her move, and assistance in packing her belongings. The OLTCO confirmed with staff on-site they would be able to assist with packing. The OLTCO contacted the assisted living home administrator who confirmed she would provide transportation for any errands. The OLTCO returned to the assisted living home later in the week with an extra box and observed the resident and staff were in the process of packing her belongings. The resident showed the OLTCO that the administrator had provided her with an additional suitcase, and she was able to pack all her remaining belongings. The resident was happy to be returning to her home in her village. The resident left the following day to return to her private home.

Once initiated, the process of arranging travel and assistance for the resident to return to her private home was relatively quick, but the resident was not sure where to start. If the OLTCO had not conducted a routine visit and asked the resident further questions, her situation would have gone overlooked and she may have remained in the assisted living home for an extended time. The OLTCO advocated for further information to confirm the move was possible and assisted the resident in contacting relevant parties to arrange her move. The OLTCO advocated for assistance from the assisted living home to help the resident pack and complete errands to prepare for her move. The resident received support in making her own choices in her living situation, ultimately returning to a less-restrictive living environment in her home village.

Case Example of Advocacy for a Resident in a Skilled Nursing Facility

A resident in a skilled nursing facility (SNF) received a 30-day discharge notice when it was determined that the resident's medical condition no longer necessitated the level of care provided. Following standard practice, the OLTCO was provided a copy of this notice. The OLTCO reviewed the notice and contacted the resident for further discussion.

The resident expressed concerns about their readiness for such a significant change. Additionally, the resident mentioned that the initially planned safe discharge location was no longer a viable housing option for them. The resident revealed that the SNF was also aware of the circumstances. The facility had provided the resident with a printed list of assisted living homes (ALH) to consider and contact for potential new residency.

The OLTCO then reached out to the contact person listed as the resident's safe discharge location. The contact person explained that unforeseen circumstances prevented them from accommodating the resident. This unfortunately presented an obstacle in the resident's path to a smooth transition.

With this crucial information in hand, the OLTCO swiftly made contact with the SNF to share the developments concerning the safe discharge location's unavailability. Accountability was paramount in ensuring a just outcome for the resident. The OLTCO reminded the facility of its responsibility to locate a suitable safe discharge location to uphold the validity of the 30-day discharge notice.

Acknowledging their responsibility and the challenge at hand, the SNF agreed to rescind the 30-day discharge notice. They recognized that, without a suitable safe discharge location, the notice was rendered invalid. Although the resident still faced uncertainty while their immediate housing needs were temporarily met, the decision afforded the resident some much-needed breathing room during a difficult period of transition. In the interim, the facility proactively secured a Medicaid extension for the resident while they diligently worked to identify an appropriate safe discharge location.

After a period of careful consideration and search, the resident fortunately discovered new residency that not only addressed their housing needs, but also provided a supportive environment that aligned with their well-being and preferences. The resident's journey through this challenging ordeal ultimately led to a more favorable outcome, demonstrating the importance of responsive facilities in ensuring the welfare of individuals in their care.

Assisted Living Home (ALH) Visits:

- In FFY 2023, the LTCO staff visited all 287 ALHs across the State of Alaska that serve seniors.
- Most of these homes had more than one visit during the year.
- 70 of these ALHs received a visit each quarter during FFY 2023.
- Total number of visits for all ALHs in FFY 2023 was 743.

Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) Visits:

- In FFY 2023, the LTCO staff visited all 20 skilled nursing facilities.
- 18 SNFs received more than one visit.
- 5 of the SNFs received quarterly visits.
- Total number of visits for SNFs in FFY 2023 was 84.

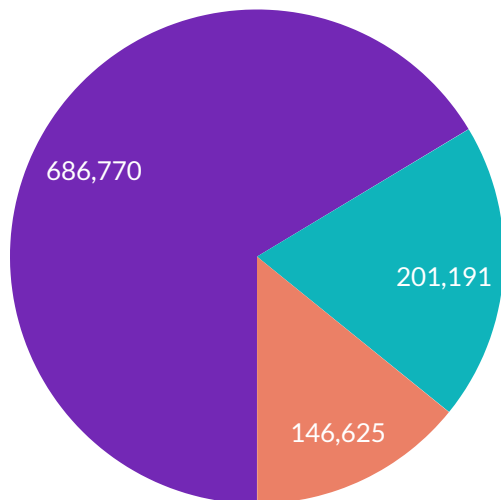
Strengthening our Work in 2024

Priorities for the FFY 2024

- 1 Strengthen system advocacy efforts
- 2 Continue to advocate for the rights of seniors in LTC facilities
- 3 Continue to make unannounced visits to LTC facilities
- 4 Increase community education and outreach activities
- 5 Continue to engage with resident councils
- 6 Increase the number of volunteer LTC Ombudsman by 10
- 7 Continue to strengthen relationships with community partners



How Are Ombudsman Services Funded?



State Funds (66.38%) Federal OAA Title III (19.45%)
Federal OAA Title VII (14.17%)

The Office of the Long Term care Ombudsman is housed within the Department of Revenue - Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Funding comes from the State of Alaska, the Older Americans Acts, Title VII and Title III.

Systems Advocacy Efforts

1 Issue: Language Access - For a number of seniors residing in long term care, English is not their primary language.

Solution: As Alaska's senior population continues to increase, so will the diversity of seniors in Alaska increase. To better serve residents in Long Term Care, The OLTCO has made a considerable effort to provide resources such as residents rights in the resident's primary language to help residents better understand their rights. Thanks to the National Consumer Voice, Residents Rights information is provided in Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Tagalog, German, Filipino, Korean, Polish, and French. The Office will be focusing our efforts in FFY 2024 to have resident's rights translated in Alaska Native languages.

2 Issue: Discharge, Transfers and Evictions has been in the top five complaint category for the last five years for skilled nursing Facilities. Residents of skilled nursing facilities are entitled to safe discharges.

Solution: The OLTCO created a training for administrators and their staff highlighting residents rights and safe discharges, the regulations relating to facility initiated discharges, the importance of discharge planning, the six main reasons for discharges, and the importance of timely notices.

3 Legislative Advocacy in 2023 - In Support of HB 58/SB 57

Often while visiting seniors in assisted living homes, the Ombudsmen frequently hear from elders that while they love their current living environment, they wished that they could find a home close to the community where they have family or a home close to where they were born and raised.

The State of Alaska Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program supported House Bill 58/Senate Bill 57 which established a new residential setting category "Adult Care Home". The Adult Home Care Bill was introduced and approved by the legislature in 2023, and signed into law by the Governor in July 2023. With the passage of this bill, a home can provide care for up to two individuals. The bill authorizes the Department of Health to develop the Adult Home Care License and to establish rules and regulations (as well as encourages a streamlined application process). This bill will help address the shortage of services and settings for seniors who require help with the activities of daily living and other assistance to live more independently and will also help seniors to remain in a community setting when they might otherwise need to leave their communities to access an assisted living home in a different community. HB 58/SB 57 would implement standards for operating adult care homes, create standards for long term care and support for seniors and allow for payment to the care provider. The bill would specifically allow for family members to care for seniors and receive financial support for their service. The bill would allow for a continuity of care for seniors and provide the necessary support for the family that is providing the care, with decreased administrative burden than is normally required for an adult assisted living home. The State LTCO provided both written and oral testimony. This bill was passed in both the House and Senate.

Protecting Residents Rights

Residents in long-term care facilities have certain protections under state and federal law that include:



A resident shall be treated with respect.



A resident may not be discriminated against because of race, color, religious creed, disability, handicap, ancestry, sexual orientation, national origin, age, or sex.



A resident has a right to self-determination and choice.



A resident may not be neglected, intimidated, physically or verbally abused, mistreated, subjected to corporal punishment, or disciplined in any way.



A resident shall have access to a telephone in the home to make calls in privacy.



A resident has the right to receive and send mail.



A resident has the right to communicate privately with and access the long term care Ombudsman.



A resident has the right to practice the religion or faith of their choice, or not to practice any religion or faith.



A resident has a right to manage their own financial affairs.



A resident has the right to decide how they will be cared for and to receive all the services agreed upon in their plan of care or service plan.



A resident has the right to access, review and request corrections to the resident's record.



A resident has the right to freely associate, organize and communicate with others privately.



A resident shall be free from restraints.



A resident has the right to privacy of self and possessions.



A resident has the right to visit with family and friends.



A resident has the right to choose his own health care providers.



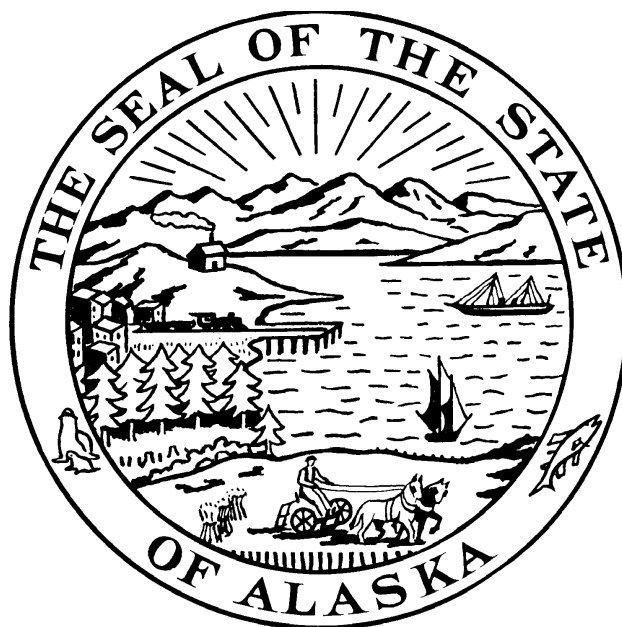
A resident has the right to access the internet.



A resident has the right to participate in activities inside and outside of the facility.



A resident has the right to file complaints with any individual or agency and recommend changes in policies, home rules and services of the home without intimidation, retaliation, or threat of discharge.



STATE OF ALASKA OFFICE THE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

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