

# Annual Report: 2023

## ADVOCATES AT THE READY

This year, long-term care ombudsmen made over 14,000 visits to long-term care homes across Illinois. Ombudsmen handled over 7,875 complaints, working to resolve concerns to the satisfaction of the residents. Turnover amongst paid staff and decreasing volunteers primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic led the State Ombudsman to advocate for increased funding targeting recruitment and retention of paid ombudsmen. In addition, multiple trainings were held at the end of the year to bring on some new volunteers.

## RESETTING THE STAGE FOR PERSON-DIRECTED LIVING

As ombudsmen interacted with residents, families, and staff members, it became clear that one of the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was a shift away from person-centered care. Knowing that it seemed like we were heading in the wrong direction, the Office of the State Ombudsman engaged in conversations with regional and local ombudsmen, long-term care providers, and others in the aging network to begin discussions about shifting the momentum back to resident-directed, person-centered decision making for residents living in long-term care homes.

These conversations led into the development of the current statewide initiative: “to encourage long-term care communities to embrace person-directed living to promote systemic changes in long-term care culture”.

The starting point for this initiative was to provide training on the [Artifacts of Culture Change 2.0 tool](#). Not only did the Office of the State Ombudsman host a training with key stakeholders from across the state, but six additional regional trainings have been held thus far reaching local ombudsmen, state surveyors, and staff from long-term care homes.

## ILLINOIS LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

The Illinois Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program advocates for individuals residing in long-term care homes such as nursing homes and assisted living as well as several other types of licensed homes.

Ombudsmen work to investigate and resolve issues to the satisfaction of the resident.

As resident-directed advocates, ombudsmen strive to empower residents to speak up when problems arise and work to ensure the highest practicable level of quality of care and quality

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## PODCASTS: CATCHING THE LISTENING BUG

The State Ombudsman started a new podcast called, [“What’s Your Story: Conversations with Long-Term Care Residents and Illinois Aging Network Stakeholders.”](#) State Ombudsman Richards had the opportunity and privilege to interview five current and former residents of long-term care homes and talk about their experiences before moving into long-term care as well as what life has been like while living there.

The goal of this podcast series was to provide a platform for the voices of long-term care residents to be heard. If you’d like to listen to the podcasts, you

can find them all on Spotify.

Conducting these interviews reminded State Ombudsman Richards of the importance of amplifying the voices of residents. Providing this platform proved to be a very rewarding experience for both those participating in the interviews as well as for the listeners.

Not only did the State Ombudsman start her own podcast, but she also participated in the Pursuing Quality Long-Term Care podcast with the National Consumer Voice in preparation for Resident Rights Month. You can find that podcast [here](#).

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*“Because when people speak their mind, they become confident and empowered. And when they’re empowered, their quality of life improves.” - Ronnie, Voices Speak Out Against Retaliation*

Connecticut Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feoQjIW3\\_bc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feoQjIW3_bc)

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## LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

The Office of the State Ombudsman worked on two main bills during the legislative session and was pleased to see both signed into law.

- HB2911 amended the Illinois Act on the Aging to provide clarity that ombudsmen are allowed not only to inspect, but to also receive copies of resident records when given consent to do so.
- HB2858 made changes to the Adult Protective Services Act. It modified reporting requirements of the State Ombudsman as well as all representatives of the Ombudsman Program to ensure compliance with federal consent requirements when reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Prior to the passing of this bill, the language conflicted with federal regulations. This bill amended the Act to provide an exception to mandated reporting when prohibited by federal regulation. This change cleared up confusion often faced by ombudsmen allowing them to be confident in determining which situations require them to act as a mandated reporter and under which circumstances such reporting is prohibited.

An additional legislative victory was to see passage of a bill that included an increase in the personal needs allowance which is set to take place in 2024. The personal needs allowance is the amount of personal income a nursing home resident whose care is being funded by Medicaid is allowed to keep. This amount has been set at \$30 since 1988. A community ombudsman working at East Central IL Area Agency on Aging worked tirelessly to advocate for this increase. His efforts in working with his local legislator not only benefit residents in his jurisdiction but also positively affect residents statewide.



## 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

- 68 Full-time Ombudsmen
- 19 Part-time Ombudsmen
- 37 Volunteer Ombudsmen
- 22 Resident and Family Support Council meetings hosted on Zoom by the Office of the State Ombudsman
- 265 Facebook followers on the State Ombudsman Facebook page
- 1,473 Resident Council meetings attended by ombudsmen
- 175 Trainings on resident rights provided to long-term care staff
- 37,798 Questions about long-term care answered by ombudsmen
- 58 Videos on the [IL LTC Ombudsman YouTube Channel](#)
- 386 Presentations for community members at senior centers,

## MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS

- Response to requests for assistance (call lights not being answered in a timely manner)
- Discharge or eviction (improper notice, no notice given, or hospital dumping)
- Personal property (loss or mismanagement of funds or belongings)
- Medications (wrong medication, not given on time, etc.)
- Dignity and respect (resident treated with rudeness or indifference)

### STATE OMBUDSMAN PRESENTATION AT THE NATIONAL CONSUMER VOICE CONFERENCE

State Ombudsman Richards was invited to join in a panel discussion titled, “Empowering Long-Term Care Ombudsmen: Insights on Program Foundations and Advocacy Strategies.” She was joined by Edwin Walker, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aging at the Administration on Aging, Beverley Laubert, National Ombudsman Program Coordinator at the Administration on Community Living, and Paula Basta, outgoing Director of the Illinois Department on Aging.

This session was specifically designed to be a dialogue format allowing State Ombudsman Richards to highlight the synergistic relationship between the Office of the State Ombudsman and the State Unit on Aging. Attendees got a glimpse of how the State Unit on Aging supports the Ombudsman Program while still allowing it to be a separate, identifiable entity run by the State Ombudsman.

State Ombudsman Richards was greatly honored for the opportunity to present with such well-respected individuals and shine a light on the good work being done in Illinois.

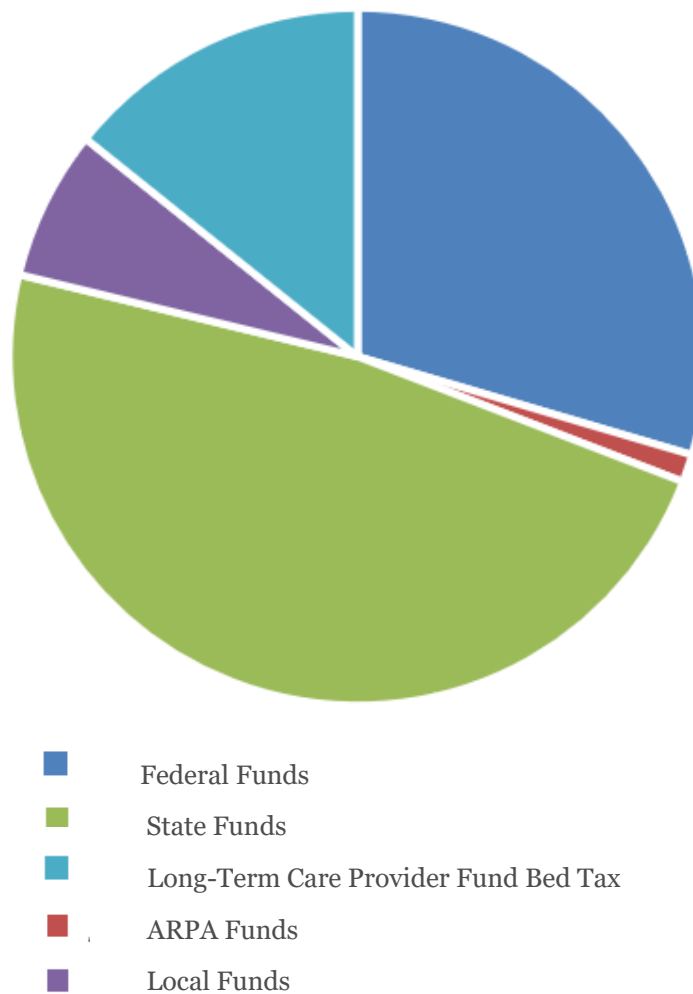
## ARPA FUNDING

The Ombudsman Program received two sets of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act that overlapped in FY2023. The first funding stream was used at the local level by Ombudsman Programs to bolster staffing, pay for overtime, cover the cost of technology purchases, pay for training fees, and provide for the purchase of outreach materials.

The second funding stream was earmarked to increase visibility in Residential Care Communities. At the local level, this funding was used to cover travel cost associated with increased visits to Residential Care Communities. It was also used to cover some overtime expenses as well as to cover the cost of training.

At the state level, the Office earmarked part of the second round of ARPA funding to cover the cost of the statewide trainings on the Artifacts of Culture Change 2.0 Tool.

## FUNDING BY SOURCE



## NEW DATA SYSTEM

This year brought a major change to the data collection system used by ombudsmen across the state. The data collection system is computer software used by ombudsmen to enter cases as well as to serve as the repository of activities for report tracking. Ombudsmen have been entering all of their documentation into the previous system since 2017.

An RFP was issued and RTZ was successful in securing the contract. Many hours were spent working to prepare the new system for the migration of the data from the previous system.

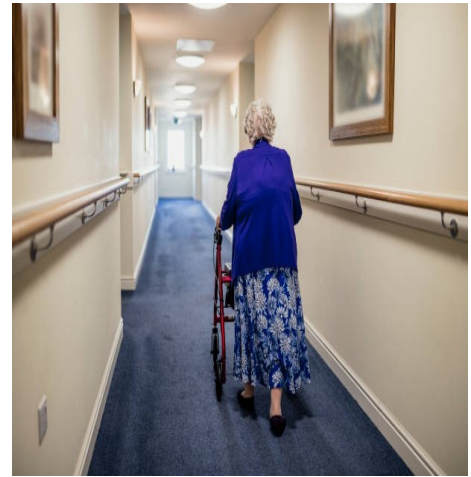
While change can be difficult, ombudsmen stepped up to the challenge and have embraced learning the nuances that come with new software.



## BARRIERS

A residual and necessary effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was a renewed emphasis on infection control. While this focus was needed, it came at the expense of recognizing person-centered care approaches in many long-term care homes. Rather than focus on an individual's needs and preferences, the focus was on their needs and proper infection control, pushing aside the individual's preferences.

As mentioned in the FY2022 Annual Report, a lack of notification to the Ombudsman Program by specialized mental health rehabilitation facilities (SMHRFs) when issuing involuntary discharges has led to missed opportunities for ombudsmen to provide assistance and ensure residents are informed of their appeal rights.



## RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

As discussed in the page 1 article, *“Resetting the State for Person-Directed Care,”* the Office recommends continued collaborative efforts from the nursing home industry, the Illinois Department of Public Health, other state agencies as well as other aging network partners to continue to push to make person-directed living a priority in all long-term care homes across the state of Illinois. Together, we believe this group can bring renewed life to the idea of culture change in long-term care homes and push the focus back to allowing resident preferences to be a priority consideration not an afterthought.

During FY2023, Public Act 103-0320 was signed into law which modified the Nursing Home Care Act to require notification of the Ombudsman Program when an involuntary discharge notice is issued. The SMHRF regulations state the process for the involuntary transfer or discharge facility shall follow the Nursing Home Care Act discharge provisions. Thus, P.A. 103-0320 makes it a requirement for SMHRFs to notify the Ombudsman Program when issuing an involuntary discharge. This is a big step towards helping to protect the rights of these individuals, however, greater enforcement is needed when homes refuse to issue the notice of involuntary discharge or dump a resident in a hospital and refuse to readmit the resident. Further reform is needed to prevent hospital dumping.



## LOOKING AHEAD

As the Ombudsman Program worked to shift the focus back to person-directed living in Illinois, it became clear that there continue to be many Illinoisans who are unfamiliar with the Ombudsman Program.

In 2023, the Office of the State Ombudsman began working with several stakeholders to find ways to rebrand the Ombudsman Program working to increase visibility and increase educational awareness of the Ombudsman Program.

An Ombudsman Program mascot has been developed and is expected to be publicly launched in early 2024.

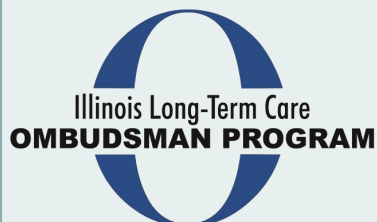


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## HOME CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

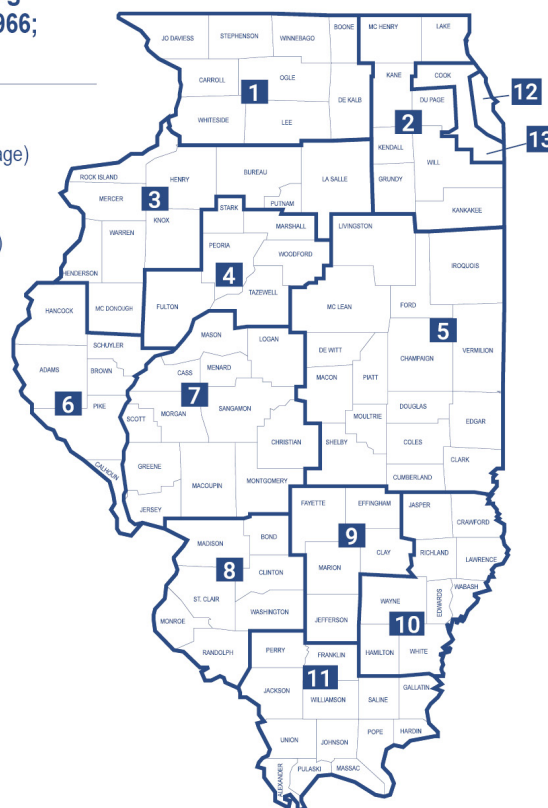
Besides providing advocacy for the 160,00+ participants on Home & Community Based Service Waivers and 90,000+ Medicare Medicaid Alignment Initiative enrollees throughout Illinois, the Home Care Ombudsman Program continues to explore new ways to promote the program's services.

This year, the HCOP partnered with Alternatives in Area 3 (see map below) to host town hall meetings for individuals receiving in-home services and their loved ones. These meetings provided an opportunity to educate, empower, and assist participants. Since the first meeting in January where an overview of the HCOP was provided, several other organizations such as the Illinois Assistive Technology Program have attended to explain the resources they provide for participants. An ombudsman attends every meeting to answer questions and provide assistance. Attendance has progressively improved throughout the year, and the HCOP is looking to start similar learning opportunities in other areas of the state.

To contact the Ombudsman Program in your local area:

**Illinois Department on Aging**  
**Senior HelpLine: 1-800-252-8966;**  
**711 (TRS)**

- Area 1:** 1-800-369-0895  
**Area 2:** 1-800-942-9412 (DuPage)  
1-630-897-4035  
(Kane, Kendall, McHenry)  
1-888-401-8200 (Lake)  
1-815-724-1120  
(Grundy, Kankakee, Will)  
**Area 3:** 1-800-798-0988  
**Area 4:** 1-309-272-2917  
**Area 5:** 1-800-888-4456  
**Area 6:** 1-800-798-0988  
**Area 7:** 1-800-842-8538  
**Area 8:** 1-855-336-4778  
**Area 9:** 1-800-283-4070  
**Area 10:** 1-888-715-6260  
**Area 11:** 1-800-642-7773  
**Area 12:** 1-312-746-7490  
**Area 13:** 1-847-448-8696  
(City of Evanston)  
1-888-401-8200  
(All except Evanston)



For more details visit [ilaging.illinois.gov](http://ilaging.illinois.gov) where you can find the Ombudsman list under Advocacy: Long-Term Care Program. Long-Term Care Ombudsman services available under the Older Americans Act are provided at no charge; however, contributions are gratefully accepted and will help to make services available to more seniors.