

Annual Report: 2024

READY, SET, ADVOCATE!

This year, long-term care ombudsmen made over 14,600 visits to long-term care homes across Illinois. Ombudsmen handled over 7,125 complaints, working to resolve concerns to the satisfaction of the residents. Training mandates led to the loss of some volunteers, however, several new volunteers were trained to join the ranks.

MOVING THE NEEDLE ON PERSON-DIRECTED CARE

In addition to continuing to provide training on the [Artifacts of Culture Change 2.0](#) and discussing person-directed care during routine visits, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman led a change collaborative for long-term care homes to support the homes to engage in a change initiative that supported what residents need, want, and deserve. An advisory group comprised of the QIO, representatives from the IL Dept. of Public Health, and the IL Pioneer Coalition was established to assist in guiding the homes so they were comfortable in taking on their change practice.

As a result of the change collaborative, a 135-bed county nursing home worked to liberalize their medication pass so that they could eventually encourage residents to wake and go to bed when the residents wanted. Within 6-months, the home was able to completely liberalize the times that individuals received their medications instead of residents being on a schedule where the nurses would wake them to take a pill. The home worked closely with their pharmacy to ensure this change could be done safely.



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.

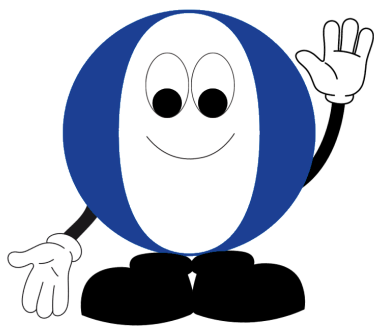
As resident-directed advocates, ombudsmen strive to empower residents to speak up when problems arise and work to ensure the highest practicable level of quality of care and quality of life.

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REBRANDING OF 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.



In FY2024, Ombudsman Program brochures and other publications were reviewed and updated. Some of those materials include the use of the Illinois Ombudsman Program mascot, Buddy. Some of the rebranding work will continue into 2025.

In addition, an Ombudsman Program brochure and publications catalog was developed. The goal of this catalog is to ensure Ombudsmen and other stakeholders have easy access to order Ombudsman Program publications.

LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

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

- HB4427 made changes to the Assisted Living and Shared Housing Act clarifying that at least one voting member of the Assisted Living and Shared Housing Advisory Board must be a resident of an assisted living or shared housing establishment.
- SB2957 modified the IL Act on the Aging to include language specifying ombudsman access to facility incident reports and allows for consent in other means that writing.



- SB2715 modified the IL Act on the Aging to clarify release of ombudsman resident records.
- HB5095 amended the Nursing Home Care Act to close a loophole related to distinct part discharges.



2024 BY THE NUMBERS

- 84 Full-time Ombudsmen
- 8 Part-time Ombudsmen
- 32 Volunteer Ombudsmen
- 22 Resident and Family Support Council meetings hosted on Zoom by the Office of the State Ombudsman
- 318 Facebook followers on the State Ombudsman Facebook page
- 1,620 Resident Council meetings attended by ombudsmen
- 226 Trainings on resident rights provided to long-term care staff
- 41,422 Questions about long-term care answered by ombudsmen
- 78 Videos on the [IL LTC Ombudsman YouTube Channel](#)
- 445 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)
- Live in less restrictive setting (discharge planning)
- Other rights and preferences

DISCHARGE DILEMMA

Hospital-dumping and inappropriate facility-initiated discharges continue to be a problem as ombudsmen across the state receive calls from desperate residents being denied the right to stay in their homes.

Not only are some residents denied the opportunity for an administrative hearing, but some homes are bold enough to scoff at potential fines.

Legislation is needed to strengthen resident rights as they pertain to inappropriate discharges.

HB5151 was a proposal to amend the Nursing Home Care Act and the Assisted Living and Shared Housing Act which would have strengthened rights related to discharges. Unfortunately, despite passing out of the Senate, this bill was not passed in the House.

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman will continue to fight for discharge rights for residents in long-term care homes.

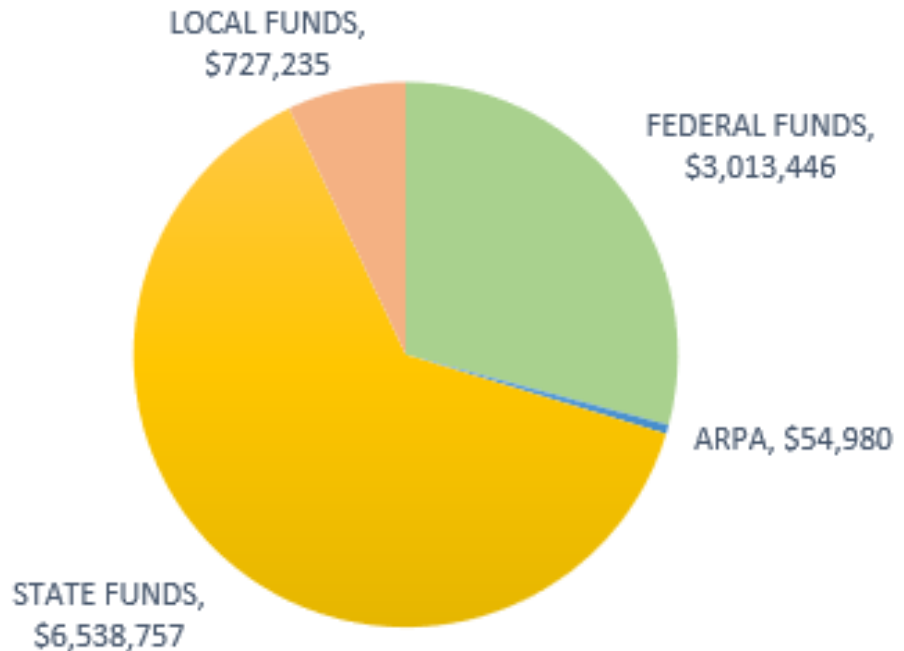


ARPA FUNDING

The Ombudsman Program received two sets of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act that over-lapped in FY2024. 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 out-reach 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.

FUNDING BY SOURCE



GETCARE

Last year brought a major change to the Ombudsman Program by way of a new data collection system. Illinois ombudsmen began using GetCare. As ombudsmen continued to understand the full functionality of the system, the Office began hosting Technical Assistance (TA) calls. During the TA calls, ombudsmen are invited to ask any question related to documentation in the system.

The calls have proven beneficial to newer ombudsmen who increase their familiarity with the system with the general overviews offered as well as to more seasoned ombudsmen who come seeking direction on how to perform specific tasks within the system.

BARRIERS

Currently, residents of long-term care homes have no explicit right to enter and leave a facility as they choose. Illinois law is silent on the issue.

More importantly though, is that some long-term care operators have normalized the idea that residents may not move about of their own free will, but instead must earn the right to freedom of movement by being cooperative residents. A carrot and stick approach that is designed to control residents rather than allow them the freedoms most Illinoisans take for granted.

Current law needs to be changed because some long-term care homes deny residents the right to go outside for staff convenience reasons and others require residents earn the right to go outside by following certain requirements.



RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Illinois law needs to change to explicitly list a resident's right to outdoor access. The Nursing Home Care Act and the Specialized Mental Health Rehabilitation (SMHRF) Act need to be modified to specify that residents have a right to enter and leave the long-term care home as they choose unless the resident's physician documents that leaving would pose a danger to the resident or other residents.

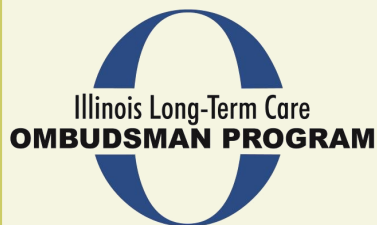
If a physician determines that leaving would pose a danger, the long-term care home would then have the authority to restrict movement as appropriate. This might be needed in the case of a resident with advanced dementia living in a memory care unit.



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HOME CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

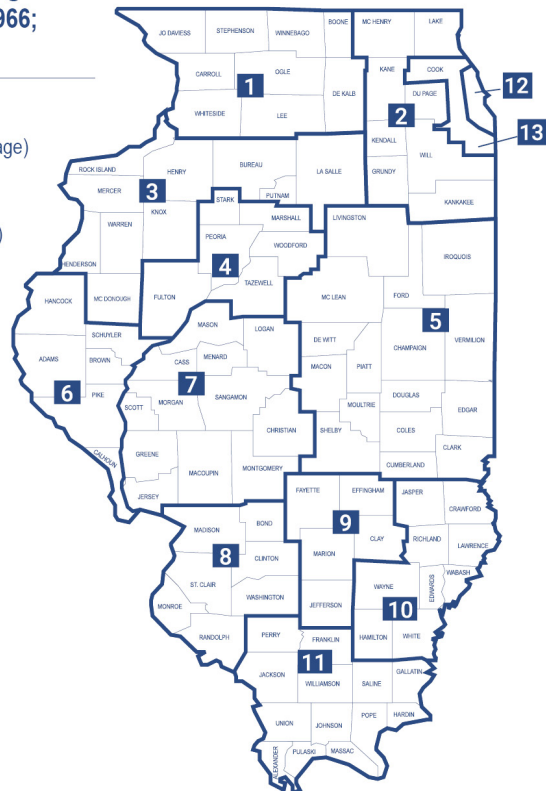
The Home Care Ombudsman Program underwent a major transition during FY2024. Previously, all Home Care Ombudsmen were on personal service contracts. During FY2024, the positions were posted for state employee status. Interviews were conducted and three individuals were hired into these positions. A working supervisor position will be filled in FY2025.

The Home Care Ombudsmen continued to provide advocacy for the 160,00+ participants on Home & Community Based Service Waivers and 90,000+ Medicare Medicaid Alignment Initiative enrollees throughout Illinois. They investigated 157 complaints.

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 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.