National Association of Local Long Term Care Ombudsman
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July 30, 2025

The Honorable Rick Scott
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
U.S. Senate Special Committee On Aging
G16 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Re: Written Testimony for July 30, 2025, Hearing on Elder Abuse, *"Awareness to Action: Combating Elder Abuse and Neglect."*

Dear Senators Scott and Gillibrand and Members of the committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony for the July 30, 2025, hearing, *"Awareness to Action: Combating Elder Abuse and Neglect."*

The National Association of Local Long Term Care Ombudsman (NALLTCO) represents over 300 Local and Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman, also known as Ombudsman Representatives, throughout the United States. Our members provide direct services to residents of long term care facilities and bring a wealth of hands-on experience across a variety of program settings, including state agencies, county and local governments, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), and nonprofit organizations.

Who We Serve
LTC Ombudsman serve residents of skilled nursing facilities and assisted living/residential care settings. The majority of these residents are older adults who live with serious health conditions that impairs their ability to self-advocate or protect themselves from abuse or neglect. Many facility residents are isolated and do not have regular visitors or family support.

What We Do

Since 1978, the Ombudsman program has used a blend of volunteers and paid staff to fulfill its federal mandates under the Older Americans Act, which include:

- Resident-centered advocacy
- Routine facility monitoring visits
- Investigation and resolution of complaints, including abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Systemic advocacy
- Information and assistance
- Community and facility-based education on residents' rights
- Support and organization of resident and family councils

We resolve complaints as reported in the National Ombudsman Reporting System (NORS), addressing concerns such as:

- Abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Admission, discharge, transfer, and eviction
- Access to information, autonomy, choice, and residents' rights
- Financial exploitation and property loss
- Quality of care
- Activities, social services, dietary and environmental issues
- Facility policies and procedures
- Concerns involving outside agencies, service providers and representatives/family conflict

Our Unique Role in Preventing Abuse

While law enforcement, Adult Protective Services (APS), and regulatory agencies respond **after** abuse has occurred, the LTC Ombudsman program is unique in its proactive, preventive approach. By maintaining a regular presence in facilities, we work to identify and resolve issues early, often before they escalate into serious harm. We also provide vital education to residents, families, staff, and visitors about residents' rights and how to address problems constructively.

Most critically, **Ombudsman are the only professionals whose mandate is to advocate solely for the resident.** While others assess legal or regulatory violations, we ensure that the individual experiencing care is safe, respected, and receiving the support they need.

When abuse or neglect occurs, Ombudsman remain engaged with the resident to ensure long term safety and follow-up. No other agency offers this type of ongoing, person-centered oversight after an incident. Our continued involvement is vital to both immediate recovery and future prevention.

Cost Savings and Impact

The preventive efforts of LTC Ombudsman save significant resources for federal and state agencies such as law enforcement, APS, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). More importantly, they protect residents from the pain, trauma, and long term consequences of abuse and neglect.

Current Challenges

Despite its value, the LTC Ombudsman program is struggling to meet its mandates. Originally launched with a reliance on volunteers and minimal paid staff, the program now faces the opposite situation: a decline in volunteer availability and the increasing need for skilled, paid professionals.

The complexity of Ombudsman work has grown dramatically. Today's Ombudsman must be well-versed in a broad range of state and federal regulations, skilled in negotiation, and able to document their advocacy at a high level of detail. Recruiting volunteers or retaining staff with the necessary experience and commitment is increasingly difficult, especially without competitive compensation.

A Call to Action

Every day, residents and their families share heartfelt appreciation for the work of Ombudsman. Our role is central to ensuring the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals in long-term care.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support the following actions:

1. **Reauthorize the Older Americans Act**, including support for the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act (S. 2120).
2. **Increase and stabilize federal funding** for the Long Term Care Ombudsman program, Adult Protective Services, and broader efforts to reduce elder abuse nationwide.
3. **Fund and require a comprehensive national study** to determine an updated, evidence-based Ombudsman-to-resident staffing ratio. The last such study, *Real People, Real Problems,* was conducted by the Institute of Medicine in 1995 and recommended a minimum ratio of 1 Ombudsman per 2,000 residents. Given the increasing complexity of long term care, that ratio needs revised to reduce the number of residents per Ombudsman. Institute of Medicine Report (1995)

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities. If you have any questions, please contact us at nalltco@gmail.com or our Board Chairperson, Karen Jones, at 805-785-0132.

Sincerely,



Karen Jones, Chair
NALLTCO Board of Directors