

Each state is required to have an Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman. In Iowa, this program is housed in the Department of Elder Affairs. Until 1999, Iowa had only one full time ombudsman. In 1999, an additional person was added and then two more ombudsmen were added in 2001 and 2003. In 2004, 2 more staff were added, and late in 2006 an additional position was created, bring the total regional ombudsmen to 6. Funding comes from the Administration on Aging, Senior Living Trust and the General Fund.

The Ombudsman's Office is mandated by the Older Americans Act which identifies several tasks for the program.

1. Identify, investigate and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of residents. These complaints involve involuntary discharges, staff failing to respond for assistance, not treating residents with dignity and respect, etc.

Last year, the regional ombudsmen identified and investigated 749 cases involving 1,310 complaints. Iowa ombudsmen were able to resolve over 80% of these cases, compared to the national average of only 60%. We were also able to provide information to over 900 residents and families and consulted 363 facilities by phone. Due to limited staff, regional ombudsmen must concentrate on complaint resolution and are not able to spend time in facilities monitoring activities or meeting with residents to share information about this office.

2. This office is charged with representing the interests of residents before governmental agencies, and also reviewing and commenting on existing or proposed laws & regulations that pertain to the rights and well being of residents.

As the State Ombudsman, Jeanne Yordi does most of this work. She is actively monitoring and making comments on any rules that do not promote quality of life and quality of care for individuals who live in a long-term care facility.

3. Long-term care ombudsmen are to support the development of resident and family councils.

If asked, a regional ombudsman can provide information to a resident or family council. As more regional long-term care ombudsmen are added, we will begin to make visits to facilities to encourage and develop resident and family councils. Council meetings could also be attended by the ombudsman when requested.

4. We are charged with providing services to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of residents and ensure that residents have regular, timely access to representatives of the ombudsman's office.

Our internal policies state that we will investigate complaints within 10 business days, and we strive to respond within just a few days. However, with the number of complaints received in this office, often it is necessary to triage and prioritize.

The Resident Advocate Committee program has been operated by this office for over 30 years. The volunteers serve in local long-term care facilities and report quarterly to this office. Regional Ombudsmen meet with the advocates as requested and also provide technical support for individual committees. Training for the 3,000 volunteers is minimal due to lack of staff and financial resources, but the Resident Advocates continue to be a vital part of the ombudsman program in Iowa.

As stated previously, regional ombudsmen must concentrate on complaint resolution and are not able to spend time in facilities monitoring activities or meeting residents to share information about this office. We are pleased that Governor Culver has recommended 4 additional long-term care ombudsmen at the cost of \$320,000. This will allow the ombudsmen in Iowa to meet the mandates of the Older Americans Act and to provide FULL ombudsman services to people living in long-term care facilities. As offices for long-term care ombudsmen are opened around the state, driving time will be reduced and will allow more time to be spent directly with people living in long-term care facilities. In recent conversations with many different groups on both a state and national level, we know that the continued presence of long-term care ombudsmen has been proven to reduce complaints and increase the quality of care life for residents living in long-term care.