

# Elder Update

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Protection for Seniors

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## Ombudsman Volunteers Sought "Our Two Cents Is No Small Change"

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It's no surprise that life in a long-term care facility can be confusing and often frustrating, since living away from familiar surroundings, being subjected to institutionalized care, and suffering from loneliness and loss of dignity are simply part of the package – right?

Wrong.

Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is a volunteer-based organization seeking to improve the quality of life of elders living in long-term care settings, including nursing homes, assisted living facilities and adult family care homes. By directly responding to the concerns of residents, volunteer ombudsmen advocate for Florida's frailest elders, ensuring their rights, health, safety and dignity. Ombudsman is a Swedish

term meaning "one who helps on behalf of another." Here in Florida, they are simply real people, helping real people. Many ombudsmen are elders themselves who want to give something back to their communities.

Comprised of 17 local councils across Florida, the program offers localized advocacy services at no charge to its clients. Each Ombudsman donates about 20 hours of service per month, responding individually to resident complaints ranging from lack of communication with staff to quality of care issues, and resolving concerns with professionalism and warmth.

Many ombudsmen compound their regular efforts by speaking with community organizations, resident groups and family councils to educate the public about residents' rights. These rights are a special set of liberties given to residents upon admission to long-term care facilities. They include the right to make informed personal decisions, the right to choose one's own physician, and the right to be treated with the

fullest measure of respect and dignity. Ombudsmen empower residents to understand their rights and make sure they are maintained.

Ombudsmen strive to give a voice to those who often go unheard. Throughout 2007 and 2008, the program hosted a statewide series of town hall meetings to listen to the public's concerns and recommendations about long-term care issues in Florida as part of its "Our Two Cents Is No Small Change" campaign. Feedback gathered from the series will be included in a special report to policymakers and the media later this year to raise awareness of underlying issues in Florida's long-term care system. The program realized the importance of helping Florida's most vulnerable elders and their families have a say with lawmakers and sought to provide a vehicle by which to relay their thoughts.

Currently each of the program's local councils is seeking additional volunteers. The only requirements for application are freedom from conflict of interest and a willingness to learn.

Prospective volunteers complete a comprehensive training process and accompany tenured ombudsmen on inspections and investigations before they become certified.

The experience of being an ombudsman is truly rewarding, and the experience of being helped by one is often comforting. Offering one-on-one assistance to those who need it most, ombudsmen strive to give back to our parents and grandparents at least a portion of what they've given us throughout the years.

To ask for an ombudsman's assistance, request an application to become a volunteer, schedule a group presentation or learn more about the program, call toll-free 1-888-831-0404 or visit the program's new Web site at <http://ombudsman.myflorida.com>.

*I live in a nursing home. I raised a beautiful family and taught school for 30 years. I play piano and love to cook and dance.*

*Shouldn't I be treated with dignity?*



*Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program seeks to ensure the health, safety, welfare and rights of elders who live in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other long-term care settings.*

*If you are concerned about a loved one's quality of life, our free and confidential services can help.*

*Want to volunteer with us? Call or visit us online to learn more.*

Florida's Long-Term Care  
**OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM**  
*Our 2 cents is no small change*

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