



FLORIDA'S OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

Advocating for Long-Term Care Residents

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 27, 2013

CONTACT:
Franko Galoso
galosof@elderaffairs.org

Florida's Ombudsman Program Remains Steadfast Amidst False Claims

TALLAHASSEE – For the past two years, Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) has been bombarded by an onslaught of negative press which has cast a shadow over the hard work of its staff and volunteers. Increasingly over the past few weeks attacks have been used to publicly bemoan an imagined decline of Florida's Ombudsman program and to spread gross misrepresentations of program policies and decisions.

Contrary to the recent characterization of the Ombudsman Program as "weakened" and "crippled", the program has continued to thrive and succeed in its mission to advocate for long-term care residents. In fact, since early 2011, there are 25% more volunteers and the percentage of residents dissatisfied with ombudsman services has decreased. Additionally, Florida's Ombudsman Program is the only program in the nation that completes comprehensive administrative assessments focusing on resident-centered advocacy.

"I've seen staff and volunteers come and go for various reasons, but our volunteers' advocacy, as always, remains first-rate and unchanged," says Lynn Penley, Pasco & North Pinellas District Ombudsman Manager. "We have achieved some great things [and have] seen an increase in volunteers and will complete 100% of our annual assessments."

"Volunteer ombudsmen are visiting and assessing facilities more than they ever have in the past, and the mere presence of ombudsmen in facilities is making a significant impact," said Kevin McKeown, Treasure Coast District Ombudsman Manager. "The reports about ombudsmen not being allowed to visit facilities unannounced or not being able to speak freely with residents are simply untrue."

As these baseless attacks continue, volunteer ombudsmen have expressed their frustration with the misrepresentations and absurdity of these published claims. However, this has not affected their continued efforts in protecting residents living in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and adult family-care homes all across the state.

"What is patently inaccurate is that the statewide [Ombudsman] Program is in jeopardy or that it is rudderless," said Dr. David Pargman, volunteer and Ombudsman State Council Chair. "Assuredly we are functioning very well, thank you. We continue to exercise our mission in the field without hesitation and without sacrificing one iota of competence."

"Having served as an ombudsman for over 3 years, I have experienced firsthand the benefits of this program to those residents of Florida's long-term care facilities," said Alan Tudor, Panhandle district volunteer ombudsman and recipient of the 2013 Department of Elder Affairs' Secretary's Award for Excellence in Volunteering. "If not for the LTCOP too many residents would suffer silently."

"Florida has over 4,000 facilities and yet our staff and volunteers are able to visit each facility and have one-on-one interactions with residents living in those facilities," said Susan Anderson, Deputy State Ombudsman. "We remain dedicated and focused on advocating for the safety and welfare of these residents."

Since its establishment in 1975, Ombudsman Program staff and volunteers have continuously dedicated their services to champion the rights of Florida's long-term care residents. The program's mission has always been steadfast and clear – to provide services that assist in protecting the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents of long-term care facilities.

“As I have served as an ombudsman since the inception of the program, I feel that I have enough experience to speak for the program,” said Linda Putnam, a 30 year volunteer ombudsman. “The ombudsman program continues to be a viable way for residents in long-term care facilities to know that they have a voice. Through the Ombudsman Program they are assured that their problems and grievances can be addressed and resolved.”

“[The staff and volunteers are] dedicating all of our efforts into our work; and giving our support, so the volunteers shall continue advocating for our residents, by completing 100% of our Administrative assessments and by continuing investigating complaints,” said Alicia Salinas, South Dade & Keys District Ombudsman Manager. “We will continue to make recommendations through remedial actions to improve our residents’ quality of life.”

“Long-term care facility residents know the true value of the Ombudsman Program's efforts and what it means to them, their families and their communities,” said Susan Anderson. “We must communicate and connect with each other in a positive manner for the good of our citizens who live in long-term care settings.”

The Florida Ombudsman Program, which consists primarily of around 370 professional volunteers, resolves complaints and concerns addressed by or on behalf of residents of long-term care facilities in the state of Florida. During the federal fiscal year of 2011-2012, volunteers gave 85,440 hours of unpaid services and saved the State of Florida an estimated average of \$1,861,737. All program services, including individualized response to residents’ concerns, are free and confidential. Individuals interested in volunteering or learning more about the program may call toll-free 1-888-831-0404 or visit ombudsman.myflorida.com online.

###