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**HB 671 - Nursing Facilities – Medicaid Quality Assessment –
Funding of the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Appropriations Committee
March 10, 2026
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 671, which will create more stable and predictable funding for the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman. We thank Delegates Shetty and Lopez for sponsoring this important legislation.

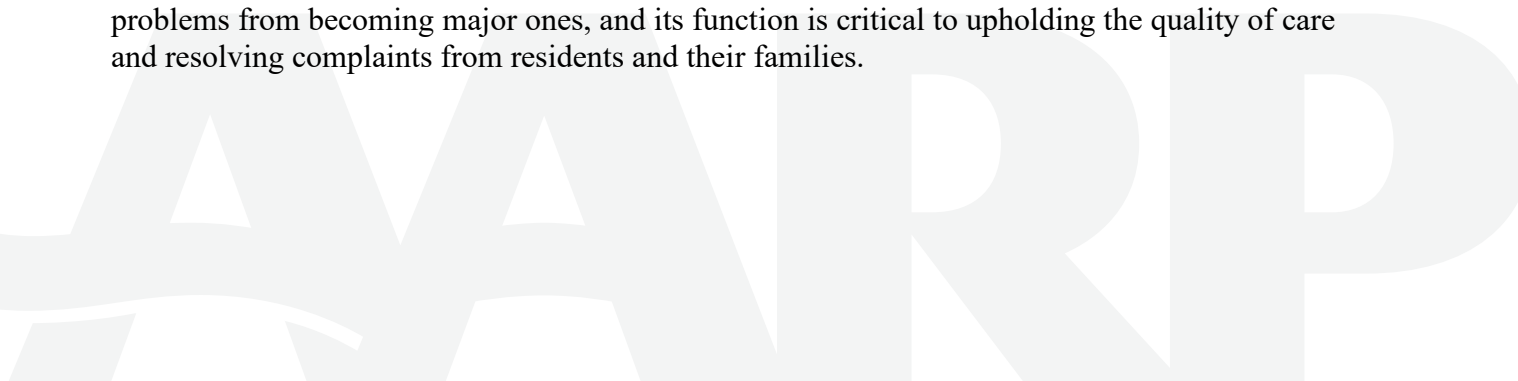
My name is Sara Westrick, Advocacy Director for AARP Maryland, and I am a member of the Oversight Committee on Quality of Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities. AARP Maryland has a long history of advocacy on long-term care issues and deeply values the work of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the state, with approximately 850,000 members. We represent the interests of Maryland's over 50 population, including families who rely on high-quality nursing home and assisted living care.

HB 671 makes a targeted, responsible adjustment to Maryland's nursing facility quality assessment by dedicating a small portion of existing assessment revenue to support the essential Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The primary purpose of the assessment, which is Medicaid nursing facility reimbursement, is preserved. At its core, this bill is about strengthening resident protections, stabilizing an essential oversight function, and improving system accountability. By dedicating a modest three percent of quality assessment revenue, the bill reduces the Ombudsman's dependence on annual general fund negotiations.

This stability is expected to prevent staffing cuts, improve program continuity, and allow for long-term planning and training. This innovative financing approach also insulates the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman from dependence on federal funds, which can be withheld or delayed, as occurred last year, causing uncertainty and unnecessary stress to the system.

With predictable funding, the Ombudsman's office can shorten response times to complaints and expand outreach to residents and families. The outcome is a stronger, more resilient Ombudsman program that can consistently serve residents across the state. The office can prevent small problems from becoming major ones, and its function is critical to upholding the quality of care and resolving complaints from residents and their families.



In sum, HB 671 represents a modest but meaningful investment in independent oversight that strengthens resident protections, supports accountability, and promotes system stability, all without undermining Medicaid reimbursement or facility finances.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 671.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Westrick at swestrick@aarp.org or by calling 410-310-0374.