



Maryland
Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Program

Date: March 6, 2026

Bill Number: **HB 671**

Bill Title: Nursing Facilities - Medicaid Quality Assessment - Funding of Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Committee: Appropriations

Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program thanks the Chair and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of House Bill (HB) 671 – Nursing Facilities – Medicaid Quality Assessment – Funding of the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

HB 671 requires that at least three percent of the special funds collected through the Nursing Home Quality Assessment be used to support the operations of the Maryland Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. These funds are intended to supplement, not replace, existing appropriations for the Long-Term Ombudsman Program.

Program Overview

The Maryland Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (Ombudsman Program) is authorized under the Older Americans Act and operates statewide to advocate for the health, safety, rights, and well-being of more than 54,000 Marylanders living in nursing homes and assisted living homes.

In fiscal year 2025, the Ombudsman Program:

- Made 7,252 visits to long-term care homes
- Provided 7,013 instances of information and assistance
- Investigated, verified, and resolved 3,978 complaints made by or on behalf of residents

Local ombudsmen across Maryland empower residents through person-directed advocacy, investigate complaints, and provide education and training for facility staff and the community.

Funding Challenges

Despite the vital nature of this work, the Ombudsman Program has been flat funded for more than a decade, receiving approximately \$1.1 million in state funds and approximately \$500,000 in federal funds, even as Maryland's older adult population and the complexity of residents' needs have grown dramatically.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman federal funding is vulnerable. Just last year federal funds for all Ombudsman programs were removed across the country. We advocated and funding was reinstated at a flat rate. This funding is crucial to the day-to-day operations of the ombudsman program and is one-third of our operating budget. Now is the time to be proactive and secure funding at the state level in order to protect the residents of long-term care and ensure they have a voice.

The Importance of the Ombudsman Program

The Ombudsman Program serves as a lifeline for residents. Ombudsmen provide a confidential, trusted space where residents can speak openly about abuse, neglect, or unmet needs without fear of retaliation. Ombudsmen give voice to those who cannot speak for themselves or may be too afraid to do so. Ombudsmen are the voice of the residents and their safe space.

Every working day, ombudsmen meet with residents, respond to families, and collaborate with nursing home staff to address concerns around care, safety, autonomy, dignity, and quality of life. Residents and families consistently tell us that the Ombudsman is the only independent party they fully trust to listen and act.

Investing in the Ombudsman Program Supports Better Outcomes - Research from Milbank indicates that increased state funding for Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs correlates with improved care outcomes, including reduced use of inappropriate practices and better advocacy capacity. [Trends in Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Funding and Its Relationship to Nursing Home Resident Care | Milbank Quarterly](#)

States are contributing more to their federally mandated Ombudsman Programs than they have historically. Overall, Ombudsman funding increased over 20 years. However, the share of federal contributions to the Ombudsman Program has decreased from 58.8% in 2000 to 46.9% of the total program's budget in 2019 states that have increased funding for their Ombudsman Program observe better nursing home resident care. These findings support calls to increase funding.

Why HB 671 Matters

A stable, dedicated funding source through a modest share of the existing Nursing Home Quality Assessment is both logical and equitable. The assessment is already collected from the settings where the residents live; those residents need and deserve to have a small portion of the funds

reinvested directly into the crucial resident protection and advocacy services Ombudsmen provide. Approximately 12% of states utilize the quality assessment to help fund their ombudsman programs.

Importantly, this bill does not seek funding at the expense of residents or facilities. Instead, it strengthens a program that benefits all stakeholders. Ombudsmen serve as a preventive resource for residents and nursing homes by resolving complaints early, mediating conflicts, and helping to improve quality of care before issues escalate to the Office of Health Care Quality. We believe this special fund has enough resources to continue to support residents, nursing homes and to help fund the ombudsman program.

The Broader Impact

This issue extends beyond advocacy—it is also about prevention. Should federal or state budget reductions diminish services such as home-delivered meals, case management, or in-home supports, more Marylanders will be forced into institutional settings, increasing the need for ombudsman services. Looming federal Medicaid cuts will translate into challenging times for long-term care. We need to have a well functioning, well resourced, Ombudsman Program in Maryland to protect residents.

The recent, but thankfully short-lived, federal proposal to eliminate all Long-Term Care Ombudsman funding underscored the vulnerability of this program. Maryland now has a vital opportunity to secure a sustainable, state-level funding stream that protects residents and supports essential advocacy.

Call to Action

Every day, ombudsmen make a tangible difference—advocating for safe discharges, ensuring residents’ preferences are honored, investigating abuse complaints and improving daily life in nursing homes. But when funding falls short, fewer homes are visited, residents wait longer for help, and systemic issues may go unaddressed.

With additional funding, the Maryland Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program would be able to:

- Provide more ombudsman access to long-term care residents
- Increase systemic advocacy on issues like involuntary discharges, resident-directed living and abuse prevention
- **Provide a full-time ombudsman position in every county**
- Increase the state office staff to support local offices, provide guidance and system advocacy and training
- Create a robust volunteer program
- Provide additional person-directed care, culture change and abuse prevention trainings to long-term care homes

Now is the time to act. Maryland has this amazing opportunity to ensure sustainable funding that safeguards this essential program and the residents it serves.

For These Reasons, We Urge a Favorable Report on HB 671 to:

- Safeguard the health, safety, dignity, and rights of Maryland's long-term care residents.
- Ensure residents have independent, trusted advocates who will listen and act.
- Strengthen the Ombudsman Program as both a resident advocate and resource to nursing homes.
- Maintain a consistent, daily presence in Maryland's long-term care facilities.
- Address over a decade of stagnant funding amid rising need and growing complexity of care.

Every working day, Ombudsmen are in nursing homes across Maryland—listening, educating, resolving concerns, and standing up for dignity and respect. Now is the time to protect those who protect Maryland's most vulnerable citizens. Please vote in favor of HB 671 and send a clear message that Maryland's long-term care residents matter and deserve a voice. We need to be proactive. Protect the Maryland Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

If you have any questions, please contact Karrie Craig, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, at karrie.craig@maryland.gov or (410) 940-1721.

Respectfully submitted,



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