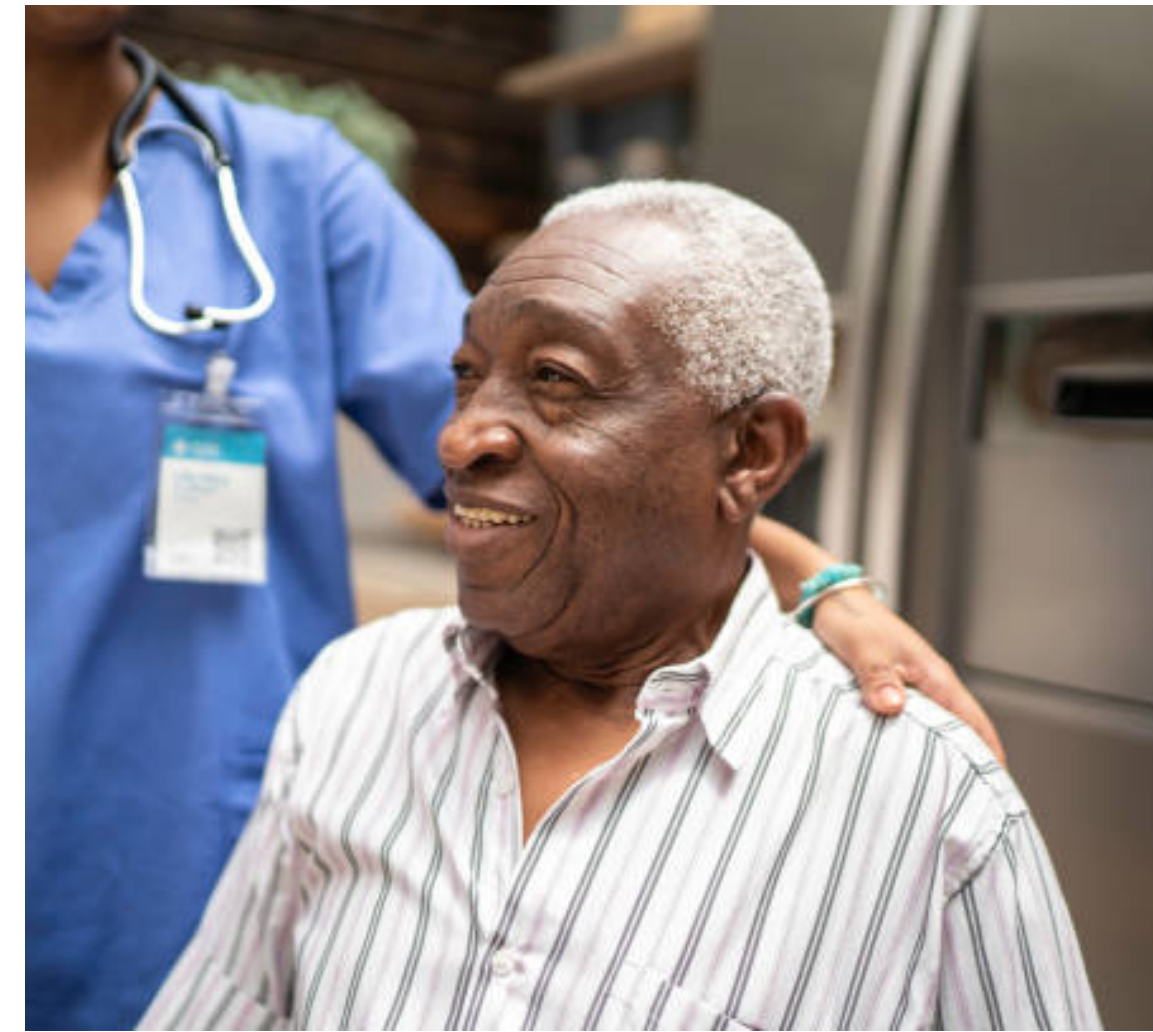




# ALASKA LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN



*Photos courtesy of Quyanna Care Center, Nome AK, istock*

# Annual Report

October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021



# Message from the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present the 2021 Annual Report of Alaska's Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) Program. It is indeed an honor to advocate on behalf of residents and their families who voice their concerns with the staff and volunteers of the LTCO Program. Our program is mandated by the federal Older Americans Act and Alaska State Statute. We are responsible for resolving complaints and advocating for the rights of seniors residing in Long-Term Care settings.

As I mentioned in last year's annual report, the *COVID 19 pandemic* heavily impacted our work, primarily shifting from in-person facility visits to virtual visits. While the *pandemic* continues to affect our world, the good news is that Ombudsmen returned to in-person facility visits in March 2021. While we have covered a lot of ground since March of 2021, we are still mindful that this *pandemic* continues to have a devastating effect on residents in long-term care settings.

Some of the ways that the *pandemic* impacted the rights of residents included restricting visitors from visiting inside of the facility and limiting residents from participating in community activities. Too, residents were often isolated in their rooms due to the suspension of group activities, which led to residents feeling disconnected to others. The *COVID 19 pandemic* helped us all to identify the importance of technology, and in many cases, technology was the only way that residents could communicate with their loved ones and friends during this pandemic.

Despite the challenges of the *COVID 19 pandemic* and its impact on our senior population; I must share that it has truly been an honor to work through these challenges with our amazing partner agencies in Alaska including the Department of Health and Social Services (Public Health, Residential Licensing, Adult Protective Services, Health Facilities and Licensing), Elder Fraud, AARP-Alaska, Alaska Commission on Aging, Mountain Pacific Quality Health, numerous other agency partners and the many administrators and staff of long-term care facilities who worked diligently to keep residents safe during this highly disruptive *pandemic*.

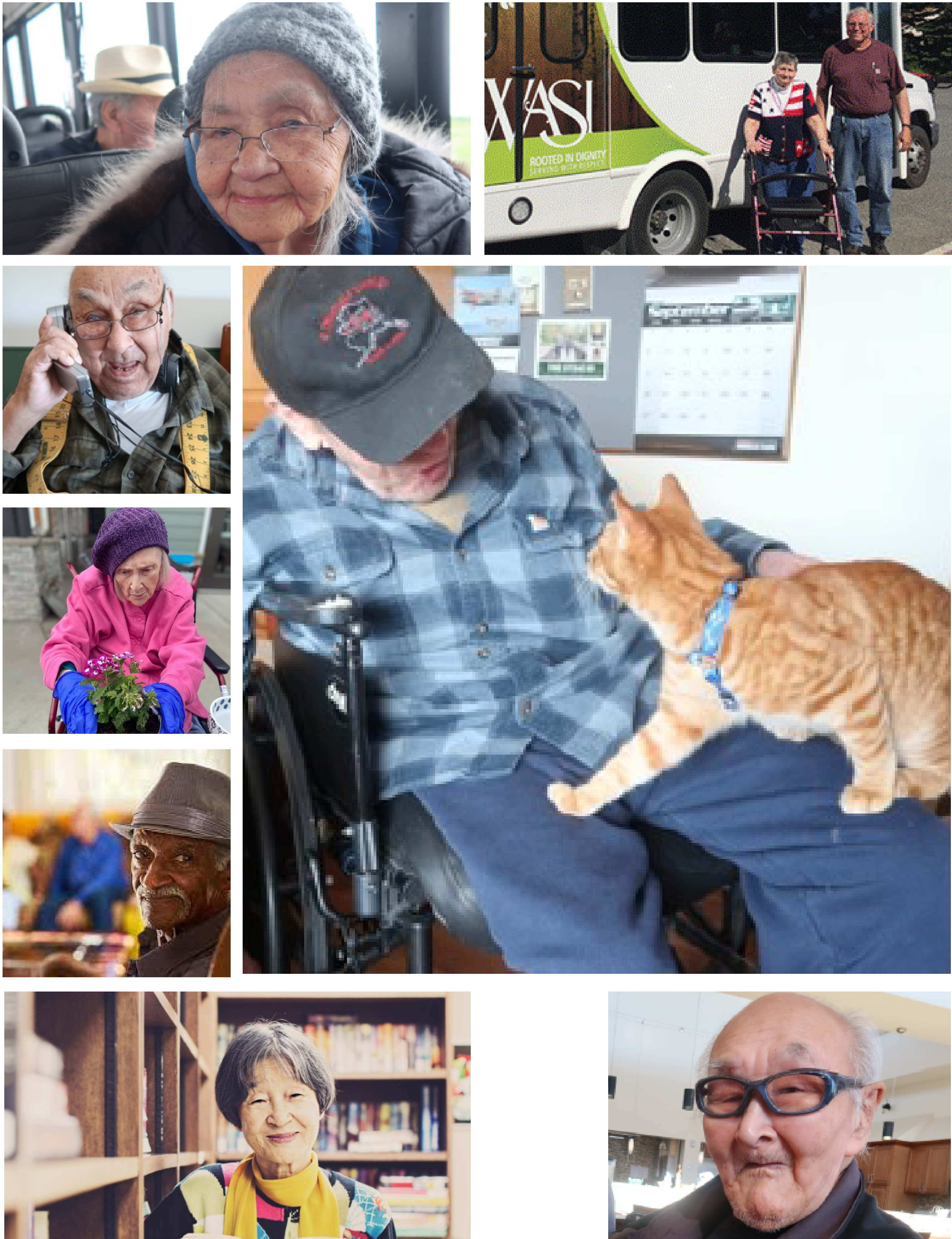
This report reflects the efforts of the program's staff and volunteer Ombudsmen, advocates, family members, residents, and concerned community members who are committed to ensuring that the rights of residents in long-term care facilities are honored and respected. Our common goal with our partners is to ensure the health and safety of seniors in long-term care facilities and to improve their quality of life.

Stephanie Wheeler, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman  
State of Alaska, Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program



# Program Mission

“The mission of the Alaska Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is to provide resident-centered advocacy designed to protect the rights, health, safety, and welfare of Alaskans living in nursing facilities and assisted living homes (ALH).”



Photos courtesy of Quyanna Care Center, Nome AK, istock, Wasilla Area Seniors, Aspen Creek



# The Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO)

Ombudsman (om-budz-man):

A Swedish word meaning "representative of the people." The OLTCO advocates for quality of care & quality of life of residents in long term care facilities.

## Core Values

Resident directed  
Resolution focused  
Respect  
Advocacy  
Professionalism

### What We Do

- ✓ Information & Referrals
- ✓ Educate About Resident Rights
- ✓ Investigate Complaints
- ✓ Empower with Self-Advocacy
- ✓ Visit Ages 60 or over
- ✓ Advocate to Improve Quality of life

### When Should you Call a Long Term Care Ombudsman

- ✓ To report problems or concerns
- ✓ If an older Alaskan is being discharged from a facility against their wishes
- ✓ To get information about long term care
- ✓ To ask for help addressing systemic issues
- ✓ To volunteer as an Ombudsman



# Staff



**Stephanie Wheeler**  
State LTC Ombudsman

Systems Issues  
Public Education  
Program Administration



**Mikki Easley**  
Deputy LTC Ombudsman

Volunteer Management  
Partner Agency Coordinator  
Case Consultation  
Facility Coverage in:  
MatSu, Chugiak & Eagle River



**Karol Collyer**  
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:  
Kenai Peninsula & Kodiak  
Part of Anchorage



**Leana Christy**  
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:  
Southeast  
Part of Anchorage



**Alvin Ancheta**  
Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:  
North and West Interior  
Part of Anchorage



**Kerri Tanner**  
LTC Specialist

Intake Processing & Referrals  
Tech/Admin Support  
Volunteer Program  
Assistance



# Program Highlights

The Alaska Office of the Long-term Care Ombudsman is organizationally structured inside of State Government. The Long-Term Care Ombudsmen visit skilled nursing facilities and assisted living homes to advocate for seniors residing in these settings.

In March of 2020, the Ombudsmen ceased making facility visits as recommended by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This guidance was implemented to help reduce the risk of spreading COVID 19. The Staff Ombudsmen gradually returned to facility visits in March of 2021 using the recommended safety precautions as outlined by the Center for Disease Control (CDS) and CMS. The disruptive *pandemic* had a major impact on the program activities reported in the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's 2021 Annual Report.

With that said, here are a few highlights from the work of staff and volunteer Ombudsmen from 2021.

**292**

*Complaints investigated*

**732**

*Information and assistance to facility staff*

**786**

*Information and assistance to residents and family members*

**106**

*Hours donated by 21 volunteers*

**269**

*Facility visits across the State of Alaska*

**1**

*Temporary LTC Specialist position created to allow for one temporary LTC Ombudsman through funding of the Cares Act.*



# Case Story



A resident in a skilled nursing facility made a request to visit her husband at his home for a period of 30 days, but was informed that she may have to discharge from the facility and then be readmitted when she was ready to return.

During this facility visit, a resident requested to meet with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman met with the resident in the activities room of the facility. This resident had a good sense of humor as she talked about her experience in the facility. The resident indicated that she wanted to go home with her husband for a while because the facility was not allowing visitation in residents rooms. Her husband lived in a nearby community. The Ombudsman asked about the resident's plans and care needs during her visit with her husband. The resident stated that there is a ramp, roll in shower, grab bars, and hospital bed at her husband's home. The resident also has an electric wheelchair to help her get around more easily. When the Ombudsman asked about who would care for her while visiting with her husband, the resident indicated that she would get a personal care assistant to support her. The resident became very concerned as she mentioned that she would most likely have to discharge from the facility since she was planning to visit her husband for about 30 days. However, she was planning to return to the facility because she recognized that it is a great place for her to live as she needs a higher level of care. The Ombudsman shared that since the census was low, it was probable that a room would be available for her when she wanted to return. The Ombudsman also suggested planning a visit for a shorter period. The Ombudsman encouraged the resident's right to self-determination and suggested steps to take including to request a care conference with the administration and her husband to discuss the details of her planned visit. The resident agreed with the idea to meet with her care team to discuss planning a visit with her husband. The resident was given the Ombudsman's information to call for additional assistance. The resident was facing some challenges with her planning due to high rates of COVID 19 in the community and in the facility. The Ombudsman continued to follow up with the resident and staff at the facility while the resident planned her trip and arranged for transportation. The resident worked with her care team and staff at the Skilled Nursing Facility. Spending time with her husband in the community was important for this resident as the resident was not able to have visitors because of COVID 19. A compromise was finally reached. The resident and facility staff with the assistance of the Ombudsman planned for the resident to visit her husband for a shorter period (not the full 30 days that she requested) but the resident was happy with this solution since she would not have to discharge from the facility.



# Top Five (5) Assisted Living Home Complaints

Received by OLTCO

1

## SYSTEMS & OTHER ISSUES

Includes concerns the resident representative or family member interferes with the resident's decision making, and preferences related to welfare, safety, or rights. This category also includes problems with services provided to a resident from an individual or entity not associated with the facility such as transportation or other similar problems.

2

## QUALITY OF CARE OF ISSUES

Issues include concerns for timely response to requests for assistance or failure to respond; failure to provide hygiene services; resident left in soiled clothing; medication errors; resident not receiving health care in a timely manner; lack of follow through with resident's care plan.

3

## RESIDENTS RIGHTS, CHOICE, & AUTONOMY

Includes resident being treated with rudeness, indifference or insensitivity. This also includes resident's rights or other preferences not being honored or respected.

4

## ADMISSION, DISCHARGE, EVICTION

Resident receives a discharge notice and does not want to leave the facility, resident discharged without receiving proper notice; this can also include issues with room assignments such as forced room changes within a facility.



Photo credits: Quyanna Care Center Nome AK

5

## ENVIRONMENT

The building environment including the room or water temperature is too hot; the ventilation is inadequate; the heating system is not working leaving residents feeling cold; the home is not clean, safe or sanitary.



# Top Five (5) Nursing Facility Complaints

Received by OLTCO

1

## RESIDENTS RIGHTS, CHOICE, & AUTONOMY

Includes resident being treated with rudeness, indifference or insensitivity. This also includes resident's rights or other preferences not being honored or respected.

2

## QUALITY OF CARE OF ISSUES

Issues include concerns for timely response to requests for assistance or failure to respond; failure to provide hygiene services; resident left in soiled clothing; medication errors; resident not receiving health care in a timely manner; lack of follow through with resident's care plan.

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Photos courtesy of Quyanne Care Center, Nome AK

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## ABUSE, NEGLECT EXPLOITATION

Failure to protect a resident from harm or failure to meet the needs of resident which results in a serious risk of health and safety.



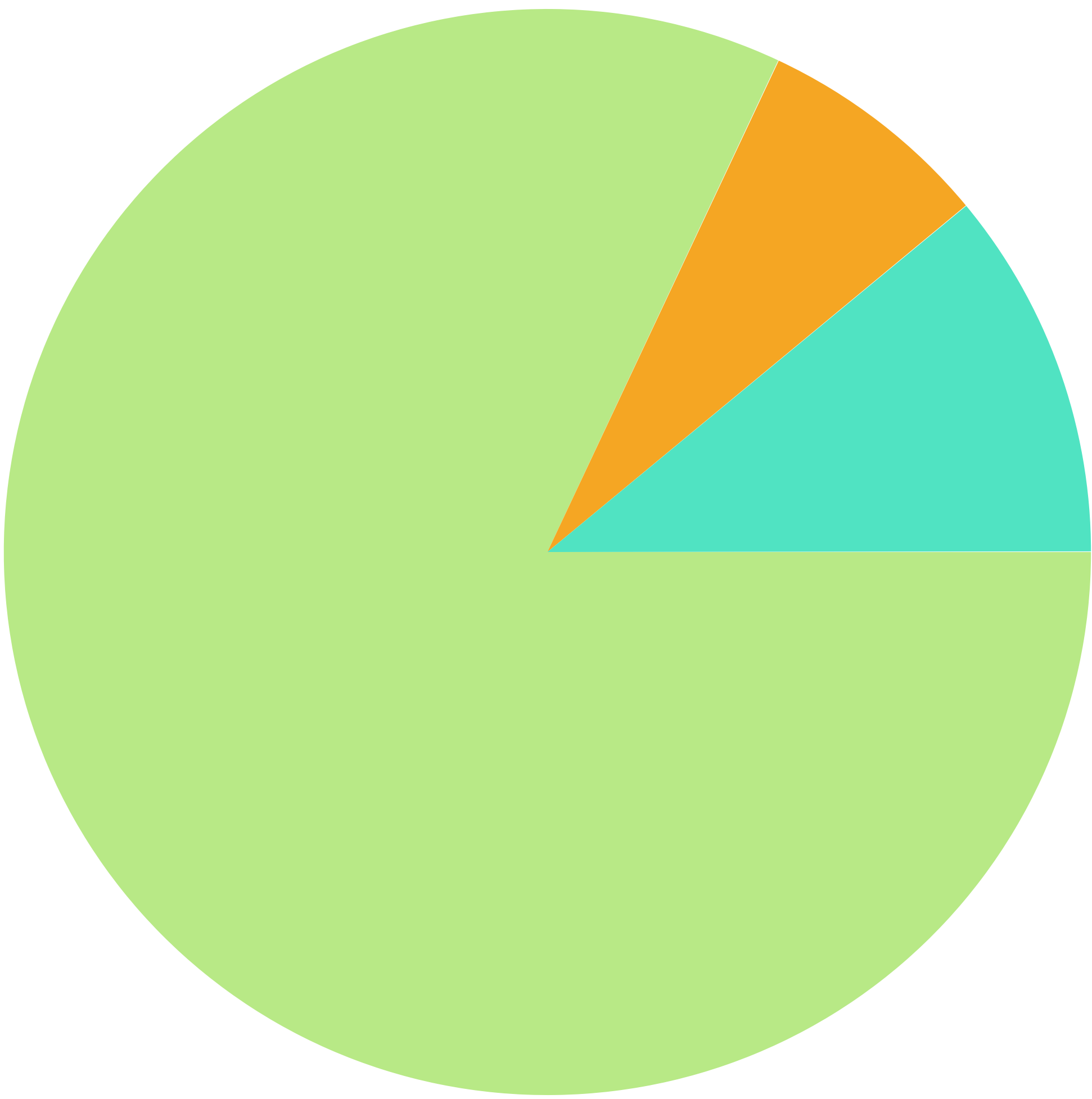
# Who Submitted Complaints in Fiscal Year 2021?



*A Complaint is defined as a concern brought forward to the Ombudsman's Office*

## OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS

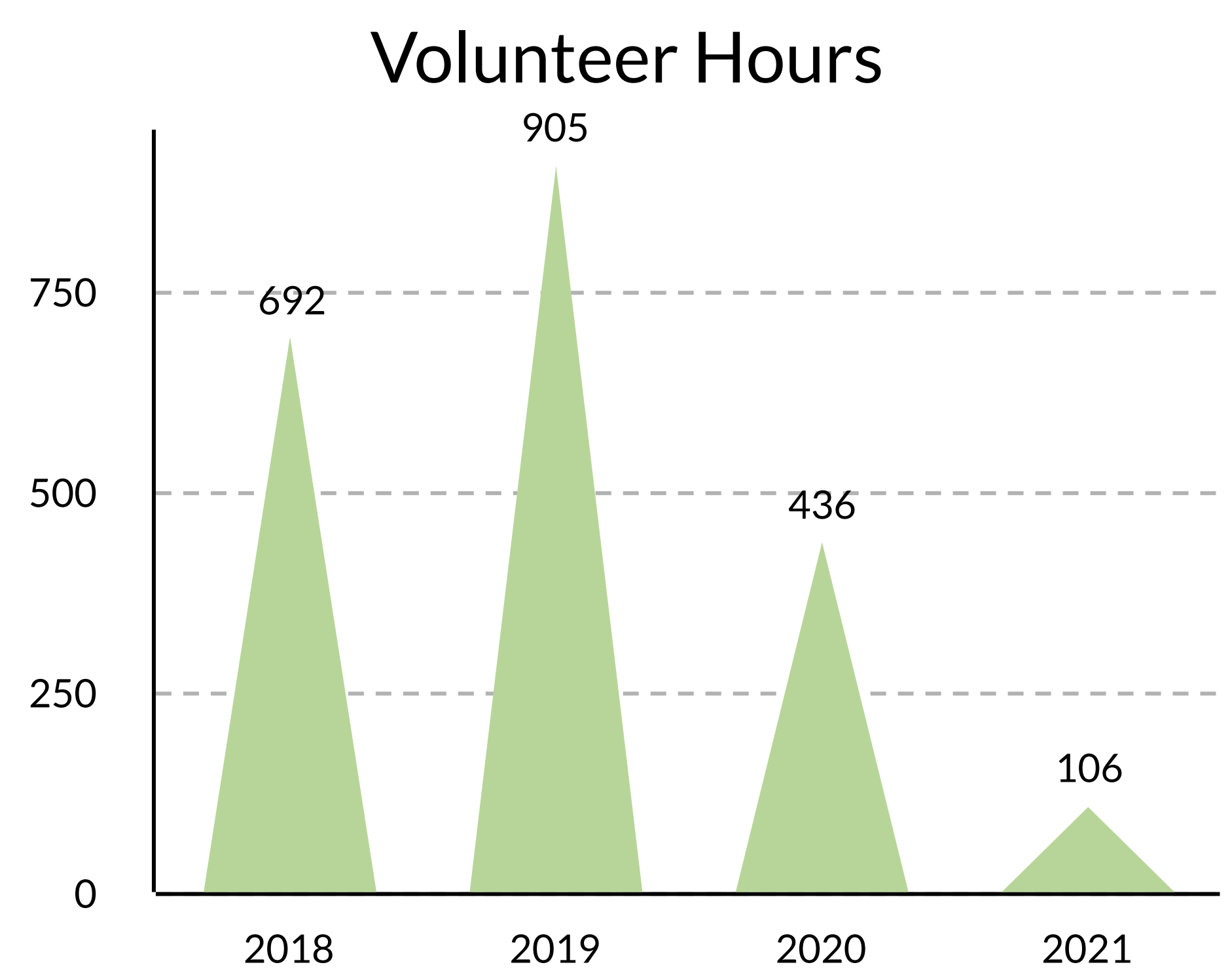
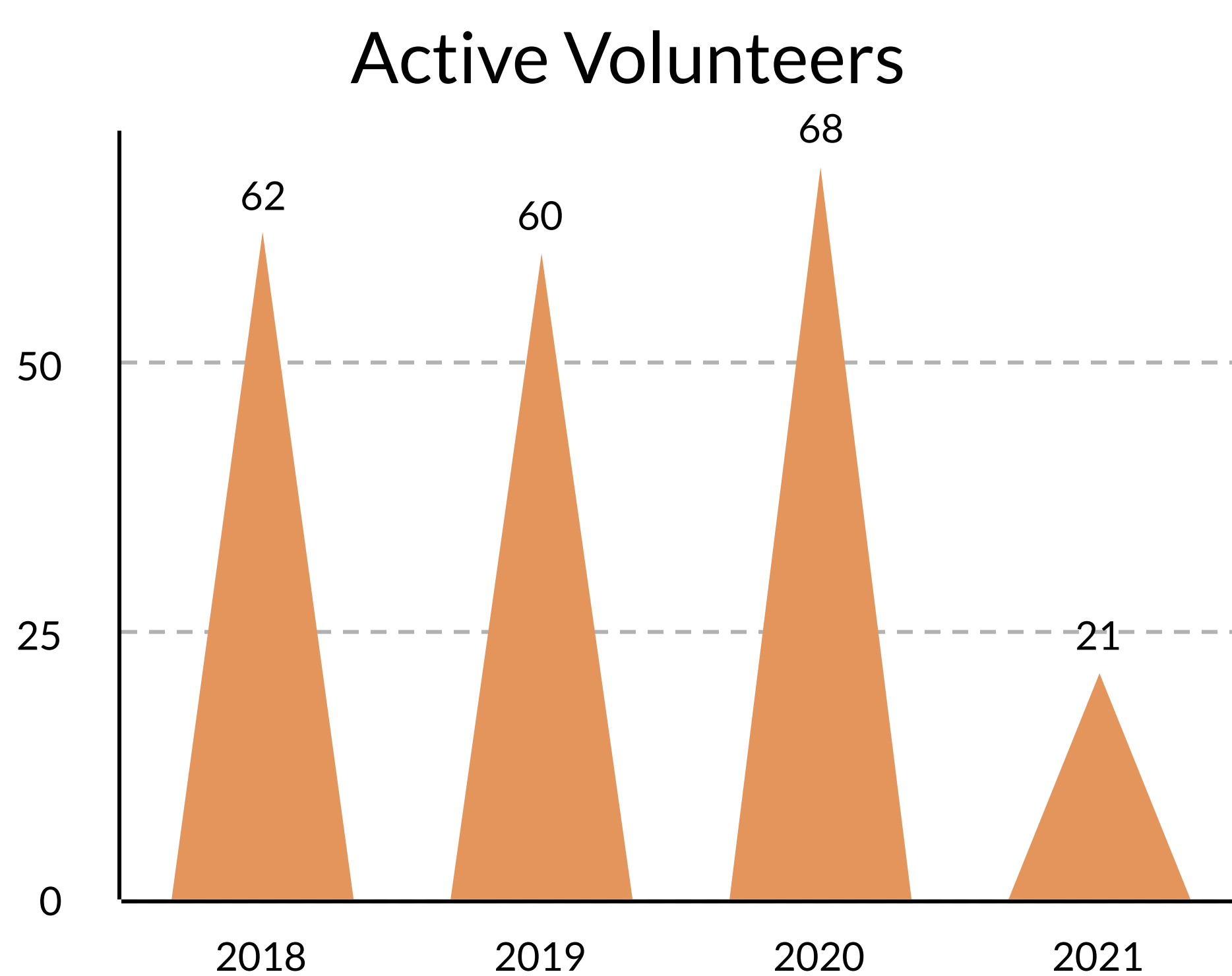
- Fully or partially resolved to the satisfaction of the resident, resident rep, or complainant (82%)
- Withdrawn or no action needed (7%)
- Not resolved to the satisfaction of the resident, resident rep, or complainant (11%)





# Volunteers are Essential to Our Work

Volunteers support the mission of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's program and enhance our program activities within the office. Our six-member team rely on volunteers to assist with completing facility visits to over 300 facilities within Alaska. Volunteers are in almost every region across Alaska. Our challenge this year was that approximately 69% of our volunteers from last year became inactive due to COVID 19 concerns. The Office is actively recruiting for new volunteers.



*"Nothing liberates our greatness like the  
desire to help, the desire to serve"*  
Marianne Williamson

## What does it take to be a volunteer?

- A passion for Elders
- Friendly and outgoing
- Creative problem solving
- Ability to be observant and non-judgmental
- A good listener who likes talking with older Alaskans

Complete an application online  
[www.akoltco.org](http://www.akoltco.org)



# Ombudsmen In the Community



**27 Communities  
throughout  
Alaska**

**20 Nursing  
Facilities with  
954 Residents**

**553 Assisted  
Living Homes with  
3,851 Residents**

**Territory of  
663,267 Miles**

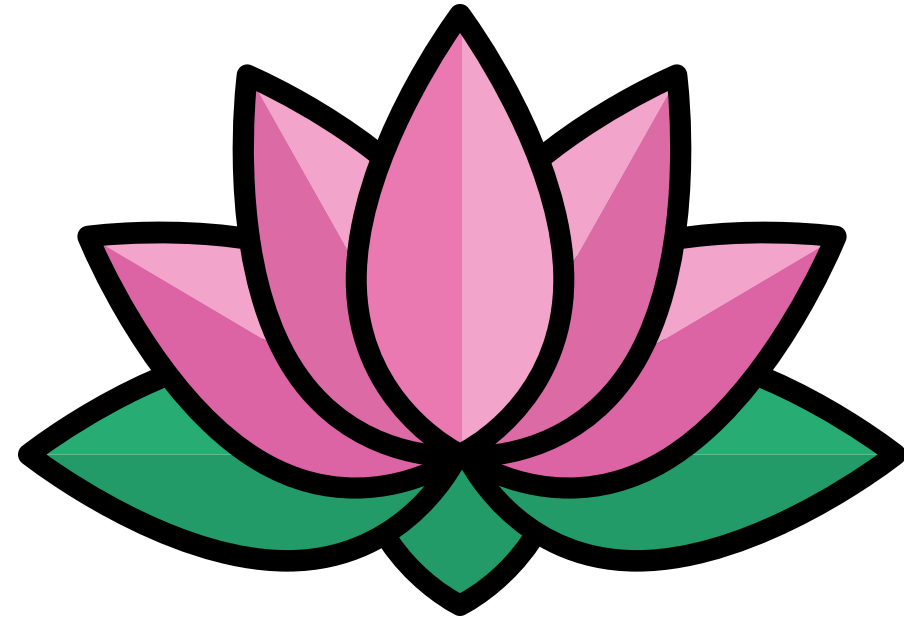
## Resident Councils

**The voices of residents must be heard. Resident Councils offer a unique opportunity for residents to share their concerns.**

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) participated in 15 resident council meetings during 2021. Most of these meetings were held virtually due to COVID 19. The purpose of a resident council is for residents, as a group, to influence the quality of their care. Resident Councils encourage members to meet and share concerns, identify problems, offer solutions, provide support, and submit the council's concerns and recommendations to the administrator of the facility. Resident Council members often consult with the LTCO to brainstorm ideas and to discuss resolutions. The LTCO are frequently invited to be guest speakers at Resident Council meetings to educate residents about their rights. The LTCO program also provides information and resources to facilities on how to create a Resident Council. The LTCO program created a Toolkit for Resident Councils, and a copy of the Resident Council Toolkit can be found on the LTCO website at [www.akoltco.org](http://www.akoltco.org)



# Case Story



A family member expressed concerns about the vaccination plan for her husband who was living in an assisted living home (ALH). The residents in this home had not had their COVID 19 vaccinations due to issues with the pharmacy. The family member wanted to ensure that resident's choice to vaccinate was honored in a timely manner.

According to the family member, the ALH had not been notified by the contracting pharmacy to schedule a date and time. The family member expressed she didn't want this home to fall through the cracks and not have the opportunity for the residents to receive their vaccination.

The Ombudsman spoke with the ALH Administrator and asked her if she received emails from the pharmacy and instructions on completing the necessary documents for residents to receive their vaccinations. The administrator explained she received all the authorizations from legal representatives, and family members. She completed all the documents through a portal and submitted these documents to the pharmacy. The administrator stated she had not received a call from the designated pharmacy. The Ombudsman began making calls to the pharmacy and found that the pharmacy did not have any vaccinations available. The Ombudsman proceeded to go up the chain to speak with a representative who was in charge. The Ombudsman spoke to a general manager of the pharmacy chain in another state and after explaining that an Assisted Living Home in Alaska followed the protocol to have residents get vaccinated in the ALH, they found out that the pharmacy no longer had vaccines available. The Ombudsman called and spoke with the ALH Administrator and informed her that he contacted the pharmacy chain representative who promised to investigate the matter immediately and would follow up with the administrator of the home. The Ombudsman continued to follow up with the representative of the pharmacy chain after receiving no response, the Ombudsman contacted the State of Alaska, Public Health - Epidemiology Team, who shared that they would make sure that this issue was resolved. The ALH administrator contacted the Ombudsman two days later to inform him that she received a call from pharmacy and was able to schedule the residents to get their vaccines. The pharmacy staff went to the ALH to give the residents their vaccinations within the week of the Ombudsman advocating on behalf of the residents and family member.



# Partnerships are Essential to our Work

## Public Education and Awareness

Promoting residents' rights can enhance the quality of life for residents in long-term care facilities. The State Long Term Care Ombudsman's (LTCO) Office hosted a *Virtual Town Hall Forum* for residents in Long-Term Care Settings in preparation for *Residents Rights Month*. *Residents Rights Month* is an opportunity to honor all residents living in long-term care settings. The 2021 theme was *Reclaiming My Rights, My Home, My Life*. The theme acknowledged the impact of COVID 19 this past year on residents and highlighted the need for residents' rights to be recognized and reasserted. Residents from facilities across the State of Alaska attended this Forum along with staff.

The *Virtual Town Hall Forum* highlighted updates from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office. The LTCO also informed residents that while they live in a long-term care setting, residents still maintain their rights. During the forum, the Ombudsmen reminded residents that the Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are their advocates and encouraged them to reach out to the Ombudsman's Office if they had any concerns.

During the Forum, we discussed residents' rights (in-depth) including the right to information, the right to dignity and respect, the right of choice, right to self-determination and the right to privacy. The Adult Protective Services (APS) staff also provided an informational session on abuse, neglect, and exploitation to help provide a better understanding and an awareness of abuse if they happened to encounter it themselves or observe others dealing with abuse or neglect situations.

## Training on the Prevention of Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation to Facility Staff

Providing abuse and neglect training to long term care facility staff can reduce the number of cases of harm in facilities. In recognition of Older Americans Month (May) and World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June), the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Office (LTCO) in partnership with Adult Protected Services, hosted two (2) virtual trainings for staff working in Assisted Living Home and Skilled Nursing Facilities across the State of Alaska. The training for Skilled Nursing Facility Administrators and their staff was held on Tuesday, June 15th and the training for Assisted Living Home Administrators and their staff was held on Wednesday, June 16th. After each training, The LTCO Office sent out certificates of attendance for the staff who attended this training as verification to be used for continuing education and training credits. This training was recorded on Zoom and a recording of the training was sent to administrators afterwards to be used for the purpose of training new staff on the prevention of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.



# OLTCO Systems Advocacy

We will continue to:

- Address issues related to COVID 19 impacts on the senior population including visitation policies and social isolation.
- Work closely with Resident Councils and Family Councils in Long Term Care (LTC) settings to support them in their advocacy work.
- Advocate for elders' interests in public policy arenas.
- Train residents of long term care settings and their families about their rights.
- Work with stakeholders to develop a plan to improve long term care services to elders with mental health or behavioral challenges.
- Develop and disseminate emergency preparedness/response information to residents and LTC facilities to assist them to be prepared for an emergency, pandemic, or natural disaster.
- Work on guardianship systems reform with the Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) to help ensure guardianships are safe and supportive.

## The OLTCO participates in the following:

### Task Force

Alaska Opportunity and Poverty Task Force

### Advisory Councils

Dementia Collaborative  
Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury (TABI) Advisory Council  
Disability and Aging Coalition  
Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship  
Stakeholders (WINGS)  
Care Transitions Coalition  
Mortality Review

### National

National Association of State Ombudsmen



# Our Advocacy Call: Protecting Residents Rights

- A resident shall be treated with dignity and respect.
- A resident may not be discriminated against because of race, color, religious creed, disability, handicap, ancestry, sexual orientation, national origin, age, or sex.
- A resident may not be neglected, intimidated, physically or verbally abused, mistreated, subjected to corporal punishment, or disciplined in any way.
- A resident has a right to self-determination and choice.
- A resident shall have access to a telephone in the home to make calls in privacy
- A resident has the right to receive and send mail.
- A resident has the right to communicate privately with and access the Long-Term Care Ombudsman.
- A resident has the right to practice the religion or faith of their choice, or not to practice any religion or faith.
- A resident has a right to manage their own financial affairs.
- A resident has the right to decide how they will be cared for and to receive all the services agreed upon in their plan of care or service plan.
- A resident has the right to access, review and request corrections to the resident's record.
- A resident has the right to freely associate, organize and communicate with others privately.
- A resident shall be free from restraints.
- A resident has the right to visit with family and friends.
- A resident has the right to privacy of self and possessions.
- A resident has the right to file complaints with any individual or agency and recommend changes in policies, home rules and services of the home without intimidation, retaliation, or threat of discharge.
- A resident has the right to choose his own health care providers.



# The Reason We Exist



Photos courtesy of Quyanna Care Center,  
Nome AK, istock





# STATE of ALASKA LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

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