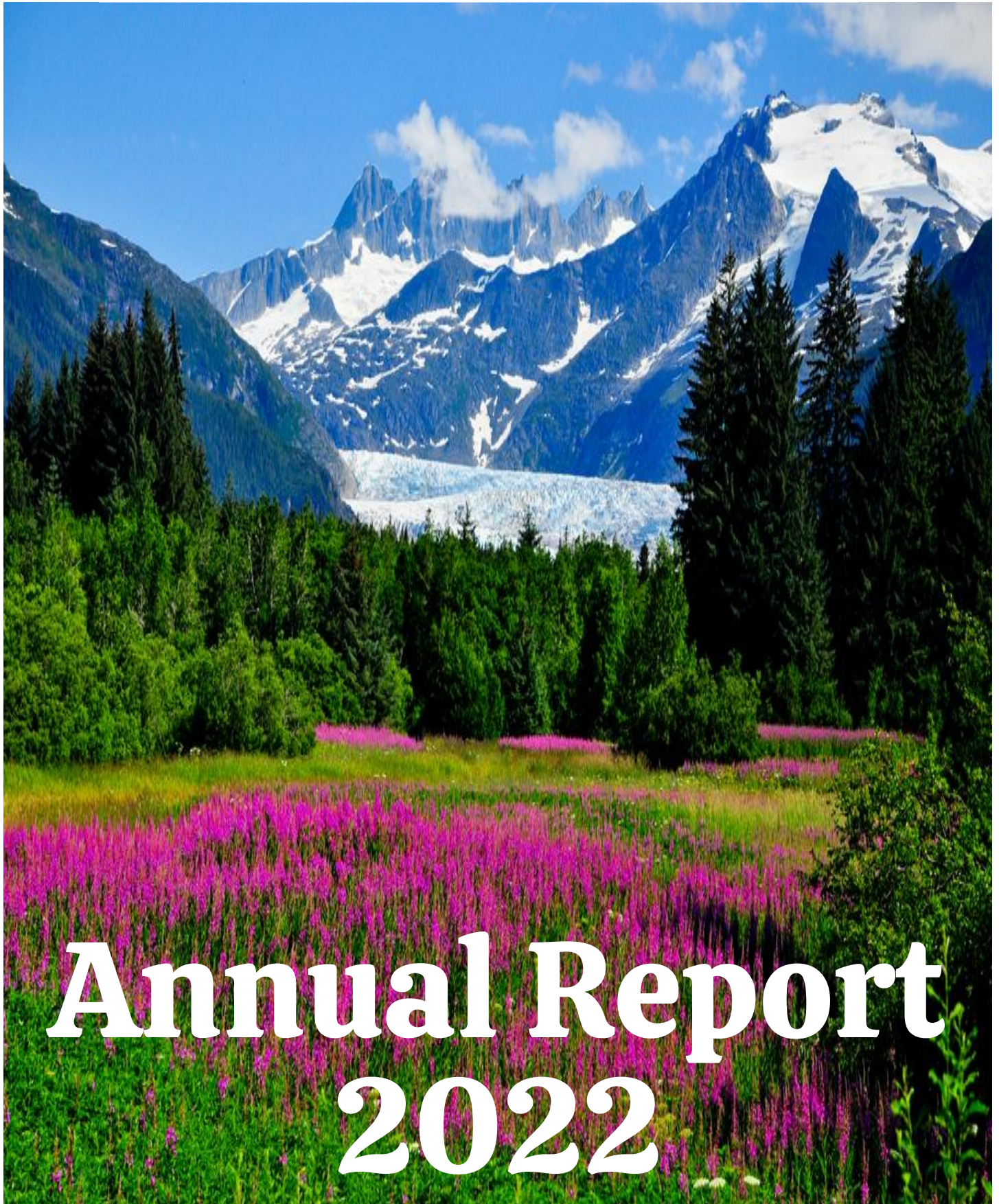




ALASKA  
LONG TERM CARE  
OMBUDSMAN



# Annual Report 2022





# Message from the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Dear Friends:

I am honored to present the annual report of the Alaska Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO) Program for federal fiscal year 2022. The OLTCO program is a resident-directed advocacy program which helps to protect the rights of residents and improves the quality of life for residents in long-term settings. The program is mandated by the Older Americans Act and Alaska State Statute. The program is responsible for investigating and resolving complaints and advocating for the rights of seniors residing in Long-Term Care (LTC) settings.

The OLTCO priorities for FFY 2022 included increasing engagement with resident councils, increasing facility visits, strengthening and expanding the volunteer program, continuing strategic partnerships, and staying connected with residents. I am happy to report that we have accomplished much of those priorities this year.

During the two previous years, the work of the Long-Term Care Ombudsmen was impacted by visitation restrictions in facilities. This reporting year, there were limited visitation restrictions and the OLTCO staff returned to nearly pre-pandemic activities. Over the past year, the OLTCO staff and certified long-term care volunteer Ombudsman conducted over 600 facility visits. This is more than double the number of visits from the previous year.

During facility visits, the OLTCO team educates residents about their rights. One resident recently shared this statement with a OLTCO staff member, “if you don’t know you have rights, it’s like you don’t have them”. Our hope is that all residents in long-term care facilities know that they have rights, and this is why we seize the opportunity to educate all residents in long-term care facilities, their family members and the staff about resident’s rights and we truly support and encourage residents to advocate for themselves.

The 2022 OLTCO annual report highlights 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***, Ph.D.

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

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

## Core Values



Resident Focused



Advocacy



Professionalism



Resolution Focused



Respect



### WHAT WE DO

Information & Referrals

Educate About Resident Rights

Investigate Complaints

Empower with Self-Advocacy

Advocate to Improve Quality  
of Life

Visit Residents ages 60 and  
over



### WHEN TO CALL A LTC 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

Volunteer Management  
Partner Agency Coordinator  
Case Consultation  
Facility Coverage in:  
Mat-Su



**Alvin Ancheta**

Deputy LTC Ombudsman



**Kerri Tanner**

Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:  
Southeast  
Anchorage

Facility Coverage in:  
Kenai Peninsula & Kodiak  
Anchorage



**Leana Christy**

Assistant LTC Ombudsman



**Christina  
Saeteurn**

Assistant LTC Ombudsman

Facility Coverage in:  
North and West Interior  
Anchorage

Intake Processing & Referrals  
Tech/Admin Support  
Volunteer Program  
Assistance



**Stephanie  
Welsh**

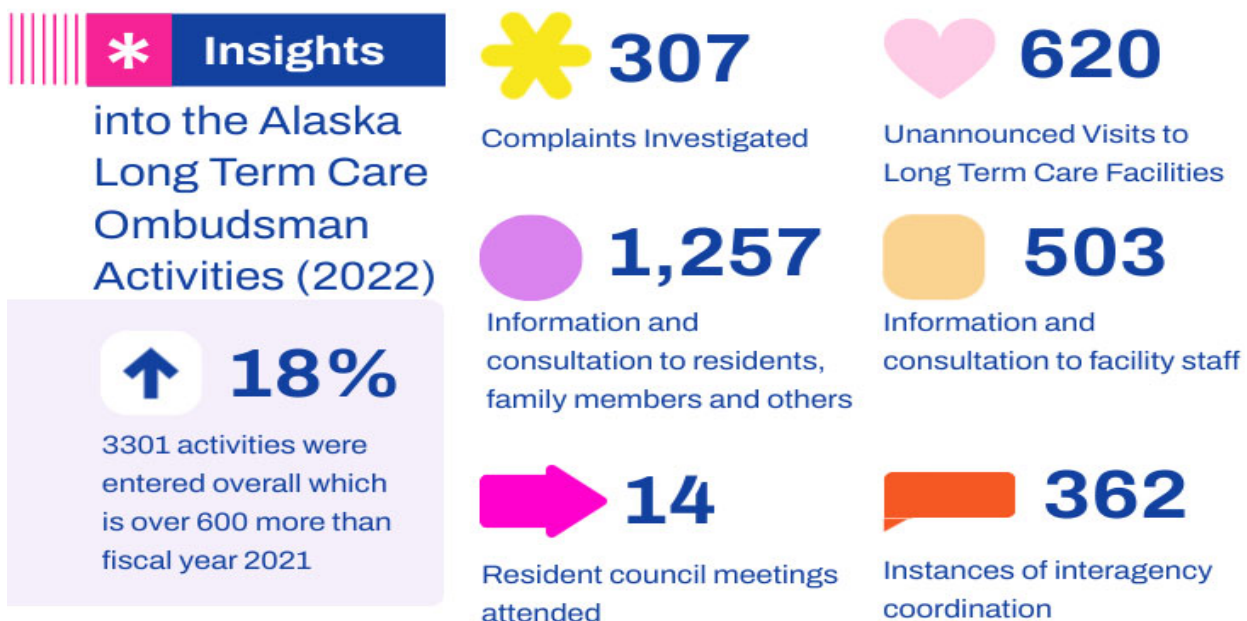
LTC Specialist

# Program Highlights

The Alaska Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO) is a statewide program that advocates for the rights of older Alaskans and for residents in Long Term Care settings. The OLTCO is a separately identifiable, distinct entity headed by the State Long Term Care Ombudsman, who carries out, with staff and volunteer Long Term Care (LTC) Ombudsmen, all functions and duties set forth in the Older Americans Act (42 USC 3001-3058ee and 45 CFR 1321 and 1327) and Alaska statute 47.62.

The Alaska Office of the Long-Term Care program is organizationally structured within the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Department of Revenue. The Mission is to provide resident-centered advocacy designed to protect the rights, health, safety and welfare of Alaskans living in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living homes.

Here are a few program highlights from the work of the Alaska Long-Term Care Ombudsmen staff and volunteers as documented in the Ombudsmanager database and reported to the National Ombudsman Reporting System for federal fiscal year 2022.



The primary duties of the staff and volunteer long term care Ombudsmen are to identify, investigate, and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of residents of LTC facilities, ensure that older Alaskans and residents of LTC facilities have regular and timely access to the services provided through the OLTCO program, provide ongoing support for resident and family councils in LTC facilities and provide information and referrals to members of the public and LTC providers.

The LTC Ombudsman program is a free and confidential service. The staff and volunteers have been quite busy this year as shown in the activity highlights above. Our work helps residents in long term care facilities to live a better quality of life and above all, ensure that their rights are not being violated.



# Success Story

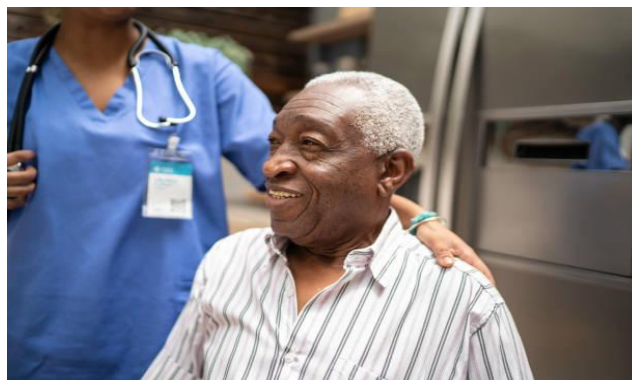


A resident was diagnosed with dementia and given only weeks to live. The resident became bedridden and admitted to a Skilled Nursing Facility with hospice care. Eventually, the resident started to thrive. He started walking a few steps, then a few feet, and after a few months, the resident was walking a few miles cumulatively.

The resident began to gain weight which was astonishing. He began feeding himself and ever so slowly participated in his activities of daily living. The resident moved off of Hospice Care. It's been amazing to watch the resident improve. As the resident continued to improve, he received a 30-day discharge notice with the reason given that the resident has made significant improvement. The resident was very concerned about receiving the discharge notice and wondered where he would be able to go. The resident was still facing so many other challenges that made it impossible for any assisted living home to take him during this time. The 30-day notice created a dilemma with no solution.

The resident has been mostly non-verbal during this time, but with the medication changes, he even started to say some words! Enter the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's Office was contacted when the resident received the 30-day notice. The Ombudsman took time to visit the Skilled Nursing Facility to observe the resident first hand. The Ombudsman also educated the resident and his family member on exactly what an ombudsman does. The resident and family member had no idea that the Ombudsman could advocate on their behalf. After observing the resident and meeting with the family, the Ombudsman spoke with the facility staff and asked them to rescind the 30-day notice based on the challenges that the resident was still having.

An extension was granted and time given to help the resident continue to make improvements. The extension also provided more time for the nurse practitioner to fine tune the residents' medications. In short, The Ombudsman's advocacy efforts helped the resident and his family to focus on a plan that would transition the resident back to his home rather than move the resident to another facility. The family was very grateful for the advocacy of the Ombudsman and for the services that the program provided.



Photos courtesy of Quyanna Care Center, Nome AK, istock

*"After receiving a 30 day discharge notice, I was concerned. I had no idea that the Ombudsman could advocate for us. The Ombudsman took time out of his day to visit with us and to explain your services. The Ombudsman listened to our story, and advocated to get an extension in the facility to allow for more time for improvement. The extension was granted. Thank you very much for the service you provide to the community."*

# Top Five (5) Complaints

Received by OLTCO

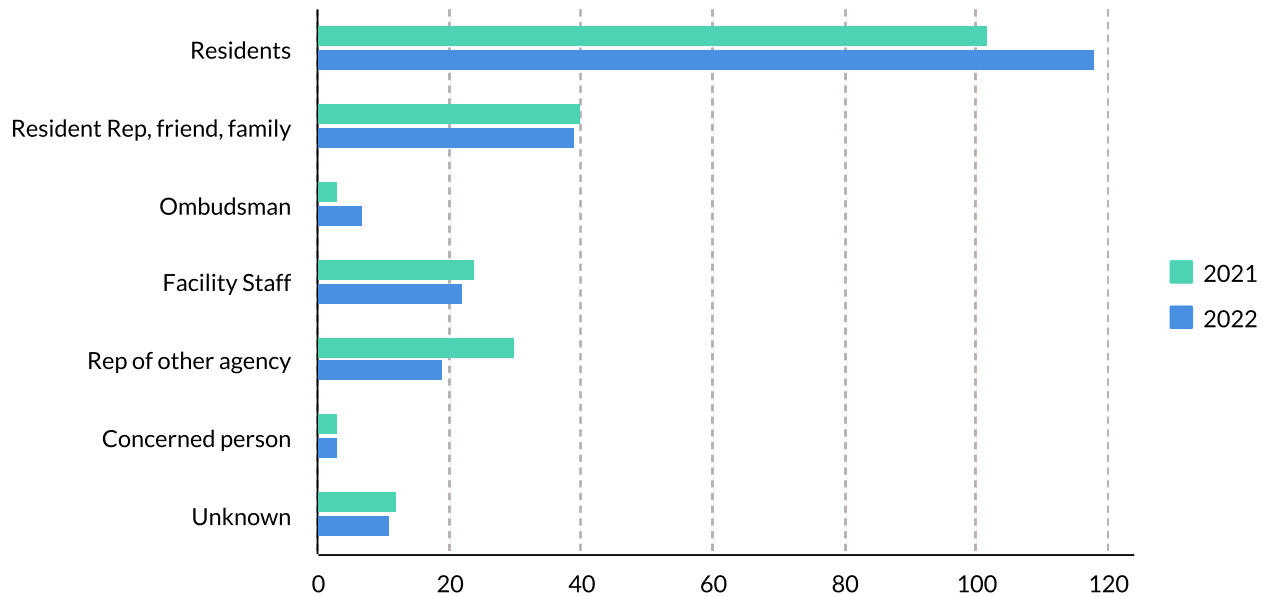
<b>Assisted Living Home</b>		<b>Skilled Nursing Facility</b>
Autonomy, Choice and Rights	1	Quality of Care
Systems and Others	2	Admission, Discharge and Evictions
Quality of Care	3	Autonomy, Choice and Rights
Admission, Discharge and Eviction	4	Systems and Others
Financial, Property	5	Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

## Definitions:

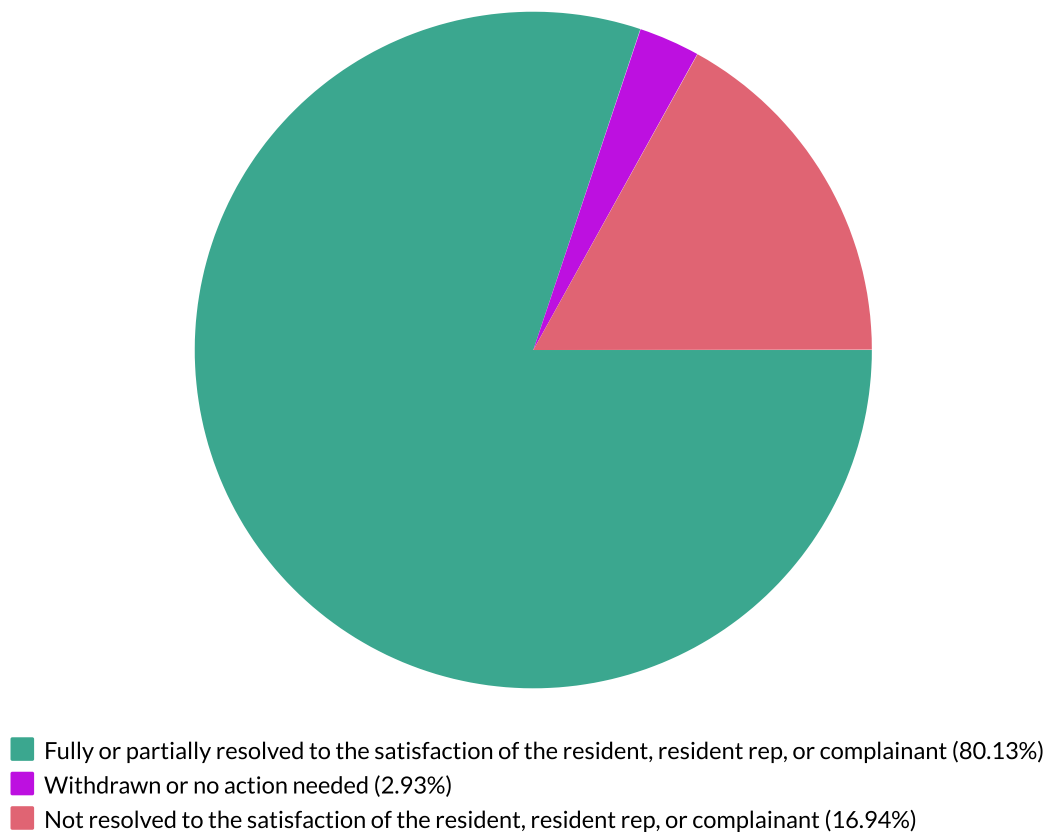
<b>Systems &amp; Other Issues</b>	Includes concerns that the resident representative or family member interferes with the resident's decision making, and preferences related to welfare, safety, or rights. This category also includes problems with services provided to a resident from an individual or entity not associated with the facility such as transportation or other similar problems.
<b>Quality of Care Issues</b>	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.
<b>Autonomy, Choice and Rights</b>	Includes resident being treated with rudeness, indifference or insensitivity. This also includes resident's rights or other preferences not being honored or respected.
<b>Admission, Discharge and Eviction</b>	Resident receives a discharge notice and does not want to leave the facility, resident discharged without receiving proper notice; this can also include issue with room assignments such as forced room changes within a facility.
<b>Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation</b>	Failure to protect a resident from harm or failure to meet the needs of the resident which results in a serious risk of health and safety.
<b>Financial, Property</b>	Incorrect billing for services, raising rates without notice. Loss or mismanagement, by the facility, of a resident's property including a resident's money or trust fund. Loss of personal property items such as dentures, hearing aids, glasses and watches.

# Who Submitted Complaints in 2022?

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



## OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS (2022)





# Volunteers are Essential to Our Work

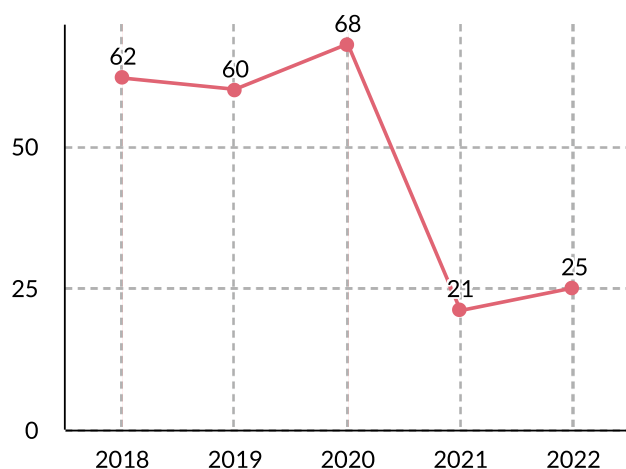
*"The heart of a volunteer is never measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others."*

**DeAnn Hollis**

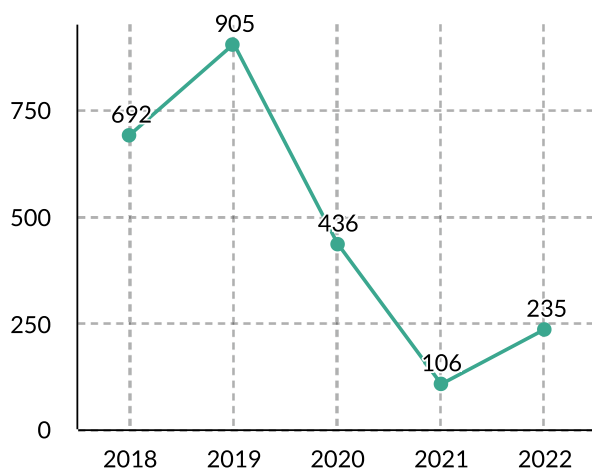
OLTCO volunteers increase resident access to the OLTCO program services. The OLTCO volunteers bring a variety of skills and experience to the program. The OLTCO volunteers are certified volunteers who complete extensive screening and training that prepares them to support residents in Long Term Care settings. OLTCO volunteers advocate for and empower residents to speak up for themselves. OLTCO volunteers educate residents of long-term care service about their rights and about the OLTCO services. Volunteers often mediate and participate in resolving complaints to the satisfaction of the resident. Volunteers are resident focused and truly make a difference in the lives of those living in long term care facilities.

After volunteers complete an extensive training program and shadowing, they are assigned to a facility near their home. Volunteers make regular visits to their assigned facility monthly. In Alaska, we have enjoyed the presence of volunteers across Alaska. This is helpful to the program because in some communities, the OLTCO staff may only visit with residents once or twice per year due to travel and budget limitations. It is great to have the ongoing presence of volunteers in these communities to build trusting relationships with seniors in long-term care.

**Active Volunteers**



**Volunteer Hours**



## **A huge thank you to our OLTCO volunteers for 2022**

Billy Anderson  
Jeanne Berger  
Deborah Simpson  
Coleen Turner  
Jacenda Fletcher

Malan Paquette  
Cortney Bramwell  
Malia Hayward  
Jan Stiers  
Aviva Borenstein

Victoria Winn  
Mindy Riley  
Gary Wells  
Charlene Walker  
Rebecca Gundunas

Marcia Watson  
Janet Long  
Wayne Wilken  
Margaret Varlamos  
Maureen Crosby

Joyce Courtney  
Carl Gresser  
Janet Long  
Laurie Ann Lavigne  
Deborah

*"The effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is."*

**Jim Carrey**

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

# Long-Term Care Ombudsmen in the Community



**27 Communities  
throughout  
Alaska**

**20 Nursing  
Facilities with  
954 Residents**

**619 Assisted  
Living Homes with  
4341 Residents**

**Territory of  
663,267 Miles**

## Testimonials:

"I have spoken to the LTC Ombudsman Specialist a couple of times and she has been incredibly kind and helpful to me"

"Thank you so much! Glad there are still nice, caring people in this world!"



"Many, many thanks for your oversight of this care! This is the fastest progress I've seen in quite some time. I remain hopeful for a quick solution."



Photos courtesy of Quyanne Care Center, Nome AK, istock

# Success Story



A resident in an assisted living home made a report with concerns regarding their legal representative. The resident expressed that the legal representative had been uncommunicative regarding their funds. The resident had no access to their own funds and had not received their personal expense allowance from the legal representative. In addition to this, the resident's room and board had not been paid to the assisted living home by their legal representative and the resident was at risk for a 30-day notice. The assisted living home, the resident as well as their care coordinator, had made several attempts to contact the legal representative to no avail. The legal representative remained unresponsive to all parties involved. The assisted living home reached out to our office for assistance in hopes that the LTCO could encourage an update from the resident's legal representative.

Upon receiving consent from the resident, The LTCO reached out to their legal representative via phone and email. The LTCO was able to successfully contact the legal representative to which they acknowledged the lack of communication was a result of phone connectivity issues. The resident's legal representative specified that issues with their phone system had recently been resolved. The LTCO informed the legal representative to be mindful of all parties involved as the insufficient communication can cause anxiousness. The LTCO reminded the legal representative that email is a beneficial form of communication for regular updates that could ease mutual concerns. The legal representative let the LTCO know that they are awaiting funds to be able to distribute the payments to both parties, the resident, and the assisted living home. The LTCO encouraged the legal representative to communicate current, and future updates with all parties to ensure that they are aware the legal representative is doing to their best and working on getting the payments disbursed. The LTCO followed up with the updates. Once the funds came in the legal representative was able to make a considerable payment towards the room and board to the assisted living home. The legal representative was also able to set aside an adequate payment to the resident for their personal expenses.

The assisted living home confirmed the payments were received by the legal representative. The assisted living home thanked the LTCO for all their help to induce a response from the legal representative. The assisted living home states that the resident is very happy and thankful that they have been able to purchase their personal items. The assisted living home asked if it would be okay to include the LTCO in the next few emails to the legal representative. The LTCO let the assisted living home know that they are more than welcomed to include the LTCO in future correspondence to the legal representative to encourage continuous communication.

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## Testimonial from an LTCO Volunteer:

*"Thank you for being the best professional and supportive State of Alaska Ombudsman representative to the Kenai Peninsula. Your passion, enthusiasm, and love for our senior residents have certainly made an impact on our long-term care facilities."*

*"I signed up over four years ago as a volunteer. You met me with open arms and immersed your assignment perfectly and with genuineness. You generously guided me as a volunteer in my commitment to the investment of our senior residents. When I had questions or concerns, you replied promptly and reinforced my personal passion as a volunteer."*

*Rebecca Gundunas (LTCO Volunteer since 2019)*



# Success Story



## **The Importance of Regular Routine Visits by the LTCO**

On a routine facility visit, the LTCO met a resident who needed some assistance.

The LTCO arrived at the assisted living home early in the afternoon. The normal routine is to meet with staff first. The LTCO asked staff if there were any concerns with residents. The staff reported that there were no concerns.

During this visit, the LTCO met with an elderly male who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease when he was younger. The resident has constricted limbs which makes it difficult for the resident to care for himself. The resident is his own decision maker, but he is also difficult to understand due to the Parkinson's. While visiting the resident, the LTCO observed that the resident could not access his water on a nearby table. He also had trouble reaching his iPad and phone due to the arrangement of the furniture in his room. The LTCO observed the resident struggling to use his iPad with his pinkies. After discussing a community resource with the resident and obtaining his consent, the LTCO contacted the Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA) to discuss her observation and to encourage the agency to visit with the resident to do an assessment. The agency would determine if the resident would qualify for any technology that may help him be able to communicate better. The agency could also work with the resident on helping him set up his room that would help make it easier for him to grab his drinks.

As the resident continued to share his concerns with the LTCO, the resident indicated that he does have a daughter who helps him pay his phone bills and credit cards but that she has been heard to reach. The daughter was suppose to also assist him with scheduling doctor's appointments, getting his medications and selling his home. The resident has not had a recent doctor's appointment, and at the time of the visit, he was almost out of meds. These are all tasks that the resident is unable to do by himself, so the LTCO began making calls to advocate on behalf of the resident.

After several phone calls, visits, and advocating on the resident's behalf, the resident's brother and a family friend became more involved. The resident's brother became his POA. The resident's brother purchased a new iPad and iPhone that is easier for the resident to use. The resident's family friend is a realtor who helped sell his home. The resident's brother also helped him to get on Medicaid and the resident no longer feels pressured to pay out of pocket for his care. The resident also has a new primary care physician who has seen him and put him on a new medication regiment. The resident was assessed by ATLA and he is currently on a waiting list. The resident's quality of life has improved, and he is excited for the possibilities.

If the Alaska Long-Term Care LTCO had not done a routine visit, the resident's situation may have been overlooked. This included the need for obtaining a new primary care doctor who is more responsive to the resident's needs. With assistance from his brother, the resident purchased a new accessible phone and Ipad which helps with improved communications with friends and family. With assistance, the resident was able to access new resources like Medicaid where the resident no longer feels pressured to pay out of pocket for his care. The resident was able to connect with ATLA to help address other assistive technology concerns. The resident's quality of life has improved and the resident was very appreciative of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's advocacy efforts.

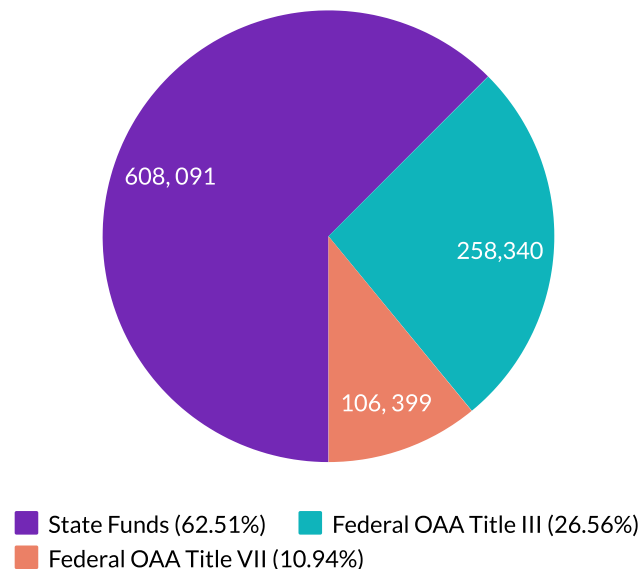
# Strengthening our Work in 2023

The Alaska Long-Term Care Ombudsman program staff participates in strategic planning meetings on an annual basis. Strategic planning sessions provide an opportunity for the program staff to review program data, evaluate program activities, and highlight the program accomplishments from the previous year. This is also an opportunity to discuss ways to strengthen the LTCO program to support seniors across the state of Alaska.

Priorities set for 2023 include:

- Expanding our volunteer program and recruiting volunteers in rural communities
- Increasing facility visits to Assisted Living Homes
- Updating Memoranda of Understanding with agency partners
- Strengthening our partnerships with network providers
- Identifying opportunities for community education and outreach across Alaska
- Increasing our presence on social media including posting public awareness campaigns about the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program
- Monitoring and providing input on legislation that impacts seniors in Alaska

## Alaska OLTCO Funding Sources



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### Testimonial from an LTCO Volunteer:

*"I decided to volunteer after my Uncle was diagnosed with dementia and passed away in the Spring of 2019 at an assisted living home in his early 70s. As a member of the Anchorage Police Department Citizen's academy alumni association they had posted about volunteer opportunities with the LTCO program. My grandparents had resided in an assisted living facility until they passed in 2004 and 2005. I would want these assisted living homes to have the same compassion and care I would want for my own parents and relatives. I came face-to-face with the possibility of needing an assisted living home in 2021/2022 if things did not improve with my own health and I would want these facilities to meet my own expectations and needs."*

Courtney Bramwell (LTCO Volunteer since 2019)





# Systems Advocacy

During 2022, the Alaska State Long Term Care Ombudsman (SLTCO) participated in two ongoing Legislative Advocacy Meetings.

- The Alaska Commission on Aging's Legislative Teleconferences which is a joint effort to keep track of senior-related bills. The bi-monthly meetings help to educate participating agencies and advocates about upcoming legislative bills that impact seniors. The forum is also an opportunity to share insight about issues and concerns around Medicaid and Senior assistance or benefits programs.
- The Mental Health Trust Authority hosts weekly advocacy meetings during the legislative session that provides updates on bills that impact beneficiaries including individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. This meeting is a gathering of agency staff, administrators, providers of services and beneficiaries.

Supporting Bills during the 2022 Legislative Session:

- Dementia Awareness (House Bill 308): The SLTCO provided written testimony in support of House Bill 308, which supports the development of a statewide dementia awareness program in the State of Alaska. House Bill 308 passed during this legislative session. The bill expands the states' efforts to improve systems of care and to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and dementia in Alaska. The SLTCO is a member of the steering committee for the Alaska Dementia Action Collaborative which is an ongoing workgroup that advocates for increasing awareness about Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia.
- Adult Home Care (Senate Bill 98): Senate Bill 98 provides Elderly Alaskans and Adults with Disabilities who are enrolled in Medicaid home and community-based waiver services with a new living option called *Adult Home Care*. The bill establishes a new licensed residential setting type and a new certified service that may enable people to remain in a community setting. This bill will help address the shortage of services and settings for seniors and other individuals who require help with the activities of daily living to live more independently. The SLTCO provided public testimony on how this bill may provide more options for seniors wanting to remain in their home communities. This bill did not pass in 2022 but will be up for review again in 2023.

## Alaska Poverty and Opportunity Task Force

The SLTCO spent 2022 participating as a member of the Alaska Poverty and Opportunity Task Force which was created through House Resolution 8. This Task Force met monthly to examine poverty in Alaska and how current statutes and regulations may affect poverty and the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The SLTCO was designated as a representative of the senior population and provided a presentation on the Intersection of Seniors and Poverty on March 9, 2022. The Task Force sunsets on December 31, 2022 after finalizing a written report with recommendations to the legislature.

Additional Advocacy Efforts: The SLTCO participates on the following Councils:

- Dementia Action Collaborative
- Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury (TABI) Advisory Council
- Disability and Aging Coalition
- Care Transitions Coalition
- Mortality Review Board
- Interagency Fraud Education Taskforce
- Alaska Investigations Roundtable on Fraud





# 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.
- A resident has the right to access the internet.
- A resident has the right to participate in activities inside and outside of the facility.

**AS 47.33.300**  
**42 CFR § 483.10**



# STATE of ALASKA LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

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