

PRESS RELEASE

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Monday, October 6, 2014

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State Calls Attention to the Residents of Long Term Care in Observance of *Residents Rights Month*

Dept on Aging Ombudsman program protects & defends residents rights

SPRINGFIELD - October is Residents' Rights month, as started in 1981 by the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long Term Care to highlight the importance of resident focused care. In keeping with this year's theme "Better Staffing: They Key to Better Care", Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) Director John K. Holton, PhD., is encouraging people to become educated about long term care. In addition to providing services for older adults to remain living in their homes, IDoA also serves residents living in long term care facilities.

"Our Long Term Care Ombudsman Program advocates for residents of long term care facilities. It is important we support nursing home residents, who often are among our most vulnerable population. Ombudsmen become the voice for residents to ensure they are safe and that their voices are heard by facility staff," said Director Holton.

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) handles regulation, licensing and inspections of long term care facilities. The Ombudsman Program serves as another safeguard for facility residents. Ombudsmen assist, empower, represent, and intervene on behalf of the more than 100,000 residents in skilled and intermediate licensed facilities, supportive living facilities, and assisted living and shared housing establishments. Ombudsmen inform residents and their families of their rights; resolve complaints and other issues; provide information on resident's needs and concerns to their families, facility staff and their community; and provide support for the resident's individualized care, which is also referred to as person centered care. To file a complaint about a facility, contact IDPH's 24-hour a day Nursing Home Hotline at 1-800-252-4343.

Earlier this summer, Governor Pat Quinn signed a new law to expand the authority of the long-term care ombudsman. Starting January 1, 2015, older adults and persons with disabilities ages 18 to 59 who live in a community setting will receive the same advocacy services as people who reside in nursing homes. The law also allows ombudsmen to have unrestricted private communication with any consenting resident without the additional consent of a legal guardian.

"Strengthening our capabilities is an essential part of Illinois' ongoing nursing home reform efforts. Resolving complaint investigations to the satisfaction of the resident is priority number one for ombudsmen. Improved accessibility helps ensure residents get the best care and are treated with dignity and respect which are basic standards for a resident's quality of life," said State Ombudsman Sally Petrone.

In 2009, Governor Pat Quinn formed the Nursing Home Task Force to examine state procedures and industry practices in order to ensure all Illinois nursing home residents are safe and receive the treatment appropriate for their condition. Task force efforts led to historic legislation to transform the Illinois nursing home system.

For information about programs to assist older adults in Illinois, their families and caregivers, call the Department on Aging at 1-800-252-8966 or (TTY, hearing impaired use) call 1-888-206-1327, or log on to the department website at: <http://www.illinois.gov/aging/>.

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