



## *Reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA): Strengthen ombudsman provisions*

### Why is the Older Americans Act (OAA) Important to Older Long-Term Care Consumers?

- *It funds services that help older adults get the care they need in their own homes.*
  - The OAA pays for a range of home and community-based services for older Americans, such as assisted transport services; home-delivered nutrition services; homemaker and chore services; and caregiver support.
- *It helps educate older Americans on their long-term care options and benefits.*
  - The OAA provides formula funding to states and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) for the purpose of providing information and assistance on long-term care options to older adults and caregivers. The law also authorizes Benefits Counseling programs in each state that assist older individuals, their family members and/or caregivers in applying for benefits and services, understanding their rights, exercising choice and maintaining their rights in solving disputes.
- *It protects elderly long-term care consumers.*
  - The OAA funds programs that work to prevent and investigate prevent elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.
  - The OAA requires each state to have a long-term care ombudsman program. Ombudsmen are advocates for residents of long-term care facilities. They work to resolve problems of individual residents and to bring about improvement in resident care and quality of life at the facility, local, state and national levels.

*The Older Americans Act MUST be a main priority in the final months of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.*

Without reauthorization, funding for the Older Americans Act's services would be endangered, placing the health and well-being of seniors in our nation in jeopardy.

## How Would Stronger Ombudsman Provisions Help Long-Term Care Consumers?

Stronger ombudsman program provisions would better protect the frail, vulnerable elders who depend on them. The provisions should be strengthened to:

- *Give ombudsmen greater freedom to represent the interests of residents.*
  - Currently, many ombudsmen are restricted from taking systemic advocacy actions, such as communicating with legislators, policymakers or the media, either at all or without prior approval from the agency in which they are housed. Under law, ombudsmen are charged with recommending changes to laws, regulations and policies. New provisions would make it clearer that ombudsmen have this authority and increase their autonomy.
- *Improve ombudsman access to residents.*
  - Ombudsmen face challenges gaining access to residents and finding a place to communicate privately with a resident. New provisions would give ombudsmen unimpeded, private access round-the-clock.
- *Reduce conflicts of interest.*
  - Ombudsmen may have other job responsibilities or be located in agencies that have responsibilities that can appear to or actually compete with the interests of residents. As a result, residents and families may feel the ombudsman is not truly working on their behalf. New provisions would give clarity regarding potential conflicts of interest and guidance for eliminating or remedying conflicts.

*The long-term care ombudsman program MUST be strengthened so ombudsmen can better protect frail, vulnerable elders who depend on them.*

*For more information on these issues, please visit*

<http://www.theconsumervoice.org/advocate/Reauthorize-Older-Americans-Act>

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