



The National  
**CONSUMER VOICE**  
for Quality Long-Term Care

**Statement on the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act**  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Listening Session  
March 22, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice) is the leading national voice representing consumers in issues relating to long-term care, whereby we advocate for policies that support quality care and quality of life for long-term care consumers and work to empower and educate consumers and advocates.

The Older Americans Act provides critical services and supports to older Americans and people with disabilities, including provisions to prevent and protect individuals from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; but also, to engage in advocacy to ensure their individual rights, well-being, and independence. Reauthorization of the Act provides an important opportunity to strengthen and reinforce these vital programs that have significantly improved the lives of older adults and their caregivers.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program has proven to be a vitally important program for supporting individuals living in long-term care facilities in accessing care and services, assisting, and facilitating transitions out of nursing homes to community-based settings, empowering residents and caregivers, and representing the interests of residents in the development and implementation of policies affecting long-term care and services. The demands upon the program have increased significantly, however, as cases and complaints have increased in complexity, volunteerism has declined, and due to the expansive growth of the assisted living industry which has substantially increased the numbers of long-term care facility residents.

Ombudsman programs need more support and resources to enable them to be responsive to resident concerns. The presence and intervention of an Ombudsman often results, not only in the timely resolution of a complaint or concern on behalf of a resident, but also in preventing a small problem from escalating into something bigger and more serious.

In addition, to ensure that Ombudsmen have the skills and support necessary to effectively advocate for residents and fulfill their broad responsibilities as laid out in

the Older Americans Act, a strong and well-equipped Resource Center is needed to provide them training and technical assistance for responding to the wide range of issues facing long-term care recipients. Thus, Consumer Voice recommends increases in the authorization levels for the Ombudsman Program and the Ombudsman Resource Center.

Effective advocacy for long-term care recipients also includes access to competent legal services to support individuals with such issues as access to benefits, protection from eviction, and protection of rights and independence when faced with inappropriate guardianship. This would include strengthening of the role of the Legal Services Developer, which is responsible for leading and coordinating strong and effective legal services within a state. Thus, Consumer Voice recommends additional appropriations and supports for legal services programs, as well as strengthening the Legal Services Developer position by requiring it to be a full-time position, held by an attorney with experience working with Older Americans Act program beneficiaries.

Consumer Voice would like to express support not only of Elder Justice programs of the Older Americans Act, but also other programs, including the National Family Caregiver Support Program and the Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center. While most of the work of these programs has focused on home and community-based services, we would recommend they cover the spectrum of long-term care. Increasingly both recipients of care and services, and those providing care, move between and across care settings; thus, the need for education and resources is great across the full continuum. Caregiving for loved ones continues even after a person enters a long-term care facility, thus families need resources, information, and tools to support their family member and ensure they are receiving the best possible care in the most appropriate setting most effectively.

As our population ages, demand for Older Americans Act programs will continue to grow. We encourage Congress to ensure the necessary resources are available to meet the demands of these programs and strengthen access and accessibility of Older Americans Act services.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in today's listening session. We, at Consumer Voice, look forward to working with you on these important issues.