

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 E. Boulevard Ave., Bismarck ND 58505**

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Long-Term Care Ombudsmen recognized during *National Volunteer Week*; Additional volunteers sought

BISMARCK, N.D. – Ombudsman: it is an odd sounding Swedish word that means someone who speaks on behalf of another. In the Aging Services system, an ombudsman helps residents of long-term care facilities and their families resolve concerns.

During *National Volunteer Week*, April 10-16, the North Dakota Department of Human Services Aging Services Division is thankful for the 30 volunteer long-term care ombudsmen who regularly visit assigned nursing homes and basic care facilities.

“We appreciate the dedication of these volunteers. They truly enhance the effectiveness of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program and provide an ongoing regular presence in facilities to help residents and their families resolve concerns about quality of care and quality of life,” said State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Karla Backman, LSW.

Backman said these volunteers assist her and the division’s six professional local long-term care ombudsmen in serving residents of about 249 long-term care facilities in North Dakota. She said they provide information about residents’ rights and advocate for them, while respecting their confidentiality and their wishes.

The division’s professional ombudsmen typically address concerns involving transfers and discharges from facilities, and personal care issues. The volunteers focus on responsiveness to requests for assistance, and concerns about autonomy and personal choice, while referring more serious concerns to Aging Services Division ombudsmen staff.

“We are not a regulatory program. We work with resident councils at facilities and individuals to teach residents self-advocacy and to help residents resolve things at the facility level in a way that promotes well-being and respects individual preferences,” Backman said.

Backman said her agency is always looking for more volunteers who want to make a difference in the well-being of older adults by volunteering a few hours per month as long-term care ombudsmen to advocate for residents’ wishes.

To volunteer as an ombudsman, contact the Aging and Disability Resource Link toll-free at **855-462-5465** and press option 1, or contact State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Karla Backman at 701-328-4617, or kbackman@nd.gov.

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