

Elder Advocate

Ombudsman Services of Contra Costa, Solano and Alameda



A New Era of Care

At Ombudsman Services, we are front-line advocates for those who live in long-term care, but we are also committed to working with the seniors in our communities, ensuring that all older adults on the aging journey thrive. While advocacy includes a variety of approaches, our mainstay has always been in-person interaction. Since COVID-19 began, visits have been limited, including for long-term care ombudsmen. And while this pandemic has certainly thrown us a curve ball, the innovation and ways our team has remained in contact with the older adults across our region are truly inspiring.

As you will read in this newsletter, we have come together with various individuals, community partners, the media, government and many more collaborators to address oversight issues and safety, fight for systemic

and policy change, and expand our reach through new programs and initiatives. And now that we're coming out on the other side, we are working closely with our state ombudsman to ramp up and resume visits. With updated guidance and safety measures in place, California is leading the way for LTC Ombudsman facility re-entry. We are pleased to be meeting with residents in person where possible.

No matter the circumstance, Ombudsman Services is always here to fight for, advocate for, and support our elders, but none of it would be possible without your support. Thank you for your commitment to our work and for empowering the aging in our community.

Best wishes,
Nicole Howell

No matter the circumstance, Ombudsman Services is always here to fight for, advocate for, and support our elders, but none of it would be possible without your support. Thank you for your commitment to our work and for empowering the aging in our community.

Inside This Issue

2

A Pandemic of Innovation
COVID Connections

3

Friendly Visiting & Telephone Reassurance
Building a Culture of Togetherness

4

Facility Re-Entry
A State Leading the Nation
Volunteer Partnerships

A Pandemic of Innovation

COVID Connections

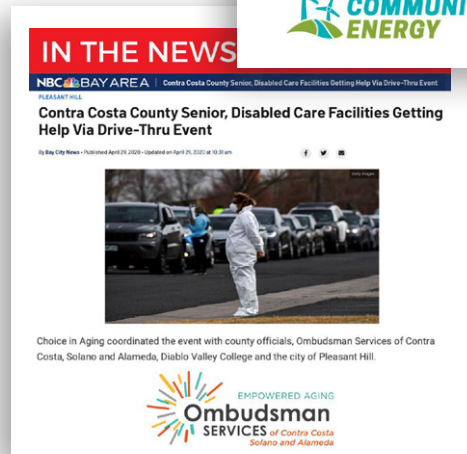
At Ombudsman Services, we are keenly aware of emergency preparedness, and from day one of this pandemic, our operations have been ongoing. Our team rapidly became an emergency response beacon and mechanism, helping meet the critical needs of our most vulnerable aging populations and the care staff who serve them. We've participated in facility care conferences discussing infectious control plans and supply needs, and talked daily with families and residents. And during the height of COVID-19, we completed hundreds of consultations with both facilities and individuals, putting them in touch with vital information and resources. But that's not all.

Media and Response to Breaking News:

Perhaps one of our biggest weapons has been our voice, collaborating with local media to educate

and speak out about residents' rights and the ever-evolving risks that face older adults and ensuring that their voices are being heard.

PPE Distribution: We've partnered with numerous individuals, local agencies, organizations, and government to provide necessary PPE and supplies to over 400 facilities across our region.

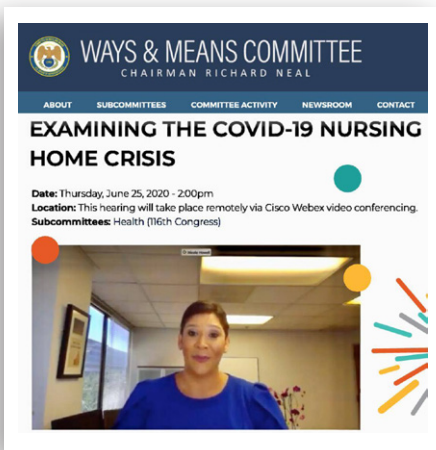


ELDER JUSTICE

LUNCH & LEARN

AWARENESS, PREVENTION & INNOVATION IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

The Elder Justice Lunch and Learn Series: June is typically when we hold our annual Elder Justice Forum, but once again, we found ourselves shifting gears and found a way to bring the same value, but in a different format through the Elder Justice Lunch & Learn program. This is a series of 12 free virtual webinars aimed at supporting elder care professionals to prevent and fight against elder abuse in the new age of COVID-19 and beyond. These webinars are held on the third Thursday of every month from 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM PDT. More information on the series can be found at ccombudsman.org.



The Ways and Means Health Subcommittee Hearing:

Examining the COVID-19 Nursing Home Crisis: On June 25, 2020, our Executive Director, Nicole Howell, and six other witnesses provided powerful testimony to help the committee better understand the landscape of long-term care in this country and how COVID-19 exploited its weaknesses, leaving residents without protection or oversight. We're so proud of our leader Nicole and the Ombudsman Organization for representing not just a nation but also a movement of long-term care residents and their families.

“This crisis is the direct result of poorly applied resources, inadequate staffing, and loosely imposed regulations that failed to protect these precious lives. In order to address these critical issues, I respectfully request that you consider the entirety of the recommendations I have provided to you.”

—Nicole Howell

Senior Technology: Long before COVID-19, we were empowering older and dependent adults, ensuring that they live free from abuse and neglect. Now, our work to educate, spread awareness, and partner with communities, families, and seniors is more important than ever. Restrictions placed on visits not only isolated older adults from their friends and families but also made it difficult for us advocates to do our jobs. Early on, we developed the Tablet Turn Over Project, collecting unused tablets or donations toward new tablets to provide to residents in need, allowing them to engage with those in the outside world. Another initiative we were selected to participate in is the Travis Credit Union Foundation Matching Gift Program. Every dollar donated through September 30, 2020, is matched dollar for dollar up to \$20,000 and goes right back into funding tablets, hotspots, and other necessary technology that facilitates communication with friends, family, and outside support systems.

Our Newest Program

Friendly Visiting & Telephone Reassurance

Building a Culture of Togetherness

Everyone knows that we are long-term care ombudsmen, but what many don't know is that we have several other programs in our organization that help our seniors in different ways. In August, we launched a new program, the Friendly Visiting and Telephone Reassurance Program, in Solano County. Designed to encourage socialization, Friendly Visiting is a FREE program that will help vulnerable adults engage with their community and connect with resources they may not have accessed otherwise.

We offer compassionate companionship and friendly visiting through weekly telephone calls, video conferencing, in-home visits (when safe), social groups, pen pals, friendly pet visits, and various other innovative ways to interact with clients to ensure health, well-being, and a sense of community.

In addition to building relationships, our trained team of staff and volunteers also assesses safety risks and any unmet needs. Our team will connect older individuals with resources such as nutrition assistance, medication reconciliation, fall risk management, and so much more.

We aim to empower individuals ages 60+ who may be homebound, bedbound, isolated, or at risk for loneliness and social isolation. If you or someone you may know is interested in making connections through this program or is interested in volunteering, please visit ccombudsman.org/friendly-visiting.



Facility Re-Entry

A State Leading the Nation

As California leads the way in facility re-entry, we're honored to help set a standard of advocacy and care that is smart, innovative, and protects everyone involved. Under close guidance from our state ombudsman, we have been preparing to resume safe in-person visits, and here's a snapshot of what that looks like.

- Our team has been trained in donning and doffing infection control gear, and all members are adequately supplied with necessary PPE.
- Each field ombudsman completes daily questionnaires about their health and is compliant with all facility requirements and documentation.
- Our team members are being tested and monitored daily—proceeding cautiously for the good of our residents and clientele.
- The ombudsman team is currently only visiting non-COVID-19-positive facilities, and we are still working on complaints remotely.

“I am profoundly touched by the joy reflected in the resident's face when they first see the ombudsman. The joy swiftly changes to deep sadness, because they haven't seen or held their loved ones in such a very long time. A resident wondered out loud if she would ever hug her grandson again before she dies. It broke my heart.”

—Debra Hanschar
Lead Regional Supervisor—Contra Costa

Become a Volunteer

There are many ways to volunteer, from becoming a trained field ombudsman to helping out in the office. As a field ombudsman, you will be part of a staff-supported team of volunteers with countless opportunities to make an immediate impact on the safety and quality of life of those living in long-term care facilities.

If you would like to learn more about our upcoming volunteer training, leadership opportunities on the board, the MSW Internship Program, or other ways to give of your time, please **contact our team by calling (925) 685-2070 or email info@ccombudsman.org**.

For volunteer opportunities with our Friendly Visiting team in Solano County, you can fill out an application online by visiting ccombudsman.org/friendly-visiting, or to get in touch with our program leader, call 707-644-4194 or email buildingconnections@ccombudsman.org.



phone: 925.685.2070
fax: 925.685.2049
2255 Contra Costa Blvd., Ste. 204
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523
www.ccombudsman.org

We're Grateful for the Gift of YOU!

We have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from our community members and partners during this time. Without your generosity, our work wouldn't be possible. As you can see from the above, your help has united hundreds of older adults with loved ones, technology, support, and necessary free resources. We want to send a special thank you to the following partners:



LAFAYETTE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
Enhancing Life, Culture, Community



Antioch Community
Foundation



HILLENDALE
HOME CARE



JOHN MUIR
HEALTH
FOUNDATION



Rotary Club of
Walnut Creek
Sunrise