

**Written Testimony for HB 3413**

**Valerie Wicklund**

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I am a certified ombudsman volunteer for the Oregon Long-Term Care Ombudsman program. I work in two assisted living facilities in Sandy, Oregon. Visiting the facilities each week, I have been able to develop relationships with the residents. Many of them feel comfortable coming to me with their problems and concerns. Residents have rights, including rights to be free from abuse and neglect and the ability to make choices about their care. I work with the residents, the facility, and other organizations as needed to uphold resident rights. All contacts are confidential and free.

When I introduce myself to a resident as their “Ombudsman”, they usually look at me curiously and ask “what’s that?”. I explain that the word “ombudsman” means “advocate”. I am there to advocate for them and I’m on their side. I’m not working for the facility or for any other organization. I am there to advocate for the residents. In a typical visit I talk to residents about their concerns; investigate concerns and complaints; advocate for a solution; and educate the residents, family, and staff. I have incredible support from my Deputy Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Steph DeLage, who advises me when I am unsure of a course of action and who is always available to talk over the issues.

I handle many different types of complaints, but the most common are that the residents are not getting the correct medication at the right times, assistance with eviction notices, poor quality of food, and poor quality of care. I have also had requests for assistance with Medicaid and social security benefits and been able to direct the resident to the appropriate agency for assistance. I made presentations at staff meetings and resident council meetings to inform and educate people about the program.

I can’t explain to you what it means to an elderly resident, who has no family support, to have someone like me be there for them. So many residents have expressed their gratitude and appreciation to me for my help and I wonder what would have happened if I weren’t there to advocate for them. In my opinion, the program is essential to protect the rights of these vulnerable citizens as they approach the end of their lives.

Currently, the program has seven deputy long-term care ombudsman. Each deputy ombudsman supervises up to 35 volunteers. The deputies also visit facilities where there is no volunteer ombudsman assigned and work the cases just like a volunteer would. HB 3413 would add three additional deputy ombudsmen who would be able to supervise up to a total of 105 additional volunteer ombudsmen. This would mean ombudsmen like me could visit 80 more facilities throughout the year and talk with 4,800 more residents each year. I encourage you to support HB 3413 and provide support for elderly Oregonians living in long-term care facilities.