

To: Chair Sara Gelser
Vice Chair Dick Anderson
Sen. Kate Lieber
Sen. Art Robinson
Sen. Kathleen Taylor

The Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program (RFO) supports individuals experiencing mental health concerns, intellectual or developmental disabilities in each of the licensed or certified homes and facilities in Oregon. The RFO advocates for and educates individuals regarding their civil and human rights, empowering individuals and those in their lives to speak up and report issues impacting their personal liberty, quality of life, and self-determination. My role as a Certified Ambassador is to conduct home visits in each of the licensed facilities in Multnomah County with the goal of meeting all residents and providing resources to contact RFO should they have any concerns. The promise of confidentiality in these conversations, investigations and records is imperative to ombudsman services of any field, and those served by the RFO rely completely on this promise in seeking assistance.

As a Certified Ambassador with RFO, I am writing to encourage you to support SB 97. The bill protects some of the most vulnerable Oregonians and those in their lives from retaliation after speaking to or reporting a concern to Ombudsman representatives by shielding Ombudsman records from court order.

SB 97 ensures that individuals can bring concerns to RFO without having to worry about retaliation or other possible consequences. Based on the model language from the United States Ombudsman Association, SB 97 offers complete protection by disallowing court orders of highly sensitive and protected information regarding an individual and the details of their requests for assistance. Without this confidentiality protection, many individuals feel uncomfortable and unable to report concerns.

The confidentiality not only protects the individuals themselves, but it also allows care workers to report concerns without fear of retaliation from their employer. Many individuals within the population RFO serves experience communication and other barriers that make it extremely important for care workers to have the ability to come forward with concerns. Similarly, neighbors, family members, case managers, and other professionals must not be discouraged from reporting issues for fear of repercussions toward themselves or individuals in the home.

SB 97 provides needed protection for people to act in a principled way and report issues as they arise at residential facilities. Please recommend that SB 97 pass to the floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Eva Alfonso
RFO Certified Ambassador