

Thank you, Committee Members for this opportunity to express my support for the Long Term Care Ombudsman, specifically the Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program, an agency who will speak on behalf of a disabled individual who may not have anyone to speak and advocate for their rights. I am an advocate for a much loved family member and I find this agencies help essential for their support and knowledge. I have thought to myself, how can I express in words how invaluable, necessary and how very important this agency is to the disabled members who live in our communities. Well, my mind kept coming back to the Willowbrook Institution which was exposed and shut down for the atrocities, neglect, abuse and violence committed against the physically and mentally disabled, exposed by a young reporter, Geraldo Rivera in the 1970s'. I began to realize why Willowbrook kept coming into my thoughts, it was because of the horrendous and shocking abuses against the most vulnerable of people, who had suffered at the hands of the very people who were responsible for their care. This must and can not ever be allowed to happen again. So, we must support this agency, The Residential Ombudsman Program. The deputies and volunteers work tirelessly for the protection of the disabled and advocate on the behalf of the disabled for their rights to decent care, decent food, decent clothing, decent housing and most importantly, the right to be treated as the valuable human beings that they are. How very different it could have been for the lives of the disabled at Willowbrook, if there had been an agency such as our states agency, The Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program.

I was fortunate to find and contact this agency, I very often felt alone and worried endlessly about issues I had to confront by myself in dealing with a long term care agency and having to navigate and understand how state agencies worked. Since my contact with Residential Facilities Ombudsman all the difficulties I faced in the past have been resolved by the members of this agency. I can honestly say, the people of this agency have never failed to address concerns, helped to answer questions, or to immediately response and take action to help. This agency has been professional, knowledgeable, courteous and has approached all concerns with great attention to detail and follow up on all cases to make certain the issues were addressed appropriately with an acceptable outcome. Again, my thanks for the opportunity to comment on the importance of the Residential Ombudsman Program. Please fund this much needed agency. It is so very valuable and needed for the protection of the lives of the disabled and the family members of the disabled, who love and worry about them.