

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Because of mental or physical disability or simply advanced age, residents of long-term care facilities are among the County's most vulnerable citizens. Fortunately, knowledgeable and committed advocates called "ombudsmen" are available through the DHS Area Agency on Aging to visit the homes regularly and respond to residents' problems, ranging from family or caregiver relationships and health concerns to repairing a wheelchair or expediting a disability payment.

One of the greatest challenges to the residents—and to the ombudsmen—came when the state imposed more stringent regulations on personal care homes in 2005. Since then, many of these facilities have closed, forcing their residents to find new homes, often in a few weeks. As you will see from the following stories, our ombudsmen helped the displaced residents through this traumatic experience and earned their lasting gratitude.

To learn more about the program and how you can help as a volunteer, call 412-350-5791.



Marc Cherna
 Director, Allegheny County
 Department of Human Services



Dan Onorato
 Allegheny County Executive



Dolores Cline, 83, relaxes outside at Skyvue Terrace and is well thanks to Ombudsman Terry Brennan

I imagine that you have lived for the last five, maybe 10, years in a personal care home. You need the extra help because of a disability or simply because of advancing age. The home isn't luxurious, but, because you've long since lost touch with most of your relatives, it has become your world and the other residents your family. Then one day you learn that the home is closing and, in a month or less, you will have to find someplace else to live – a place you can afford on a monthly income of \$1,000 or less. Panic sets in. You don't know where to turn, or what to do.

That is what happened to Carl Christner. After the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare instituted new, more stringent regulations for personal care homes, the home where Carl had lived faced repairs the owner deemed too costly, so he closed it. Fortunately, however, Carl had a "friend" to guide him through the move. Ombudsman Ron Feltz arranged for him to visit several homes on the Northside, where he wanted to remain, and – with other involved agencies – helped him make the move. **"I couldn't have done it without Ron,"** Carl says. He's very pleased with his new home at Henderson House, where he has made new friends. And he's delighted that he can continue to play right field on the Mercy softball team.



Dolores Cline, 83, and **Ray Keefer, 39**, enjoy reading outside at Skyvue Terrace



Jim Sljva, 64, with his wife **Mary**, is now progressing well thanks to Ombudsman Paul Naiditch

Most personal care home operators have their residents' interests at heart and help as best they can in the moving process. Jack (not his real name), however, encountered two who did not, and the experience was so traumatic that he chose not to be identified here. When the home where he was earning his keep as a dishwasher was closed, the owner promptly transferred him to another unlicensed facility – “a shack,” he called it – where the owner refused to give him his clothes and personal belongings and chased Ombudsman Dennis Govachini to his car when he came to visit. The county, she told Jack, would take him away and put him in an “insane asylum.” Finally, with support from the local police, Dennis and a co-worker were able to move Jack to a reputable, licensed facility nearby. Money remains a problem, though – at 60, Jack is too young for Social Security – so Dennis is helping him look for other sources of income, through part-time employment or disability, or less costly housing, possibly through the Domiciliary Care program.

Like many personal care home operators, the manager of St. Lufthild's in McKeesport welcomed Ombudsman Terry Brennan when he came to help Ray Keefer, 39, and Dolores Cline, 83, find a new place to live. An initial assessment, however, showed that both needed more than personal care, so Terry found accommodations for them at Skyvue Terrace, a nursing home in Spring Hill. Mrs. Cline hopes to find another personal care home after she completes her

post-operative rehabilitation, but Ray is happy with his new placement. He enjoys the excursions (especially the fishing trips) and going outside for a smoke with his new friends. Both look forward to visits from Terry.

Jim Sljva, 64, and his wife, Mary, didn't experience a facility closure, but their experience has been equally traumatic. On the same day that Mary was diagnosed with breast cancer, Jim suffered a massive stroke. Both were hospitalized, and Jim was sent to a nursing center for six months, then transferred to Harmarville Rehabilitation Center for two weeks of more intensive therapy. That stretched out to six weeks, and when he was ready to return to the nursing center, the manager said he was at the end of a long waiting list. Placed instead in a facility 20 miles away, where his family could visit only rarely, he became depressed and his condition deteriorated. That's when Mary called Ombudsman Paul Naiditch. Paul found that the center was obliged to hold the bed for Jim – he had been temporarily transferred, not discharged – and within two days he was back at the center. With support from the therapists there and encouragement from his family, Jim is now at home and progressing well. “We are ever so grateful to Paul,” Mary says.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
DHS Area Agency on Aging
SeniorLine: 412-350-5460 or 1-800-344-4319
TTY: 412-350-2727

“We could never have managed it all without him. He truly cared about us.”

The Allegheny County DHS/AAA Ombudsman Program advocates for nursing home and personal care home residents, helping them to resolve problems related to their rights and quality of care. Consumers in adult day services, Domiciliary Care and community-based care programs also qualify for Ombudsman services. The primary goal of this program is to assure quality care with respect and dignity for all consumers of long-term care services.

Each year, the local Ombudsman Program's six staff persons and 26 certified volunteers **help nearly 300 residents** in long-term care to resolve problems related to their rights and quality of care. The program was recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging for “**going above and beyond**” at the State Enrichment Conference in March – its third award in the last four years.