

§ 1324.11 Establishment of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

(a) The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman shall be an entity headed by the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, who shall carry out all of the functions and responsibilities set forth in § 1324.13 and, directly and/or through local Ombudsman entities, the duties set forth in § 1324.19.

(b) The State agency shall establish the Office and thereby carry out the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in either of the following ways:

(1) The Office is a distinct entity, separately identifiable, and located within or connected to the State agency; or

(2) The State agency enters into a contract or other arrangement with any public agency or nonprofit organization which shall establish a separately identifiable, distinct entity as the Office.

(c) The State agency shall require that the Ombudsman serve on a full-time basis. In providing leadership and management of the Office, the functions, responsibilities, and duties, as set forth in §§ 1324.13 and 1324.19 are to constitute the entirety of the Ombudsman's work. The State agency or other agency carrying out the Office shall not require or request the Ombudsman to be responsible for leading, managing or performing the work of non-ombudsman services or programs except on a time-limited, intermittent basis.

(1) This provision does not limit the authority of the Ombudsman program to provide ombudsman services to populations other than residents of long-term care facilities so long as the appropriations under the Act are utilized to serve residents of long-term care facilities, as authorized by the Act.

(2) [Reserved]

(d) The State agency, and other entity selecting the Ombudsman, if applicable, shall ensure that the Ombudsman meets minimum qualifications which shall include, but not be limited to, demonstrated expertise in:

(1) Long-term services and supports or other direct services for older individuals or individuals with disabilities;

(2) Consumer-oriented public policy advocacy;

(3) Leadership and program management skills; and

(4) Negotiation and problem resolution skills.

(e) Where the Ombudsman has the legal authority to do so, they shall establish policies and procedures, in consultation with the State agency, to carry out the Ombudsman program in accordance with the Act. Where State law does not provide the Ombudsman with legal authority to establish policies and procedures, the Ombudsman shall recommend policies and procedures to the State agency or other agency in which the Office is organizationally located, and such agency

shall establish Ombudsman program policies and procedures as recommended by the Ombudsman. Where local Ombudsman entities are designated within area agencies on aging or other entities, the Ombudsman and/or appropriate agency shall develop such policies and procedures in consultation with the agencies hosting local Ombudsman entities, area agencies on aging, and representatives of the Office. The policies and procedures must address the following:

(1) *Program administration.* Policies and procedures regarding program administration must include, but not be limited to:

(i) A requirement that the agency in which the Office is organizationally located must not have personnel policies or practices that prohibit the Ombudsman from performing the functions and responsibilities of the Ombudsman, as set forth in § 1324.13, or from adhering to the requirements of section 712 of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3058g). Nothing in this provision shall prohibit such agency from requiring that the Ombudsman, or other employees or volunteers of the Office, adhere to the personnel policies and procedures of the entity which are otherwise lawful.

(ii) A requirement that an agency hosting a local Ombudsman entity must not have personnel policies or practices which prohibit a representative of the Office from performing the duties of the Ombudsman program or from adhering to the requirements of section 712 of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3058g). Nothing in this provision shall prohibit such agency from requiring that representatives of the Office adhere to the personnel policies and procedures of the host agency which are otherwise lawful.

(iii) A requirement that the Ombudsman shall, on a regular basis, monitor the performance of local Ombudsman entities which the Ombudsman has designated to carry out the duties of the Office.

(iv) A description of the process by which the agencies hosting local Ombudsman entities will coordinate with the Ombudsman in the employment or appointment of representatives of the Office.

(v) Standards to ensure that the Office and/or local Ombudsman entities provide prompt response to complaints, with priority given to complaints regarding abuse, neglect, exploitation, and complaints that are time sensitive. At a minimum, the standards shall require consideration of the severity of the risk to the resident, the imminence of the threat of or potential harm to the resident, and the opportunity for mitigating harm to the resident through provision of Ombudsman program services.

(vi) Procedures that clarify appropriate fiscal responsibilities of the local Ombudsman entity, including but not limited to clarifications regarding access to programmatic fiscal information by appropriate representatives of the Office.

(vii) Procedures that establish standard retention periods for files, records, and other information maintained by the Ombudsman program and allowable methods of storage and destruction.

(2) *Procedures for access.* Policies and procedures regarding timely access to facilities, residents, and appropriate records (regardless of format and including, upon request, copies of such records) by the Ombudsman and representatives of the Office must include, but not be limited to:

(i) Access to enter all long-term care facilities at any time during a facility's regular business hours or regular visiting hours, and at any other time when access may be required by the circumstances to be investigated;

(ii) Access to all residents to perform the functions and duties set forth in §§ 1324.13 and 1324.19;

(iii) Access to the name and contact information of the resident representative, if any, where needed to perform the functions and duties set forth in §§ 1324.13 and 1324.19;

(iv) Access to review the medical, social, and other records relating to a resident, if:

(A) The resident or resident representative communicates informed consent to the access and the consent is given in writing or through the use of auxiliary aids and services;

(B) The resident or resident representative communicates informed consent orally, visually, or through the use of auxiliary aids and services, and such consent is documented contemporaneously by a representative of the Office in accordance with such procedures;

(C) The resident is unable to communicate consent to the review and has no legal representative, and the representative of the Office obtains the approval of the Ombudsman; or

(D) Access is necessary in order to investigate a complaint, the resident representative refuses to consent to the access, a representative of the Office has reasonable cause to believe that the resident representative is not acting in the best interests of the resident, and the representative of the Office obtains the approval of the Ombudsman.

(v) Access to the administrative records, policies, and documents, to which the residents have, or the general public has access, of long-term care facilities;

(vi) Access of the Ombudsman to, and, upon request, copies of all licensing and certification records maintained by the State with respect to long-term care facilities; and

(vii) Reaffirmation that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule (42 U.S.C. 1301 *et seq.*), 45 CFR part 160 and 45 CFR part 164, subparts A and E, does not preclude release by covered entities of resident private health information or other resident identifying information to the Ombudsman program, including but not limited to residents' medical, social, or other records, a list of resident names and room numbers, or information collected in the course of a State or Federal survey or inspection process.

(3) *Disclosure.* Policies and procedures regarding disclosure of files, records, and other information maintained by the Ombudsman program must include, but not be limited to:

(i) Provision that the files, records, and information maintained by the Ombudsman program may be disclosed only at the discretion of the Ombudsman or designee of the Ombudsman for such purpose and in accordance with the criteria developed by the Ombudsman, as required by § 1324.13(e);

(ii) Prohibition of the disclosure of identifying information of any resident with respect to whom the Ombudsman program maintains files, records, or information, except as otherwise provided by § 1324.19(b)(5) through (8), unless:

(A) The resident or the resident representative communicates informed consent to the disclosure and the consent is given in writing or through the use of auxiliary aids and services;

(B) The resident or resident representative communicates informed consent orally, visually, or through the use of auxiliary aids and services and such consent is documented contemporaneously by a representative of the Office in accordance with such procedures; or

(C) The disclosure is required by court order.

(iii) Prohibition of the disclosure of identifying information of any complainant with respect to whom the Ombudsman program maintains files, records, or information, unless:

(A) The complainant communicates informed consent to the disclosure and the consent is given in writing or through the use of auxiliary aids and services;

(B) The complainant communicates informed consent orally, visually, or through the use of auxiliary aids and services and such consent is documented contemporaneously by a representative of the Office in accordance with such procedures; or

(C) The disclosure is required by court order.

(iv) Standard criteria for making determinations about disclosure of resident information when the resident is unable to provide consent and there is no resident representative or the resident representative refuses consent as set forth in § 1324.19(b)(5) through (8);

(v) Prohibition on requirements for mandatory reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation to adult protective services or any other entity, long-term care facility, or other concerned person, including when such reporting would disclose identifying information of a complainant or resident without appropriate consent or court order, except as otherwise provided in § 1324.19(b)(5) through (8); and

(vi) Adherence to the provisions of paragraph (e)(3) of this section, regardless of the source of the request for information or the source of funding for the services of the Ombudsman program, notwithstanding section 705(a)(6)(C) of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3058d(a)(6)(C)).

(4) *Conflicts of interest.* Policies and procedures regarding conflicts of interest must establish mechanisms to identify and remove or remedy conflicts of interest as provided in § 1324.21, including:

(i) Ensuring that no individual, or member of the immediate family of an individual, involved in the employment or appointment of the Ombudsman has or may have a conflict of interest;

(ii) Requiring that other agencies in which the Office or local Ombudsman entities are organizationally located have policies in place to prohibit the employment or appointment of an Ombudsman or a representative of the Office who has or may have a conflict that cannot be adequately removed or remedied;

(iii) Requiring that the Ombudsman take reasonable steps to refuse, suspend, or remove designation of an individual who has a conflict of interest, or who has a member of the immediate family who has or may have a conflict of interest, which cannot be removed or remedied;

(iv) Establishing the methods by which the Office and/or State agency will periodically review and identify conflicts of the Ombudsman and representatives of the Office; and

(v) Establishing the actions the Office and/or State agency will require the Ombudsman or representatives of the Office to take in order to remedy or remove such conflicts.

(5) *Systems advocacy.* Policies and procedures related to systems advocacy must assure that the Office is required and has sufficient authority to carry out its responsibility to analyze, comment on, and monitor the development and implementation of Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and other government policies and actions that pertain to long-term care facilities and services and to the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents, and to recommend any changes in such laws, regulations, and policies as the Office determines to be appropriate.

(i) Such procedures must exclude the Ombudsman and representatives of the Office from any State lobbying prohibitions to the extent that such requirements are inconsistent with section 712 of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3058g).

(ii) Nothing in this part shall prohibit the Ombudsman or the State agency or other agency in which the Office is organizationally located from establishing policies which promote consultation regarding the determinations of the Office related to recommended changes in laws, regulations, and policies. However, such a policy shall not require a right to review or pre-approve positions or communications of the Office.

(6) *Designation.* Policies and procedures related to designation must establish the criteria and process by which the Ombudsman shall designate and/or refuse, suspend, or remove designation of local Ombudsman entities and representatives of the Office.

(i) Such criteria should include, but not be limited to, the authority to refuse, suspend, or remove designation of a local Ombudsman entity or representative of the Office in situations in which an identified conflict of interest cannot be removed or remedied as set forth in § 1324.21.

(ii) [Reserved]

(7) *Grievance process.* Policies and procedures related to grievances must establish a grievance process for the receipt and review of grievances regarding the determinations or actions of the Ombudsman and representatives of the Office.

(i) Such process shall include an opportunity for reconsideration of the Ombudsman decision to refuse, suspend, or remove designation of a local Ombudsman entity or representative of the Office. Notwithstanding the grievance process, the Ombudsman shall make the final determination to designate or to refuse, suspend, or remove designation of a local Ombudsman entity or representative of the Office.

(ii) [Reserved]

(8) *Determinations of the Office.* Policies and procedures related to the determinations of the Office must ensure that the Ombudsman, as head of the Office, shall be able to independently make determinations and establish positions of the Office, and carry out the functions and responsibilities authorized by § 1324.13 without interference and shall not be constrained by or necessarily represent the determinations or positions of the State agency or other agency in which the Office is organizationally located.

(9) *Emergency planning.* Policies and procedures related to emergency planning must include continuity of operations procedures using an all-hazards approach, and coordination with emergency management agencies.