

**HB 671 – Nursing Facilities – Medicaid Quality Assessment – Funding of
Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman**
House Appropriations Committee
March 10, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 671.

HB 671 would increase funding to Maryland's Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman by directing to the Office 3% of the special funds from the Maryland quality assessment.

Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Programs exist in every state. They play a critical role in serving as advocates for older adults in nursing facilities and assisted living facilities. The LTC Ombudsman Programs are responsible for ensuring regular and timely access to their services by making routine visits to facilities and meeting with residents. In addition, they respond to complaints and advocate for residents. In FY25, Maryland's Ombudsmen made 7,250 visits to assisted living facilities and nursing homes and investigated 4,000 resident complaints, with 86% of those complaints being resolved to the satisfaction of the resident.

The LTC Ombudsman Programs are partially funded by the Older Americans Act. In addition, they receive state funding that varies significantly from state to state. The share of federal contributions to the LTC Ombudsman Programs across the country has decreased from 58.8% in 2000 to 46.9% in 2019. **Studies have found that states that have increased funding for their LTC Ombudsman Programs see better nursing home resident care, including fewer residents who are prescribed antipsychotic medications and fewer incidents of restraint and seclusion.**¹

It is difficult to determine precisely how much each state is spending on their LTC Ombudsman Programs, but data from the Government Accountability Office (GOA) permits some general estimates.

In FY22, the GOA reported that across the country, LTC Ombudsman Programs served more than 3 million residents, at a total funding level of \$140 million. That equates to a cost of

¹ Katherine A. Kennedy. Trends in Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Funding and Its Relationship to Nursing Home Resident Care. The Millbank Quarterly (2025). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41132113/>

roughly \$46/resident.² In Maryland, it is estimated that about 54,000 people reside in long-term care facilities.³ To fund Maryland's Long-Term Ombudsman Program at a level that would simply align with the average across the country, the Office would need about \$2.5 million. Currently Maryland's LTC Ombudsman has a budget of \$1.5 million.

There are additional challenges for the Maryland LTC Ombudsman Program. Seventy-seven percent of Maryland assisted living facilities have nine or fewer beds.⁴ It is much more difficult to go into many small facilities than a few large ones. In addition, Maryland has a significant problem with small unlicensed assisted living facilities, which are not included in the official bed count. Unlicensed facilities frequently provide poor accommodations and care and financially exploit their residents.⁵ Even though these facilities are unlicensed, the Maryland Ombudsmen make efforts to assist those residents and resolve problems.

Since the Maryland LTC Ombudsman Program is already underfunded when compared to the national average, since better-than-average funded LTC Ombudsman Programs have been shown to result in better nursing home care, and since Maryland LTC Ombudsmen have an especially difficult job addressing the needs of the many residents living in numerous small assisted living facilities and in unlicensed facilities, it is imperative that the state increase funding for the program.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 671 and urges a favorable report.

² Government Accountability Office. Long-Term Care: Information on the Ombudsman Program (2024). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-107209.pdf>

³ Maryland Department of Aging. <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/state-long-term-care-ombudsman.aspx>

⁴ Maryland Health Care Commission. Small Assisted Living Programs Study Recommendations Report January 2024. https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/home/workgroups/documents/assisted_living/wkgrp_al_rpt.pdf

⁵ The Baltimore Sun. November 21, 24, 26; December 3,9,10,11, 12, and 31, 2025.