



ALLIANCE FOR BETTER
LONG TERM CARE

May 5, 2026

House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island General Assembly
HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov

Re: Support for HR 7059, Appropriation for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HR 7059

My name is Keri Salinger, and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Better Long Term Care, the nonprofit organization that has housed Rhode Island's State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program for over 30 years. I have worked with this program for 15 years and have overseen its finances throughout that time, including the past two years as Executive Director.

I write in strong support of HR 7059, which would provide a \$100,000 appropriation to the Office of Healthy Aging for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.

Over the past 15 years, the state appropriation for this program has never increased, not even to account for cost of living adjustments. During that same time, I have seen the program navigate economic downturns, rising costs, and increasing demand, all without receiving a single additional dollar in state funding. Level funding over this period has effectively resulted in a significant reduction in real resources.

The impact is clear. We have lost staff, as it is simply not sustainable to retain employees in a program that cannot offer salary growth over time. At the same time, the number of complaints, cases, and required activities has steadily increased, along with Rhode Island's aging population. Today, fewer Ombudsmen are responsible for serving more residents across a growing and increasingly complex Long Term Care system.

This matters because the Ombudsman Program delivers measurable results. Nationally, programs investigated over 205,000 complaints in FY 2024 and resolved or partially resolved 71% of them to the satisfaction of residents or complainants. These are not abstract outcomes, they represent real problems solved for residents who often have no other independent advocate.

Research consistently shows that program effectiveness is directly tied to funding and staffing levels. Below a certain threshold, the program cannot fulfill its federal mandate. Rhode Island is currently well below widely recognized benchmarks, with a small number of staff responsible for residents across nursing homes, assisted living residences, and other Long Term Care settings statewide.

The Ombudsman Program is also unique. It is the only entity in Rhode Island whose sole statutory role is to represent the interests of the resident. Other agencies regulate, pay for, or operate within the system, but only the Ombudsman is dedicated exclusively to the resident's voice, operating under a confidentiality structure that allows individuals to safely raise concerns.

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The work itself has also become more complex. Increasingly, Ombudsmen are handling cases involving discharges and evictions, situations where residents face losing their homes and have little power to advocate for themselves. These cases require significant time, expertise, and support.

As the organization that houses this program, we have a direct view into both its impact and its limitations. The need is clear, the demand is growing, and the current funding level is no longer sufficient to sustain the program's essential work.

An investment in the Ombudsman Program is an investment in accountability, dignity, and protection for some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable residents. I respectfully urge your support for H 7059.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keri Salinger', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Keri Salinger

Executive Director

Alliance for Better Long Term Care