

# 2024 NORTH CAROLINA STATE LONG-TERM CARE *Ombudsman Program*



Promoting *quality of life* and *quality of care* for long-term care residents.



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Aging



## *Opening Letter*

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I am pleased to submit the 2024 Annual Report of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program reflecting federal fiscal year October 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024.

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143B-181.18 (8), this annual report provides an updated review of the accomplishments in advocacy and direct services provided by representatives of the long-term care ombudsman program at both the state and regional levels. Also, included in the report are overviews of the statewide community advisory committees. The data within the report demonstrates our achievements toward protecting residents' rights, empowering families, educating consumers, and our commitment to quality, person-centered care for residents in long-term care facilities across North Carolina.

I welcome any questions or comments you may have about our annual report.

Sincerely,

Renee Kea  
Interim State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

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*Disclaimer: The information provided by the Office of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in this report is for general information purposes only. It does not represent the positions of the state agency or other agencies in which the office or representatives of the office are organizationally located. Data and findings represent the types of problems experienced and complaints reported by residents and representatives to the Office.*

## Program Purpose

The North Carolina Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program exists to protect residents' rights and improve the quality of care and life for residents in long-term care facilities. To accomplish this mission, the Program:

- Receives and attempts to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of residents in long-term care facilities
- Provides information to the public about issues facing long-term care residents
- Works with long-term care providers to resolve issues of common concern
- Conducts in-service training for facilities and long-term care providers and staff on topics relevant to resident rights and quality of life
- Trains and provides technical assistance to Community Advisory Committee volunteers
- Collects and reports data regarding the number of complaints handled and other program activities
- Facilitates community education sessions on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Provides information to public agencies, legislators and others on problems impacting the rights of residents, and makes recommendations for the resolution of issues identified

## History and Legal Basis

The federal Older American's Act provided the authorization for the establishment of a national Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program beginning in 1978. In following years, amendments to the Older American's Act expanded the jurisdiction and scope in each state to include both nursing homes and adult care homes. It also called for the formation of a network of volunteers to assist with complaint response and systems advocacy for long-term care residents.

In 1989, the North Carolina State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program was codified into state law through General Statute 143B-181.15-25, which mirrored the federal mandates provided in the Older American's Act. The legislation established guidelines for both state and regional programs. The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is housed within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging. The 16 Regional Ombudsman Programs are housed within the Area Agencies on Aging across the State.

Since the creation of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program 44 years ago, it has undergone many changes, including Final Rule (2016), the revision of Federal Nursing Home Regulations (2016), new software development & revision of data reporting (2019) and COVID-19 restrictions (2019-20). The Program has continued to undergo major transitions including the establishment of new training standards for both current and new Ombudsman representatives. More information about these standards can be found at: [https://ltcombudsman.org/uploads/files/support/2019\\_LTCOP\\_Training\\_Standards.pdf](https://ltcombudsman.org/uploads/files/support/2019_LTCOP_Training_Standards.pdf)

In FFY 2023, North Carolina launched customized training for new volunteers and provided a wide variety of training options to accommodate and attract members. The Program also had the opportunity to create and fill a new position in the State Office known as the Ombudsman Program Trainer. This position is responsible for coordinating and conducting training across the state for both new and current community advisory committee members (volunteer ombudsmen). The program trainer also assists the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman staff in the development, planning, and delivery of training. The Trainer also assists in the development and implementation of materials for the continuing education of regional ombudsmen. This position is designed to capture more data regarding the Program through observation, evaluation and recommendations to foster continuous improvement.

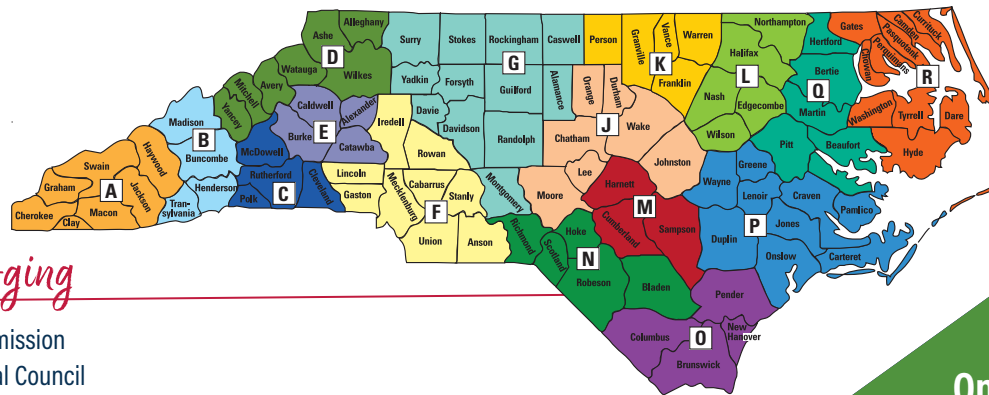


# Program Structure

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is housed within the Elder Rights and Special Initiatives Section of the Division of Aging. The Office is comprised of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, an Ombudsman Program Specialist, an Ombudsman Trainer, and an Ombudsman Elder Rights Specialist. These staff members manage the day-to-day program administration that includes ensuring all newly hired Regional Ombudsmen complete the certification and designation requirements mandated in federal and state law. The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman provides quarterly training sessions to Regional Ombudsmen on a variety of aging and long-term care issues as part of their ongoing certification requirements.

The Regional Ombudsman Program operates out of the 16 Area Agencies on Aging. Regional Ombudsmen provide advocacy and direct services to long-term care residents for the counties they serve.

Community Advisory Committees are designated and certified by the State Ombudsman. These volunteers provide additional support to the long-term care residents within their specified counties. They are appointed by their local board of county commissioners and are trained by regional ombudsmen. For Federal Fiscal Year 2024, which ended Sept. 30, 2024, 417 trained community advisory committee members served on adult care home, nursing home, or joint community advisory committees across all 100 counties in North Carolina. Over the past several years, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program has seen a fluctuation in the number of volunteers for various reasons following changes to Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 1324 that changed how representatives of the Ombudsman Program are designated, de-designated, and suspended.



## Area Agencies on Aging

- Region A – Southwestern Commission
- Region B – Land of Sky Regional Council
- Region C – Foothills Regional Commission
- Region D – High Country Council of Governments
- Region E – Western Piedmont Council of Governments
- Region F – Centralina Regional Council
- Region G – Piedmont Triad Regional Council
- Region J – Central Pines Regional Council
- Region K – Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments
- Region L – Upper Coastal Plains Council of Governments
- Region M – Mid-Carolina Regional Council
- Region N – Lumber River Council of Governments
- Region O – Cape Fear Council of Governments
- Region P – Eastern Carolina Council of Governments
- Region Q – Mid-East Commission
- Region R – Albemarle Commission

**State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**  
NCDHHS Division of Aging

**Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman**  
Regional Area Agencies on Aging

**Community Advisory Committees**  
Local Boards of County Commissioners



# Federal Fiscal Year 2024: Overview

The North Carolina Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program serves as the voice for residents of long-term care facilities, including nursing homes, adult care homes (assisted living), or family care homes. The Ombudsman Program, authorized under the Older Americans Act, has three major goals: resolution of complaints by residents and family, advocacy on behalf of residents to ensure they receive quality care, and education about long-term care services and supports. Ombudsmen also play a key role in educating and training long-term care facility staff and providing administrators with detailed consultation.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2024, the North Carolina Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program completed investigations of 1,839 cases containing 3,168 complaints. The most frequently addressed complaints were related to discharge/eviction and resident care.

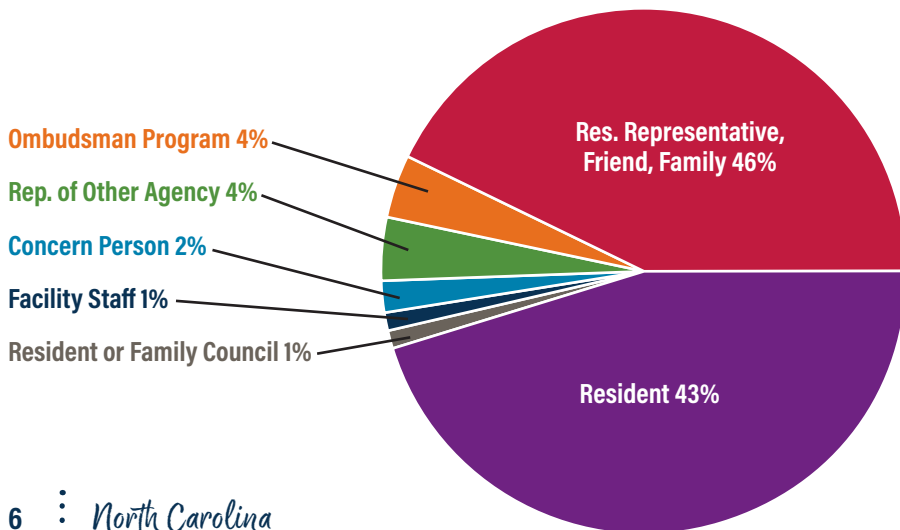
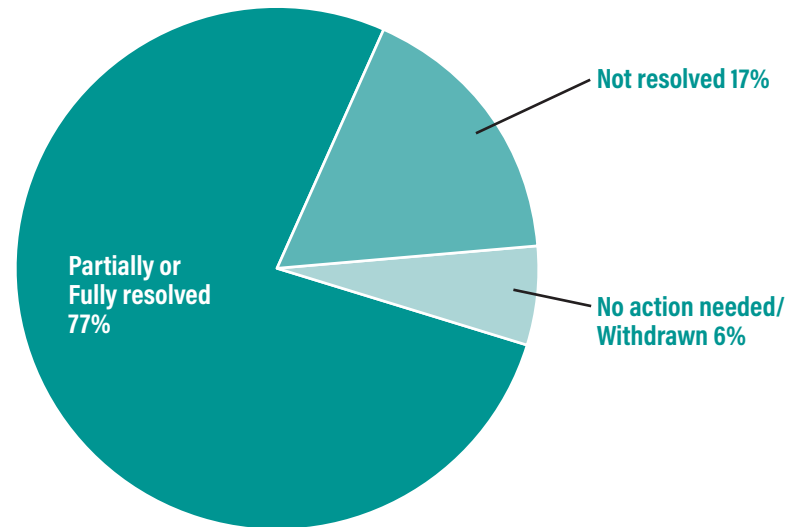
Ombudsmen receive complaints from residents and a variety of individuals that initiate concerns on behalf of residents. The ombudsmen received complaints from 1,839 complainants in Federal Fiscal Year 2024. A complainant is an individual (*i.e., resident, resident representative friend/family member, facility staff, etc.*) who requests Ombudsman program complaint investigation services regarding one or more complaints made by, or on behalf of, residents. The breakdown of complainants is as follows.

Of the 3,168 complaints that were closed in 2024, ombudsmen resolved, or at least partially resolved, 77% of complaints to the satisfaction of the residents or their representatives. Ombudsmen accomplish their work by hearing the residents' concerns and, through facilitated discussion, mediation, and community partners, addressing the residents' needs.

## COMPLAINANT SOURCES FFY 2024

COMPLAINANT SOURCE	FFY 2024 COUNT	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Res. Representative, Friend, Family	838	46%
Resident	793	43%
Ombudsman Program	69	4%
Rep. of Other Agency	65	4%
Concern Person	37	2%
Facility Staff	27	1%
Resident or Family Council	10	1%

## DISPOSITION OF COMPLAINTS



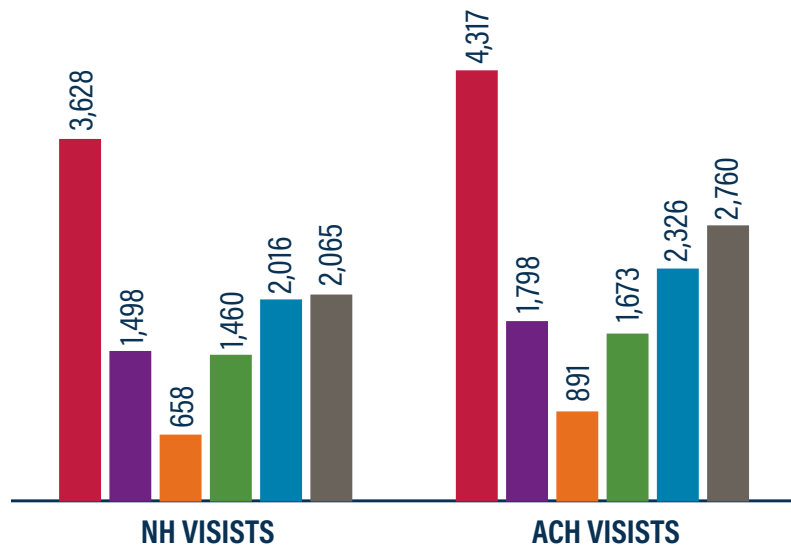
Ombudsmen verify complaints through a variety of investigative techniques, including interviews, record reviews, observations, and other fact-finding methods. When a complaint is verified by an ombudsman, it has been determined through investigative work that the conditions and circumstances described in the complaint are generally accurate. **In 2024, 77% of the complaints received by the program were verified.** For complaints that are not able to be verified or resolved to the satisfaction of the resident and/or the complainant, ombudsmen continue to exhaust all possible advocacy strategies. This may include further educating consumers on the matter in question and/or providing contact information for other appropriate entities, such as licensing and regulatory agencies, for continued investigation or follow-up. Additionally, Ombudsmen are responsible for making regular non-complaint related visits to facilities to establish rapport with residents and observe the general conditions of the facility. The presence of ombudsmen in long-term care facilities helps staff focus on resident-centered care. The staff are encouraged to model and embrace methods that promote and protect resident rights.

Below is a summary of the non-complaint visits totaling 4,825 made to residents in FFY 2024.

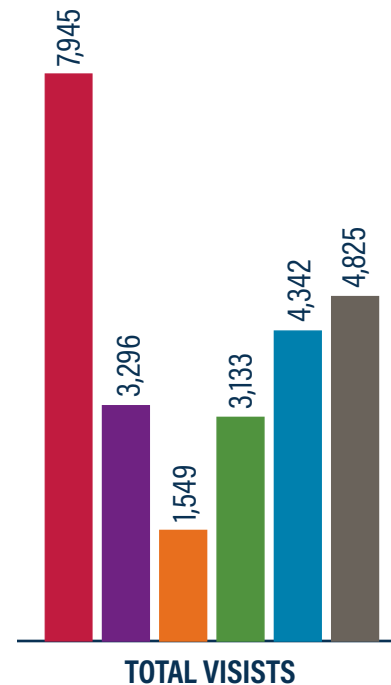
The 2019 Revision of the National Ombudsman Reporting and Data System included changes in the type of facility settings. In North Carolina, the Ombudsman Program advocates for residents of nursing homes (NH) and adult care homes (ACH) and recognizes adult care home settings such as Assisted Living Facilities and Family Care Homes, or communities that provide at minimum room and board, around the clock on-site supervision, and help with personal care such as bathing and dressing or health-related services including medication management. However, the Administration for Community Living now identifies these types of settings as Residential Care Communities (RCC) and includes, but is not limited to, assisted living facilities and family care homes.

### NUMBER OF VISITS TO FACILITIES 6-YEAR COMPARISON

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
NH Visits	3,628	1,498	658	1,460	2,016	2,065
ACH Visits	4,317	1,798	891	1,673	2,326	2,760



### TOTAL VISITS ACROSS ALL PROVIDER TYPES (6-YR COMPARISON)



## Resident representative MEANS ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- (1) An individual chosen by the resident to act on behalf of the resident in order to support the resident in decision-making; access the resident's medical, social, or other personal information; manage the resident's financial matters; or receive notifications pertaining to the resident;
- (2) A person authorized by State or Federal law (including but not limited to agents under power of attorney, representative payees, and other fiduciaries) to act on behalf of the resident in order to support the resident in decision-making; access the resident's medical, social or other personal information; manage the resident's financial matters; or receive notifications pertaining to the resident;
- (3) Legal representative, as used in section 712 of the Act (42 U.S.C. 3058g);
- (4) The court-appointed guardian or conservator of a resident;
- (5) Nothing in this rule is intended to expand the scope of authority of any resident representative beyond that authority specifically authorized by the resident, State or Federal law, or a court of competent jurisdiction.

# 2024 Program Overview

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE & REGIONAL  
LONG-TERM CARE (LTC) OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM**  
OCTOBER 1, 2023 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

**3,168** Complaints closed by the LTC  
Ombudsman Program

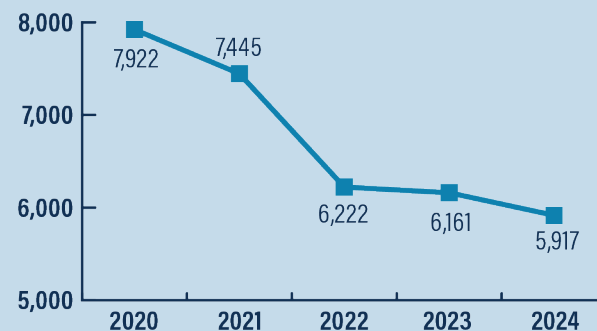
*\*Complaints are considered closed when the investigation is complete. Completion includes documentation of verification status, referrals are made as necessary, and an outcome has been established for each complaint, indicating whether the complaint was withdrawn or no further action was needed by the Ombudsman, the complaint was fully or partially resolved, or not resolved to the satisfaction of the resident and/or complainant.*

**1,839** Complainants assisted by  
State & Regional LTC Ombudsmen

## FLUCTUATIONS, 5-YEAR COMPARISON

*We are continuing to see an increase and/or a return to normal range for most activities.*

**Instances of technical assistance provided to individuals regarding long-term care issues**



**Resident visits made in adult care homes and nursing homes**



5,917 Instances of technical assistance provided to individuals regarding long-term care issues

4,825 Resident visits made in adult care homes and nursing homes

605 Instances of facility licensure survey participation

113 Resident Council meetings attended

488 Community education workshops conducted

2,143 Consultations to LTC providers

241 Training sessions provided for staff in LTC facilities

1,562 Hours spent training community advisory committee members and new ombudsmen

Hours spent training community advisory committee members and new ombudsmen



Training sessions provided for staff in LTC facilities



# Ombudsman in Adult Care Homes

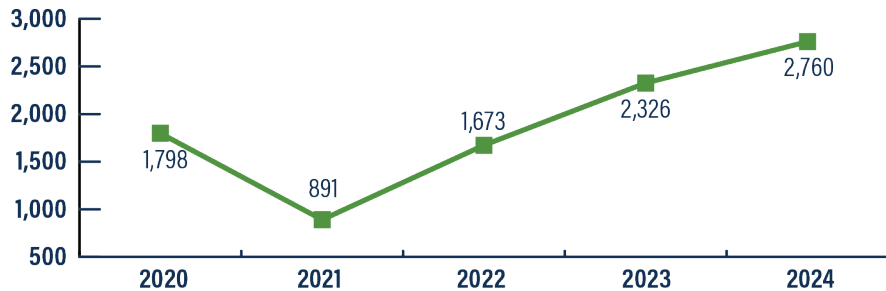
## RESIDENTIAL CARE COMMUNITIES

In North Carolina, assisted living facilities and family care homes are classified as “adult care homes.” North Carolina General Statutes require the Ombudsman program to visit adult care homes with seven or more residents at least quarterly, while family care homes, which have two to six residents, are to be visited at least annually. In FFY 2024, the ombudsman program made 2,760 visits to adult care homes.

Number of  
Licensed Facilities  
**1,083**

Number of  
Licensed Beds  
**31,840**

### NUMBER OF VISITS TO ADULT CARE HOMES 5-YEAR COMPARISON



### MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS



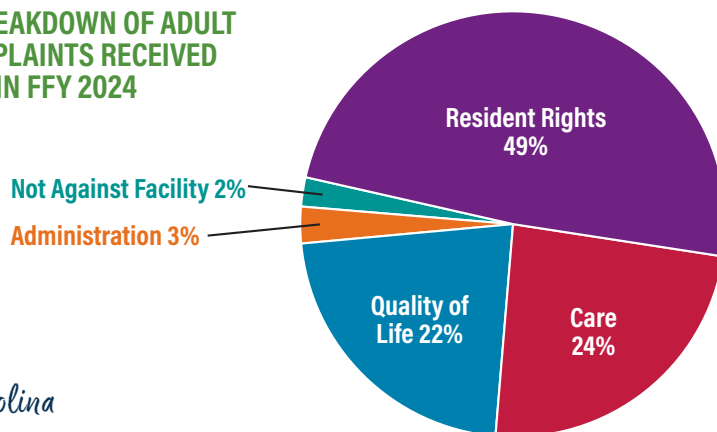
DISCHARGE/  
EVICTION

PERSONAL  
PROPERTY

MEDICATIONS

During the same period, there were **1,166 complaints handled in adult care homes by ombudsmen**. The most frequent complaints investigated by ombudsmen on behalf of residents in adult care homes were related to **discharge/eviction, personal property, and medications**. The following illustrations further demonstrate the categories and types of complaints received by ombudsmen.

### CATEGORICAL BREAKDOWN OF ADULT CARE HOME COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY OMBUDSMAN IN FFY 2024



CATEGORY AND TYPE OF COMPLAINT	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
Residents' Rights: Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation	26
Residents' Rights: Access to Information	34
Residents' Rights: Admission, Transfer, Discharge	134
Residents' Rights: Autonomy, Choice, Preference, Privacy	232
Residents' Rights: Financial, Property	142
<b>TOTAL RESIDENT RIGHTS COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>568</b>
Resident Care: Medications	82
Resident Care: Rehabilitation, Maintenance of Function	194
Resident Care: Restraints	2
<b>TOTAL RESIDENT CARE COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>278</b>
Quality Of Life: Activities and Social Services	47
Quality Of Life: Dietary	85
Quality Of Life: Environment	128
<b>TOTAL QUALITY OF LIFE COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>260</b>
Administration: Oversight, Management	19
Administration: Staffing	21
<b>TOTAL ADMINISTRATION COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>40</b>
Not Against Facility: Regulatory System	1
Not Against Facility: Medicaid	4
Not Against Facility: Systems/Others	15
<b>TOTAL NOT AGAINST FACILITY COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>TOTAL ADULT CARE HOME COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>1,166</b>

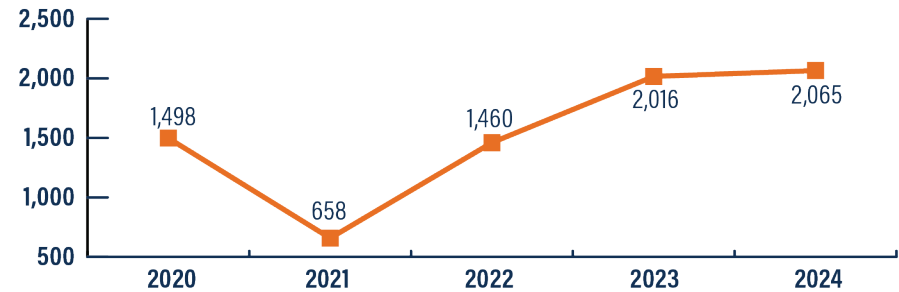
Number of  
Licensed Facilities  
**423**

Number of  
Licensed Beds  
**49,119**

## Ombudsmen in Nursing Homes NURSING HOMES

Ombudsmen are expected to visit nursing homes at least quarterly. **In FFY 2024, the ombudsmen made 2,065 visits to nursing homes.**

### NUMBER OF VISITS TO NURSING HOMES 5- YEAR COMPARISON



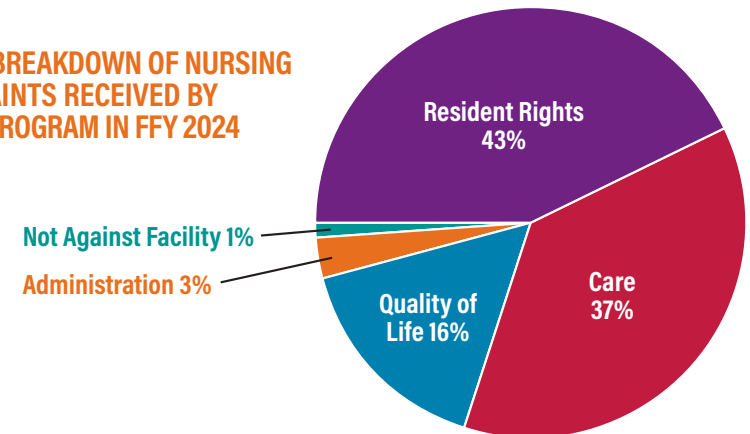
During the same period, there were **1,986 complaints handled in nursing homes** by ombudsmen. The most frequent complaints investigated by ombudsmen on behalf of residents in nursing homes were related to **discharge/eviction, response to requests for assistance, and personal hygiene**. The following graphs further demonstrate the categories and types of complaints received by ombudsmen.

#### MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS



CATEGORY AND TYPE OF COMPLAINT	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
Residents' Rights: Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation	43
Residents' Rights: Access to Information	65
Residents' Rights: Admission, Transfer, Discharge	277
Residents' Rights: Autonomy, Choice, Preference, Privacy	318
Residents' Rights: Financial, Property	159
<b>TOTAL RESIDENT RIGHTS COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>862</b>
Resident Care: Medications	677
Resident Care: Rehabilitation, Maintenance of Function	46
Resident Care: Restraints	4
<b>TOTAL RESIDENT CARE COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>727</b>
Quality Of Life: Activities and Social Services	64
Quality Of Life: Dietary	142
Quality Of Life: Environment	114
<b>TOTAL QUALITY OF LIFE COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>320</b>
Administration: Oversight, Management	19
Administration: Staffing	31
<b>TOTAL ADMINISTRATION COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>50</b>
Not Against Facility: Regulatory System	0
Not Against Facility: Medicaid	7
Not Against Facility: Systems/Others	20
<b>TOTAL NOT AGAINST FACILITY COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>TOTAL ADULT CARE HOME COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>1,986</b>

### CATEGORICAL BREAKDOWN OF NURSING HOME COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM IN FFY 2024

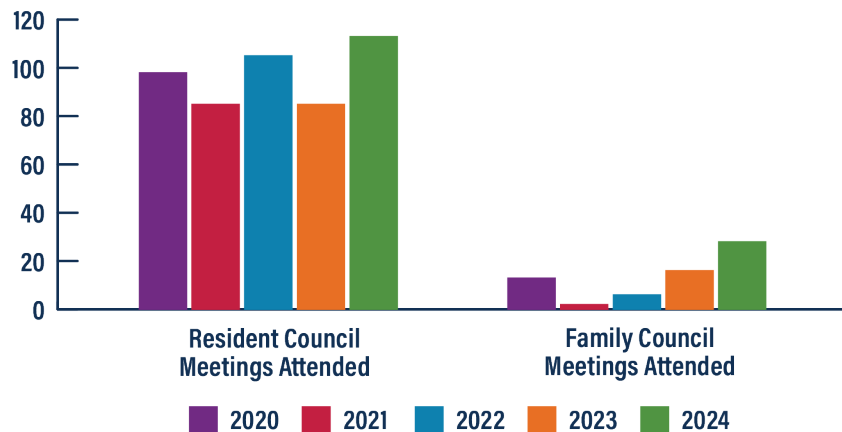


## Other General Information, Technical Assistance and Training

The ombudsman program provides consultation and training to residents, families, facility providers, and concerned citizens. Ombudsmen have in-depth knowledge of how to navigate the long-term care system, which is multifaceted and includes interactions with facilities, regulatory entities, legal, and fiduciary service providers. They engage with these other interested parties to build greater collaborative networks dedicated to upholding resident rights and advocating for person-centered strategies in problem-solving.

### RESIDENT AND FAMILY COUNCILS

In FFY 2024, ombudsmen attended **113 resident council meetings** and **28 family council meetings**. Ombudsmen play an instrumental role in the formation of these councils by educating and empowering residents and their families to become their own best advocates. The presence of the ombudsmen at these meetings is solely at the invitation of these groups. They are typically asked to share information about the ombudsman program, residents' rights, and best practices.



### CONSULTATION TO RESIDENTS AND FAMILIES

At both the state and local levels, during FFY 2024, the ombudsman program provided **5,917 consultations to individuals about long-term care**. The most frequently requested topics included consumer requests for **residents' rights, transfer/discharge, and lists of long-term care facilities**.

### PROVIDER IN-SERVICE TRAINING AND CONSULTATIONS

Ombudsmen are often called on to provide technical assistance and training to facilities about matters of resident rights, quality of life, and other aging issues. In FFY 2024, ombudsmen provided **2,143 consultations to providers** about a variety of issues. The three most common areas were related to **transfer/discharge, residents' rights, and dealing with challenging resident behaviors**. Additionally, ombudsmen provided **241 provider in-service trainings**. The most requested training topics included **residents' rights, aging sensitivity and elder abuse, neglect and exploitation**.

### COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Ombudsmen also advocate, educate, and raise awareness through the development of media campaigns, purchasing, and distributing resident-centered items, networking with stakeholders and community organizations, participating in a variety of workgroups and task forces, and recruiting, training, and recognizing community advisory committee volunteers. The Ombudsman Program continued its media campaign to generate awareness of the Program and recruit new volunteers for our community advisory committees through radio, newspaper ads and on social media. Ombudsmen are also called on by various civic organizations, faith groups and other community organizations to educate citizens about issues facing older adults in long-term care settings and spent **1,258 hours conducting 488 sessions of community education**.





## Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Activities

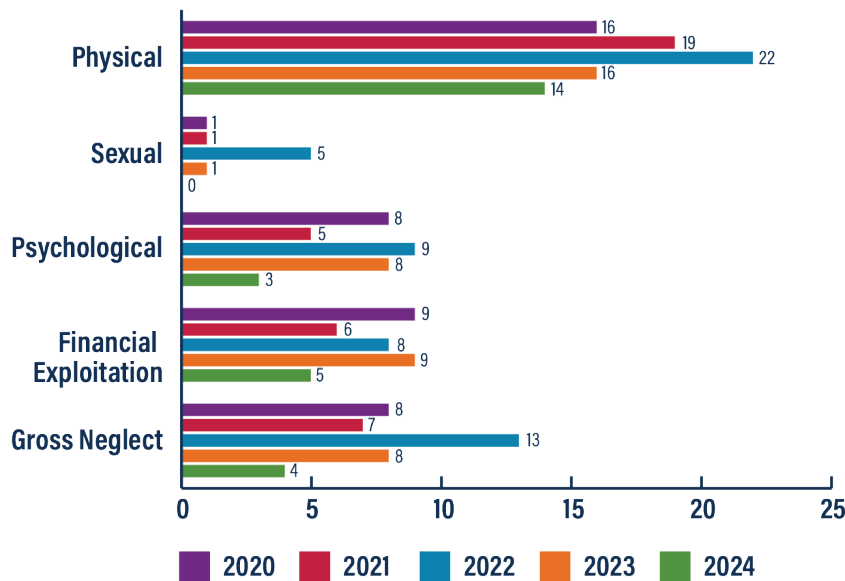
The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is responsible for initiating special projects and organizing events to increase the public's awareness of long-term care issues and efforts to prevent elder abuse. We hosted a variety of community education and outreach sessions across the state, specifically designed to educate people about elder abuse. In 2024, ombudsmen conducted **89 sessions of community education** on elder abuse awareness, identification, and prevention. Additionally, North Carolina continued to embark on an Adult Protective Services (APS) improvement

journey led by the Division of Aging and Division of Social Services, county partners and key stakeholders from across the state to make great strides in bringing about better results for some of our most vulnerable citizens. This initiative was launched during our annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event. During this event, Ruth Pearce, a renowned coach, author, mentor, and advocate, delivered a powerful message about self-awareness and how it plays a critical role in maintaining, motivating, and focusing on character strengths as a tool to foster engagement, commitment and to move our APS Improvement work forward. Ruth Pearce's philosophy is rooted in the belief that age is just a number and that life is meant to be lived intentionally and fully. Her insights inspired us all to embrace curiosity, courage, and kindness as we navigate our paths and work towards improving the lives of those we serve to encourage a culture of empowerment and support within our communities.

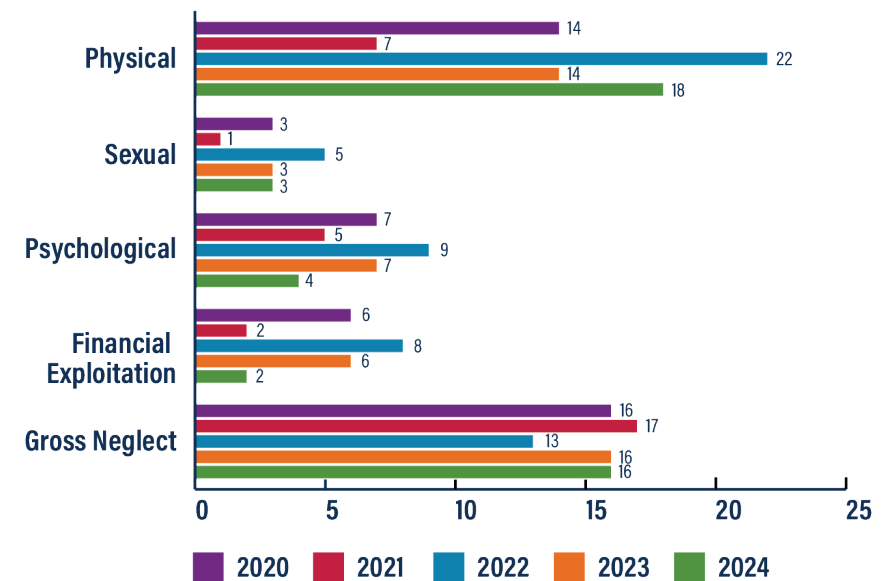
Ombudsmen continue to seek community collaboration among agencies like long-term care providers, senior centers, faith groups and other community entities to assist with outreach efforts. Often, the ombudsmen participate in multi-disciplinary teams that emphasize elder abuse awareness. Furthermore, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman continues to oversee the SAFE in LTC Taskforce dedicated to the awareness of crimes committed in long-term care facilities. Members of the task force and State Office staff continue to teach the Voiceless Victims training curriculum that was specifically designed for law enforcement officers at the NC Justice Academy several times a year.

National and International research shows that abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable and older adults is grossly underreported. The well-being of North Carolina's vulnerable and older adults is a shared responsibility of the community. All North Carolinians are charged under state law to report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation to their local County Department of Social Services. Ombudsmen in North Carolina do not investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. However, they can empower and support victims of abuse by encouraging them to self-report and by connecting them with agencies such as local departments of social services, law enforcement and regulatory agencies to have their concerns appropriately addressed.

### ADULT CARE HOME ABUSE COMPLAINTS, 5-YEAR COMPARISON



### NURSING HOME ABUSE COMPLAINTS, 5-YEAR COMPARISON



## Community Advisory Committees (CAC)

A total of **417 Community Advisory Committee members** served the Ombudsman Program in FFY 2024. Committee members must be trained prior to being appointed by county commissioners to the committee. In accordance with Session Law 2017-103 (House Bill 248), the State Ombudsman must certify and designate committee members upon completion of training by the Regional Ombudsmen.

For Federal Fiscal Year 2024, **1,562 hours were spent on 637 training sessions for community advisory committees**. These sessions included education for new appointees as well as required ongoing annual training.

The committees spent **10,985 hours** and **drove 35,084 miles conducting resident visits and performing other mandated duties**.

Total Number of  
CAC Volunteers

417

Number of Hours  
Donated by CAC

10,985

Number of Miles  
Driven by CAC

35,084



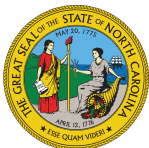
Want to become  
a volunteer?

APPLY NOW AT  
YOUR COUNTY  
COMMISSIONER'S  
OFFICE.



Promoting *quality of life and quality of care* for long-term care residents.





NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Aging

**Roy Cooper, Governor, State of North Carolina** • **Kody H. Kinsley, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Joyce Massey-Smith, MPA, Director, Division of Aging** • **Victor Orija, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman**

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