

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/CS/HB 293	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:	
SPONSOR(S):	Health & Human Services Committee; Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee; Roberson and others	117 Y's	0 N's
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/SB 7018	GOVERNOR'S ACTION:	Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/HB 293 passed the House on April 24, 2015, as CS/SB 7018.

The State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) is a statewide, volunteer-based system of ombudsmen that act as advocates for residents of long-term care facilities. The purpose of the LTCOP is to discover, investigate, and determine the presence of conditions which constitute a threat to the rights, health, safety, or welfare of the residents of long-term care facilities. The LTCOP accomplishes these tasks by conducting investigations of complaints filed by or on behalf of residents and by conducting annual administrative assessments of long-term care facilities. The LTCOP is administratively housed within the Department of Elder Affairs.

The bill revises the operating structure and internal procedures of the LTCOP to reflect current practices, maximize operational and program efficiencies, and conform to the federal Older Americans Act (OAA).

The bill revises part I of chapter 400, F.S., to:

- Provide the state ombudsman with final authority to appoint district ombudsmen;
- Revise the duties of and the appointment process for at-large positions to the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council;
- Revise and clarify the application and training requirements for appointment as an ombudsman, including requiring a level 2 background screening;
- Expand the duties of ombudsmen in the local districts to comply with the OAA, to include the authority to establish resident and family councils within long-term care facilities;
- Clarify that the complaint investigation process and the administrative assessment process are separate processes;
- Conform the complaint investigation and resolution processes with the requirements of the OAA; and
- Require information to be provided to a resident of a long-term care facility upon first entering the facility to confirm that retaliatory action against a resident for filing a grievance or exercising a resident's rights is prohibited.

The bill appears to have no fiscal impact on state or local government.

The bill was approved by the Governor on May 14, 2015, ch. 2015-31, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2015.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Background

Department of Elder Affairs

Florida has approximately 4.7 million residents aged 60 and older.¹ The state is first in the nation in the percentage of citizens who are elders, measuring 23% of total population in 2010 and estimated to soar to 35% of total population in 2030.²

The Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA), established in 1992, serves as the primary agency for administering state human services programs for the elderly and developing policy recommendations for long-term care.³ Section 20.41, F.S., creates the DOEA and details some of its roles and responsibilities.⁴ For example, the DOEA is statutorily required to administer the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council⁵ and the local long-term care ombudsman councils,⁶⁷ which provide advocacy on behalf of residents of long-term care facilities by identifying, investigating, and resolving complaints made by or on behalf of residents.

The DOEA is designated as the State Unit on Aging, as defined in the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA).⁸ Under the OAA, the DOEA is responsible for organizing, coordinating, and providing community-based services and opportunities for older Floridians and their families, including the oversight of services to help elders age in place with dignity and independence and to preserve the rights of the most vulnerable.⁹

The DOEA contracts with an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) in each of eleven Planning and Service Areas (PSAs) to provide coordinated and integrated long-term care services and prevention and early intervention services to the elderly population of Florida.¹⁰ Each of the AAAs then contract with community care lead agencies to provide actual services to the elderly in each PSA.¹¹

The DOEA is authorized to administer certain trust funds, in conjunction with federal funds provided to the state, to operate programs and provide services for the elderly.¹² The programs and services include, but are not limited to, home-and community- based services, nursing home diversion, the Alzheimer's disease initiative, the Comprehensive Assessment and Review for Long-Term Care Services (CARES) program, and consumer assistance programs such as the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

¹ Florida Department of Elder Affairs, *Summary of Programs and Services 2014*, available at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/sops.php> (last visited February 4, 2015).

² *Id.*

³ S. 430.03(1), F.S.

⁴ Art. IV, s. 12 of the Florida Constitution permits the creation of the Department of Elder Affairs. The number of executive branch agencies is capped at twenty-five, exclusive of agencies specifically mentioned in the constitution.

⁵ S. 400.0067, F.S.

⁶ S. 400.0069, F.S.

⁷ S. 20.41(4), F.S.

⁸ S. 20.41(5), F.S.

⁹ S. 430.04, F.S.

¹⁰ S. 20.41(6), F.S.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² S. 20.415, F.S.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

The State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) is a statewide, volunteer-based system of local councils that act as advocates for residents of long-term care facilities.¹³ The LTCOP was established by Title VII of the federal Older Americans Act¹⁴ and its operation is governed by state statute.¹⁵ Through 13 districts¹⁶ that together cover the entire state, volunteers identify, investigate, and resolve complaints made by, or on behalf of, residents of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, adult family care homes, and continuing care retirement communities. In addition to investigating and resolving complaints, the LTCOP:

- Monitors and comments on the development and implementation of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies regarding health, safety, and welfare of residents in long-term care facilities.
- Provides information and referrals with regard to long-term care facilities.
- Conducts annual assessments of long-term care facilities.
- Aids the development of resident and family councils.¹⁷

An ombudsman “is a specially trained and certified volunteer who has been given authority under federal and state law to identify, investigate and resolve complaints made by, or on behalf of, long-term care facility residents.”¹⁸ It is important to note that the LTCOP does not have enforcement or regulatory oversight. Certified ombudsmen in the local councils work as independent advocates for residents to mediate disputes on an informal basis.

Florida law requires that the Office of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (office) maintain a statewide system for collecting and analyzing data relating to complaints and conditions in long-term care facilities.¹⁹ The office must also publish the information pertaining to the number and types of complaints received by the program on a quarterly basis.²⁰ Additionally, federal law requires the office to have a statewide data system to collect, analyze, and report data on residents, facilities, and complaints to federal officials as well as the National Ombudsman Resource Center.²¹

Ombudsmen also complete annual assessments of each long-term care facility in the state to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the residents.²² No advance warning of the assessment is to be given to the long-term care facility. An ombudsman is not allowed to forcibly enter the facility to complete the assessment; however, the administrator of the facility commits a violation of part I of ch. 400, F.S., if the ombudsman is not allowed to enter the facility, and, in such circumstances, the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) may use appropriate administrative remedies.²³ AHCA also conducts routine licensure and complaint surveys of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and adult day care homes. As part of the survey process, AHCA must complete offsite survey preparation, which includes a review of information about the facility prior to the survey. One of the sources of this information is the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

¹³ For 2013-2014, 321 volunteers worked an estimated 91,790 hours which resulted in estimated average savings in salaries and administrative costs of \$1,941,919. See Florida’s Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, *2013-2014 Annual Report*, available at <http://ombudsman.myflorida.com/Publications.php> (last visited February 4, 2015).

¹⁴ 42 U.S.C. §§ 3001 et seq. (as amended by Public Law 106-501).

¹⁵ Part I, Ch. 400, F.S.

¹⁶ The 13 districts are: Northwest Florida, Panhandle, North Central Florida, First Coast, West Coast, West Central Florida, East Central Florida, Southwest Florida, Palm Beach County, Broward County, South Dade & the Keys, North Dade, and South Central Florida. See *supra*, FN 1.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Florida’s Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, *Residents and Families*, available at <http://ombudsman.myflorida.com/ResidentFam.php> (last visited February 4, 2015).

¹⁹ S. 400.0089, F.S.

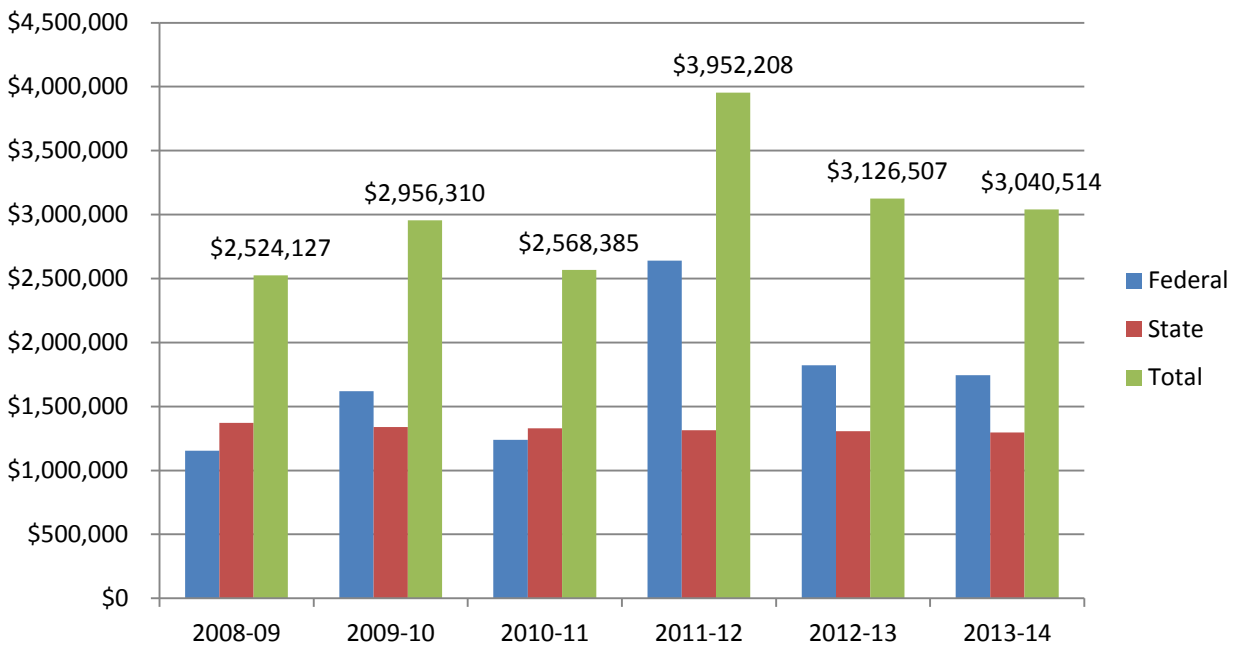
²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ 42 U.S.C. s. 3058g(c) and 42 U.S.C. s. 3058g(h)(1).

²² S. 400.0074, F.S.; the entire list of responsibilities of an ombudsman can be found at s. 400.0065(1), F.S.

²³ *Id.*

The following chart shows the recent appropriation history of the LTCOP²⁴:



The following chart details some of the activities of the LTCOP, including the number of facilities assessed, the total number of assessments conducted, and the number of complaints investigated²⁵:

FEDERAL REPORTING YEAR	FACILITIES	ASSESSMENTS	COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED
2008-2009	3,932	3,932	8,302
2009-2010	4,016	4,016	8,651
2010-2011	4,039	3,347	7,534
2011-2012	4,039	4,269	8,600
2012-2013	4,074	4,091	7,336

Effect of the Bill

The bill revises the operating structure and internal procedures of the LTCOP to reflect current practices, maximize operational and program efficiencies, and conform to the OAA.²⁶ The bill establishes local ombudsman districts to replace the current council structure and outlines district membership, duties and responsibilities.

Definitions

The bill amends the definitions applicable to part I of chapter 400, F.S., by adding the definition of “representative of the state ombudsman program” to mean the state ombudsman, employees of his or her office, and persons certified to serve as ombudsmen under the LTCOP. The bill adds the definition of “district” to refer to a geographical area of the state, as designated by the state ombudsman, where certified ombudsmen carry out the duties of the LTCOP. The definition also permits a district to have more than one local council, which many larger districts currently have within their areas. The bill revises the definition of “ombudsman” to mean an individual certified by the state ombudsman under the statute to carry out the duties of the LTCOP and creates a separate definition of “state ombudsman”

²⁴ See supra, FN 1.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ See supra, FN 14.

to refer to the person appointed by the Secretary of DOEA to lead the LTCOP. The bill revises the definition of “resident” to include a person aged 18 years or older who resides in a long-term care facility. Finally, the bill adds the definition of “state ombudsman program” to mean the LTCOP operating under the direction of the state ombudsman’s office.

The bill revises many sections of part I of chapter 400, F.S., to remove references to the current ombudsman councils, districts, offices, and the ombudsman or ombudsmen, and replaces them with the term “representative of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program”. This change in terminology is consistent with the terms of the OAA.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman and Office Representative Duties and Responsibilities

In s. 400.0065, F.S., which outlines the duties and responsibilities of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, the bill corrects position titles of individuals who receive an annual report.

The bill eliminates the authority of the state ombudsman to enter into an agreement with the Statewide Advocacy Council²⁷ for the purpose of coordinating activities and avoiding duplication of effort.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council

The bill requires the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council (Council) to include one active certified ombudsman from each local unit within a district. Each local unit must choose the active certified ombudsman to represent it on the Council. The bill also requires the state ombudsman to submit a list of his or her recommendations for individuals to serve in at-large positions on the Council to the Secretary of DOEA, who will then appoint those members to the Council. Current law gives the Governor the authority to appoint at-large members to the Council.

The bill also revises the internal operational aspects of the Council, such as permitting the Council to perform its duties if one or more positions are vacant and providing procedures for removing a member from the council.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Districts

The bill revises s. 400.0069, F.S., which establishes local ombudsman councils and details their duties and membership. The bill deletes references to the term “local council” and replaces it with “long-term care ombudsman districts.” This reflects the change in structure of the LTCOP from a large state council with multiple local councils, each acting autonomously, to a more hierarchal structure consisting of a district ombudsman and representatives of the office of the state ombudsman. The bill requires the state ombudsman to designate districts. Each district must designate local long-term care ombudsman councils to carry out the duties of the LTCOP. The state ombudsman must ensure that there is at least one long-term care ombudsman and local council operating in each district. Every person working in a district ombudsman office will be certified as an ombudsman and will be permitted to carry out the duties and responsibilities of an ombudsman. The bill also requires each district to convene a public meeting at least every quarter. This requirement ensures the public will have the opportunity to participate in the activities of the ombudsmen within each district.

The state ombudsman is given the authority to appoint ombudsmen in the districts. At his or her discretion, the state ombudsman may appoint an ombudsman to a district other than where he or she resides. This reflects the change in program structure to emphasize that the LTCOP is to be directed and administered by the state ombudsman and the districts are to act as an extension of the state

²⁷ The Statewide Advocacy Council and local advocacy councils were created in 2000 as a network of volunteers to monitor and investigate programs and facilities for clients served by four state agencies (the Agency for Health Care Administration, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Children and Families, and DOEA). In 2010, funding and positions for the Statewide Advocacy Council were eliminated.

ombudsman with regard to policy and operations. The district ombudsmen may provide technical assistance in forming resident and family councils at long-term care facilities.

The bill provides a list of individuals who may not be appointed as an ombudsman. The list includes:

- An owner or representative of a long-term care facility;
- A provider or representative of long-term care services;
- An employee of the Agency for Health Care Administration;
- An employee of the Department of Elder Affairs (except for staff certified as ombudsmen in the district offices);
- An employee of the Department of Children and Families; or
- An employee of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

The bill requires a person to successfully complete a level 2 background screening before he or she can be appointed as an ombudsman. A level 2 background screening is detailed in ss. 435.04 and 430.0402, F.S. The bill clarifies that the state ombudsman has final authority to appoint an individual as an ombudsman. The bill also gives the state ombudsman the authority to rescind any appointment of an ombudsman.

Training

The state ombudsman is responsible for ensuring that appropriate training is provided to all representatives of the LTCOP. The bill specifies certain training requirements for all representatives of the LTCOP contained in s. 400.0091, F.S. First, the bill requires all representatives of the LTCOP to have a minimum of 20 hours of training upon employment with the LTCOP. Second, the bill requires 10 hours of continuing education each year after appointment.

Complaint Investigations and Facility Assessments

The bill revises s. 400.0073, F.S., to address complaint investigations. The bill clarifies that the complaint investigation process and the administrative assessment process are separate processes. Complaint investigations are conducted to follow up and investigate complaints made by or on behalf of a resident. Administrative assessments focus on the rights, health, safety, and welfare of residents and are conducted annually on nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and adult family care homes.

The bill requires onsite administrative assessments to be completed by representatives of the LTCOP in a resident-centered manner. The bill requires an ombudsman who is denied access to a facility by a facility administrator to report the denial to the state ombudsman, who shall then report the incident to AHCA for possible disciplinary action, including action against the facility license. The bill permits DOEA, in consultation with the state ombudsman, to develop rules to implement procedures for conducting onsite assessments of long-term care facilities.

The bill removes references to “local council” from the complaint investigation process and replaces it with “LTCOP”. A representative of the LTCOP is now tasked with identifying and investigating a complaint by or on behalf of a resident relating to actions or omissions by providers or representatives of providers of long-term care services, other public agencies, guardians, or representative payees which may adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, or rights of residents.

The bill revises the notification and resolution process for complaints contained in s. 400.0075, F.S. A representative of the LTCOP may notify a facility administrator of a verified complaint determined by the local council to require remedial action, while adhering to the confidentiality provisions in s. 400.0077, F.S. The administrator must set target dates, with the concurrence of the representative of the LTCOP, for resolution of the complaint. If the complaint is not resolved by the target date or remedial action to address the complaint is not forthcoming, the bill permits the representative to extend the target date if he or she believes that additional time will lead to a resolution of the complaint or refer the complaint to the district manager, who may then refer the complaint to the state council.

If the representative of the LTCOP determines, during an investigation, that the health, safety, welfare, or rights of a resident are in immediate danger, the bill requires immediate notification of the district manager or local council chair. The bill then requires the district manager or local council chair, after verifying the nature of the threat, to notify appropriate state agencies, law enforcement, the state ombudsman, and legal advocate.²⁸ If the state ombudsman or legal advocate has reason to believe that the long-term care facility or an employee of the facility has committed a criminal act, the state ombudsman must provide the local law enforcement agency with the relevant information to initiate an investigation.

The bill requires the state ombudsman or a designee to assume responsibility for resolving a complaint that has been referred by a district. The bill authorizes the state ombudsman to take certain action if the facility fails to resolve or remedy the complaint. These actions by the state ombudsman can include publicizing the complaint, publicizing the recommendations for resolution of the complaint, and recommending facility reviews to the appropriate state agency that licenses a particular non-compliant facility to ensure the conditions that gave rise to the original complaint are resolved.

The bill requires the office of the state ombudsman to establish an email address for receiving complaints from, or on behalf of, residents of long-term care facilities. The bill also requires that each resident, or his or her representative, upon first entering a long-term care facility and as part of the initial information packet provided by the facility, receive specific information stating that retaliatory action cannot be taken against a resident for filing a grievance against the facility or otherwise exercising his or her resident's rights. The facility must also provide any other relevant information on how to contact representatives of the LTCOP.

The bill revises the criteria that must be met in order for a facility to receive Gold Seal Program recognition. The bill requires evidence that a verified complaint by the state ombudsman program within the 30 months preceding the facility application to the Gold Seal Program did not result in a citation.

The bill clarifies, in light of eliminating the local council structure and implementing the district structure, that representatives of the office of the state ombudsman and the members of the Council have immunity from civil and criminal liability for any action taken in good faith performance of their duties as outlined in the statute.

Conforming Changes

Finally, the bill makes conforming changes to the following statutes to reflect the provisions of the bill: sections 20.41, 400.0070, 400.021, 400.022, 400.0255, 400.162, 400.19, 400.191, 400.23, 400.235, 415.102, 415.1034, 415.104, 415.1055, 415.106, 415.107, 429.02, 429.19, 429.26, 429.28, 429.34, 429.35, 429.67, 429.85, F.S.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

²⁸ The legal advocate is established in the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman by s. 400.0063(3), F.S. The legal advocate is selected by the state ombudsman and must be a member in good standing with the Florida Bar. Some of the duties of the legal advocate include assisting the state ombudsman in carrying out his or her duties with respect to abuse, neglect, or violation of rights of residents of long-term care facilities and pursuing administrative, legal, and other appropriate remedies on behalf of residents.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

By eliminating the local council structure, the bill removes internal staff meetings at the district level from the requirements of the Sunshine Act. As a result, the bill removes the notice requirement for internal staff meetings, which is expected to save the DOEA an average of \$2,225 per year, based on costs over the last three years.²⁹

²⁹ HB 293, 2015 Agency Legislative Bill Analysis, Department of Elder Affairs, December 16, 2014 (on file with Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee).