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means the employees or volunteers designated by the Ombudsman to fulfill the duties set forth in §1324.19(a), whether personnel supervision is provided by the Ombudsman or his or her designees or by an agency hosting a local Ombudsman entity designated by the Ombudsman pursuant to section 712(a)(5) of the Act.

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 medical, social or other personal information of the resident; manage financial matters; or receive notifications;

(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 medical, social or other personal information of the resident; manage financial matters; or receive notifications;

(3) Legal representative, as used in section 712 of the Act; or

(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.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, or Ombudsman, as used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the individual who heads the Office and is responsible to personally, or through representatives of the Office, fulfill the functions, responsibilities and duties set forth in §§1324.13 and 1324.19.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, Ombudsman program, or program, as used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the program through which the functions and duties of the Office are carried out, consisting of the Ombudsman, the Office headed by the Ombudsman, and the representatives of the Office.

Willful interference means actions or inactions taken by an individual in an attempt to intentionally prevent, interfere with, or attempt to impede

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the Ombudsman from performing any of the functions or responsibilities set forth in §1324.13, or the Ombudsman or a representative of the Office from performing any of the duties set forth in §1324.19.

[80 FR 7758, Feb. 11, 2015, as amended at 81 FR 35646, June 3, 2016]

§ 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 which shall be headed by the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, who shall carry out all of the functions and responsibilities set forth in §1324.13 and shall carry out, 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 any 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 persons or individuals with disabilities;

(2) Consumer-oriented public policy advocacy;

(3) Leadership and program management skills; and

(4) Negotiation and problem resolution skills.

(e) *Policies and procedures.* Where the Ombudsman has the legal authority to do so, he or she 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. 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 and with representatives of the Office. The policies and procedures must address the matters within this subsection.

(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 which 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. 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. 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 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 assure prompt response to complaints by the Office and/or local Ombudsman entities which prioritize abuse, neglect, exploitation and time-sensitive complaints and which consider the severity of the risk to the resident, the imminence of the threat of 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.

(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;

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(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; and

(C) 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, 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

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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) Exclusion of the Ombudsman and representatives of the Office from abuse reporting requirements, 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

(v) 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.

(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 is subject to 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 representatives of the Office with 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 with a conflict of interest, which cannot be adequately 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 rec-

ommend 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.

(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 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 a local Ombudsman entity or representative of the Office in situations in which an identified conflict of interest cannot be adequately 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, without necessarily representing the determinations or positions of the State agency or other agency in which the Office is organizationally located, regarding:

- (i) Disclosure of information maintained by the Ombudsman program within the limitations set forth in section 712(d) of the Act;
- (ii) Recommendations to changes in Federal, State and local laws, regulations, policies and actions pertaining to the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents; and
- (iii) Provision of information to public and private agencies, legislators, the media, and other persons, regarding the problems and concerns of residents and recommendations related to the problems and concerns.

[80 FR 7758, Feb. 11, 2015, as amended at 81 FR 35646, June 3, 2016; 85 FR 72911, Nov. 16, 2020]

§ 1324.13 Functions and responsibilities of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman, as head of the Office, shall have responsibility for the leadership and management of the Office in coordination with the State agency, and, where applicable, any other agency carrying out the Ombudsman program, as follows.

(a) *Functions.* The Ombudsman shall, personally or through representatives of the Office—

(1) Identify, investigate, and resolve complaints that—

- (i) Are made by, or on behalf of, residents; and
- (ii) Relate to action, inaction, or decisions, that may adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, or rights of residents (including the welfare and rights of residents with respect to the appointment and activities of resident representatives) of—

(A) Providers, or representatives of providers, of long-term care;

(B) Public agencies; or

(C) Health and social service agencies.

(2) Provide services to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of the residents;

(3) Inform residents about means of obtaining services provided by the Ombudsman program;

(4) Ensure that residents have regular and timely access to the services provided through the Ombudsman program and that residents and complainants receive timely responses from representatives of the Office to requests for information and complaints;

(5) Represent the interests of residents before governmental agencies, assure that individual residents have access to, and pursue (as the Ombudsman determines as necessary and consistent with resident interests) administrative, legal, and other remedies to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents;

(6) Provide administrative and technical assistance to representatives of the Office and agencies hosting local Ombudsman entities;

(7)(i) Analyze, comment on, and monitor the development and implementation of Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and other governmental policies and actions, that pertain to the health, safety, welfare, and rights of the residents, with respect to the adequacy of long-term care facilities and services in the State;

(ii) Recommend any changes in such laws, regulations, policies, and actions as the Office determines to be appropriate; and

(iii) Facilitate public comment on the laws, regulations, policies, and actions;

(iv) Provide leadership to statewide systems advocacy efforts of the Office on behalf of long-term care facility residents, including coordination of systems advocacy efforts carried out by representatives of the Office; and

(v) Provide information to public and private agencies, legislators, the media, and other persons, regarding the problems and concerns of residents and recommendations related to the problems and concerns.

(vi) Such determinations and positions shall be those of the Office and shall not necessarily represent the determinations or positions of the State agency or other agency in which the Office is organizationally located.

(vii) In carrying out systems advocacy efforts of the Office on behalf of