



## **A note from the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman:**

During the month of October, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO) celebrated Residents' Rights Month, nationally recognized as a time to pause and reflect on topics that promote the dignity, respect and the value of every resident/tenant residing in long-term care.

In the final installment of our special weekly newsletter, we're highlighting a couple ways lowans have responded to the invitation to celebrate this month.



In furtherance of the occasion, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad signed a proclamation to reaffirm that all Iowa residents should be aware of their rights so they may be empowered to live with dignity and self-determination, noting: "We wish to honor and celebrate these Iowa citizens, to recognize their rich individuality, and reaffirm their right to vote and participate politically, including the right to have a say in their care." The Governor also spoke to the Older Iowans Legislature and noted his continued support for efforts to address elder abuse and to protect older Iowans who are the target of financial exploitation.

We've also received tremendous feedback regarding the [voting materials](#) featured earlier this month. In coming years, we hope to develop additional tools and resources related to this fundamental right. As you look to the future, we want to share a question posed by a facility in relation to their voting programming.

A nursing facility's activities director called recently to let us know she used the new [voter guide](#) to organize an absentee ballot effort. Staff collected resident preferences about how each wanted to vote and then made arrangements with the county auditor for an elections team to deliver ballots to residents on November 3. The activities director also called the OSLTCO to ask, "Is our absentee ballot effort enough [to help residents exercise their rights]?"

It was a great question, because there isn't really a uniform answer to that kind of question—which can make it tough for a facility to assist with adequate supports and programming. In this instance, we decided that if every resident wants to vote absentee at the facility for this election and that date works for each resident to receive and mark his/her ballot, then it sounds like this plan meets the needs and wishes as expressed by each resident for this election. The goal of the voter assistance plan is simply to help all parties take stock of preferences in advance to reduce the obstacles that can arise when important decisions aren't considered ahead of time.

The [voter assistance plan](#) can also be used after elections as a tool to help facilities and residents evaluate the efficacy of their programming/efforts and make any adjustments in time for the next election.

We welcome feedback on other ways we can support your efforts to assist residents/tenants with voting. While we cannot advise facilities on how best to comply with state and federal voting laws or evaluate their programming for any compliance or legal issues—that type of question should be directed to the Secretary of State, county auditor or the facility's legal counsel—it's our mission to provide person-centered advocacy tools and non-partisan information about the process. We appreciate your efforts to promote residents' rights year-round.

Deanna Clingan-Fischer, JD

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*The mission of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals residing in long-term care by investigating complaints, seeking resolutions to problems and providing advocacy, with the goal of enhancing quality of life and care.*

*Please feel free to forward this newsletter to others who may be interested.*