

RELEASE DATE:
July 24, 2017

CONTACT:
Laurie Brewer
609-417-0038
609-826-5090

NJ Agency that combats nursing home elder abuse urgently needs volunteers in Bergen County

Training classes forming now

The New Jersey Long Term Care Ombudsman (NJLTCO) has identified an urgent need for volunteer nursing home advocates in the northern part of the state, especially in Bergen County.

“We currently have 31 nursing homes in Bergen County that don’t have a volunteer advocate assigned, *the highest number in the state*,” said James W. McCracken, the state’s Long Term Care Ombudsman since 2010. “If you are looking for a challenging volunteer opportunity that offers flexible hours, I can’t think of a more important way to contribute to your community.”

The NJLTCO provides advocacy to people living in long-term care facilities and investigates allegations of abuse and neglect in those facilities. NJLTCO volunteer advocates are at the front lines in combatting elder abuse and exploitation, said McCracken.

Volunteers undergo 32 hours of training in communication, observation and troubleshooting skills and are required to shadow an experienced volunteer before being assigned to a facility. Once assigned to a facility, they are required to spend at least four hours a week visiting residents, listening to their concerns and troubleshooting problems with the facility administration.

The NJ Long Term Care Ombudsman, formerly known as the Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly (OOIE), is currently recruiting for volunteers to be assigned to skilled nursing facilities in **Rochelle Park, Emerson, Park Ridge, Rockleigh, Teaneck, Saddle River, Paramus, Tenafly, Woodcliff Lake, Saddle Brook, Norwood, Westwood, Wyckoff, Allendale, Old Tappan, Fair Lawn, Maywood, Hackensack and Ridgewood.**

“Volunteer advocates are a lifeline for many residents of long-term care facilities in New Jersey. These committed volunteers provide friendship and companionship to elderly residents of nursing facilities. They also identify and mediate problems on the resident’s behalf,” said McCracken.

When issues are identified in a nursing facility, the volunteer advocate can play an important role in resolving issues at the facility level. However, if an issue cannot be resolved satisfactorily, volunteer advocates can refer the matter for further action by the Ombudsman's office, said McCracken.

"NJLTCO volunteer advocates are a reflection of the broader community. They come from all walks of life and every age group. Some volunteer advocates become interested in working with elderly residents as a result of their own personal experiences with aging family members. Others are retirees seeking a meaningful and rewarding way to use the skills they acquired during their working lives to benefit the larger community," said Deirdre Mraw, who is the NJLTCO statewide volunteer coordinator.

Today, with the number of elderly people who are living in long term care facilities continuing to increase, the need for volunteers is even more critical, she said.

The NJLTCO is currently seeking applications for a fall 2017 Volunteer Advocate training session.

Anyone over the age of 21 who is interested in volunteering can email Mraw at Deirdre.mraw@ooie.nj.gov or call her at 609-826-5053. Or check out the NJ Long Term Care Ombudsman website at www.nj.gov/ooie

###