

To: Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsmen, Ombudsman Supervisors at Host Agencies and AAAs

From: Salli Pung, Michigan State Long Term Care Ombudsman

Date: August 13, 2020

Subject: Long Term Care Ombudsman Guide for Resuming In-Person Visits

Our role as long term care ombudsmen is to advocate for the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents living in long term care facilities. Since March 13<sup>th</sup>, our program has been faced with the challenge of how to meet the needs of residents through electronic communication during the COVID-19 emergency while in-person visits have been suspended.

On June 30, 2020, MDHHS Director Robert Gordon issued an Epidemic Order excluding Michigan long term care ombudsmen from visitation restrictions imposed by Executive Order 2020-136. The MLTCOP in collaboration with the Aging and Adult Services Agency has developed guidance for ombudsman to resume in-person visits (attached).

Paid long term care ombudsman may resume in-person visits to nursing homes, adult foster care homes, and homes for the aged in accordance with this guidance. The guidance is subject to change as new guidance or orders are released by MDHHS, Governor Whitmer, or the federal government.

As we begin to resume in-person visits, all ombudsmen must consider their own health and safety needs. If an ombudsman has a serious underlying medical condition or is concerned about exposing a family member who is at high risk, that individual should consider seeking guidance from a health care professional about the risks of conducting in-person visits and follow guidance from their employer about reporting such concerns. The ombudsman or host agency should notify the state ombudsman if the ombudsman is unable to conduct in-person visits, but need not disclose any private health information related to that decision.

As paid ombudsmen begin to conduct in-person visits to long term care facilities, it is important to be mindful that in-person visits may not be practical at every long term care facility due to the current status of COVID-19 in the building or with every resident as some are being quarantined or isolated in COVID-19 units/rooms. Ombudsmen are asked to coordinate visits with facility leadership to ensure the best possible visit for residents and to accommodate the facility's infection prevention and control practices.

In-person visits at this time still cannot fully replace the effectiveness of a routine-access visit as full and unscheduled access to the facility may not be possible, but it is a step towards maintaining a visible presence for the residents during this unprecedented time. Ombudsmen can provide both another set of eyes and ears in facilities that have not received much scrutiny since mid-March and companionship and compassion for residents who likely have not had any in-person visits from family or friends during that period.

The Aging and Adult Services Agency and the MLTCOP will co-host a Microsoft Teams meeting on August 19<sup>th</sup> from 11 a.m. to 12 noon for all paid ombudsmen, ombudsman supervisors at Host Agencies, AAAs, the AASA grant contract manager. We ask participants to review the guidance prior to the meeting and be prepared to ask questions and discuss any concerns with resuming in-person visits. Please watch your email for an invitation from AASA to participate in this important event.

Any ombudsman, ombudsman supervisor, or AAA with questions or concerns about in-person visits should feel free to reach out to the MLTCOP office to discuss those concerns with the State Ombudsman.