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State government launches partnership to strengthen accountability within nursing homes, long-term care facilities

Sep 16, 2020 | Press Releases

Multi-agency approach aims to protect residents and families from abuse and fraud

SANTA FE – The state of New Mexico has created a new partnership between the state Attorney General, State Auditor and Ombudsman to protect seniors and specialized care individuals at nursing homes and long-term care facilities from poor or abusive treatment.

The Ombudsman will also partner with the Department of Health and Adult Protective Services to review data and elevate complaints to executive departments that have the power to investigate, level civil penalties and prosecute if needed.

The creation of this partnership follows a request by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for the Ombudsman to review complaints occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic and to recommend a course of action to increase support for residents and their families.

“This new process will take a hard look at the information and complaints we are seeing come from families, residents, and surveyors, with the goal of expanding

accountability and increasing the standard of care across New Mexico," said **Aging and Long Term Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez**.

"We must work together and leverage the tools of our offices to protect vulnerable New Mexicans from anyone who would defraud or abuse them," said **Hector Balderas, New Mexico Attorney General**. "Through this collaboration, we will continue to aggressively prosecute and hold individuals accountable for horrific abuse."

The partnership is designed to ensure that all complaints are expediently handled by setting up a direct referral process coordinated by the Ombudsman, working closely with not just the Attorney General and Auditor but local district attorneys, the Department of Health and the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance as needed.

"At a time when we need strong oversight for our seniors and care dependent New Mexicans, this referral process will enable residents and their families to restore their dignity and seek the justice they deserve," said **Zack Quintero, New Mexico State Ombudsman**. The State Ombudsman Program has recently started a new statewide initiative of wellness, dignity, and access to justice during COVID-19; this announcement is part of that initiative.

"These efforts help champion the Office of the State Auditor's fight against fraud and abuse, increasing avenues for identifying risks related to financial affairs and guardianship and conservatorship matters within our purview," said **Brian Colón, New Mexico State Auditor**. "New Mexicans deserve financial transparency and protection and we look forward to working with the Attorney General and Ombudsman to better serve one of our most vulnerable populations."

The New Mexico Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program provides advocacy and resident-centered protection of the rights of New Mexicans living in long-term care facilities. To that end, the Ombudsman Program provides individual and systemic advocacy on behalf of long-term care residents.

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