URGENT MEMO – Policies and Procedures

To: Regional LTC Ombuds and All Certified LTC Ombuds
From: Patricia Hunter, Washington State LTC Ombuds
Date: Monday, March 11, 2020
Re: Virtual Visitation Policy for All LTC Ombuds; Governor’s Suspension of Certain Resident Rights

A. The State LTC Ombuds has enacted a virtual visitation policy for all LTC Ombuds, effective immediately. All LTC Ombuds will refrain from entering LTC facilities unless specific authorization is obtained in writing from the State LTC Ombuds. All LTC Ombuds will switch to “virtual” visiting by phone, email, and web-based technologies. The State LTC Ombuds will make exceptions to this policy on a case-by-case basis. Any LTC Ombuds who believes that an in-person visit to a facility is essential should contact their supervisor, who will seek authorization from the State LTC Ombuds for an in-person visit. This policy will be in place until further notice.

• Your health and safety come first. This decision has not been made lightly. We recognize that LTC residents are at high-risk during this time and we will continue to provide LTC Ombuds services. However, during the coronavirus outbreak in Washington, LTCOP must also innovate and stay nimble in order to protect the health and safety of LTC residents and all LTC Ombuds. LTCOP must do its part to slow the spread of this virus while continuing to serve residents and protecting the safety of all LTC Ombuds.

• Temporary policy. To be clear, this is a temporary policy. The State Ombuds is regularly consulting with federal and state authorities regarding the risks from the coronavirus outbreak. This temporary policy will be revisited on a regular basis. We will continue to solicit feedback from LTC Ombuds throughout this process.

• Virtual Visitation Only. Instead of entering LTC facilities, all LTC Ombuds will be provided alternate assignments during this temporary prohibition on in-person visits by LTC Ombuds. There are several ways you can continue LTC Ombuds work from outside facilities. (Please see PIM#20-01 issued on March 10, 2020 for specific guidance.)

• Exceptions to Virtual Visitation Policy. We anticipate that some LTC Ombuds may encounter situations where they feel an in-person visit to a facility or resident is required despite the coronavirus outbreak. We also recognize that the risks of coronavirus are lower for some people than for others. To ensure maximum safety and health for residents and LTC Ombuds, some in-person visits will be permitted but only as an exception to this policy as authorized solely by the State LTC Ombuds on a case-by-case basis. If you believe such a visit is required, immediately contact your Ombuds supervisor and share all information that you have.

✓ NOTE: Alerting your supervisor that an in-person visit is needed does not mean that you or any other LTC Ombuds will be required to enter a facility. Please err on the side of alerting your supervisor of such situations, even if you personally do not want to enter a
facility. Alerting your supervisor simply allows State LTCOP to have all available information and then make an informed decision about whether an in-person visit is needed. State LTCOP will not “force” anyone to enter a LTC facility during this crisis. We must maintain a health LTC Ombuds force to continue serving residents in the months to come.

- **Funding Considerations.** LTCOP funding is based on the specific job responsibilities and tasks of LTC Ombuds. All LTC Ombuds must be sure to coordinate their work assignments with their Ombuds supervisors to ensure proper documentation of activities and no interruptions in funding.

B. **On March 10, 2020 Washington State Governor Jay Inslee announced new rules about visitation in LTC facilities, which are effective immediately. This is an unprecedented situation in Washington State.**

- Please see the attached document for details.
- Note that residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities are limited to one adult resident per day. Other restrictions and requirements apply.
- Note that part of RCW 70.129 (WA’s resident rights statute), and related WACs have been “suspended” under the governor’s emergency powers.
- These changes remain in effect until midnight on April 9, 2020.
- We are analyzing this information in earnest and consulting with LTCOP’s attorney and federal and state authorities. Guidance and more information will be provided as soon as possible. Please bear with us so that we provide you accurate information and analysis.