

Human Services Committee.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you, Madam President, members, this bill relates to the long-term care ombudsman program over in the Department of Aging and what I would like to, I guess, do at this point is rather than get into the discussion at this point, because we need to reject the committee amendments and there is a pending amendment that has been worked out over the summer that I would ask that we spend our time discussing. So at this time I'd...I don't know how we'd do it, but I'd vote against the committee amendments and go on to the next amendment that is pending.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Okay, thank you, Senator Wesely. Senator Withem, do you wish to speak to the committee amendments?

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, I would, I have a basic question. I've looked over the bill summary, looked over the bill and visited with some people, but I think before I cast a vote, either rejecting or adopting committee amendments, I'd like to have a little discussion on the issue of the local Department of Aging regions' abilities to have an ombudsman. As I recall, this bill has been around a number of years. I think Senator Smith had introduced it a couple of years ago. Did she not? Okay. She had introduced a bill dealing with the question of an ombudsman for the State Department of Aging and at that time I was convinced by my local Department of Aging to introduce an amendment to it providing that they could also have this concept at the regional level. And there was a bit of a concern. The industry was comfortable enough, I guess, with the state level having this concept of the ombudsman but they were somewhat uncomfortable with having each region. They felt somewhat like it might become somebody out in some kind of a witch hunting situation and so they were comfortable with the state, they are accepting of that, they weren't with the local. I had offered an amendment to provide for the local level because I was convinced that it was a good idea to have that ability at the local level, that having the statewide office may not be enough. So, Senator Wesely, before we either reject or adopt or whatever the committee amendments, could you use the rest of my time and maybe some other time to discuss this whole issue of regional versus state and how you are ultimately proposing to solve that potential dispute?