

for them, an individual looking out for their concerns to try and rectify and resolve problems? And we thought a program in Lincoln seemed to hold a great deal of promise. We have a volunteer ombudsman program in place in Lincoln and that's through the local area on aging and that program has worked to the satisfaction, as I understand it, not only of the advocates for nursing home residents, but also for the nursing homes themselves. It has been a problem solving initiative that has been mutually beneficial and if properly handled, this concept could be beneficial to the rest of the state as well. So we took that program and incorporated it into LB 677 and the concept again would follow. You have an office of a state long-term care ombudsman who would then oversee a local long-term care ombudsman program that would be optional to the local areas on aging. If they chose to have a program, they could then have volunteer ombudsman advocates. These advocates would be trained under the auspices of the state office on state long-term care ombudsman and the Department on Aging. So there would be some training for these individuals. We found that was one of the key components of the success of the Lincoln program. And these advocates, these volunteer advocates would have some following restrictions under the law. They couldn't initiate action. They would have to respond to it from the request of residents. In other words, they couldn't go out and try and solicit and try to find, well I don't know if that's quite the term, but they couldn't initiate action. They would have to respond to people that have brought them concerns. We would not allow them, for instance, access to records of individuals without the consent of those individuals. So again, we're trying to say that if people want help in these homes and if they request assistance, these advocates will be there, but otherwise we're not trying to have the witch hunt concept that Senator Withem was raising that others have been concerned about. In addition, these individuals have to present their credentials to the nursing home operators before they have access to residents so that you just don't have anybody coming in and claiming to be an advocate when they may not be. So the nursing home operators will know the individual has been trained and recognized and should have a background to be able to provide ombudsman services to residents in that home. We also protect, under the statute, the confidentiality of records and of the individuals involved and place parameters on the release of those information that, I think, again should alleviate some concerns. We also have provisions in here to protect residents and employees who provide information not only to the advocates,