

## State agencies champion good treatment in nursing homes

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent  
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State leaders from the attorney general's office, the state auditor and state ombudsman are working together across the state to protect seniors and people who need specialized care.

The governor's office announced the partnership between the agencies on Sept. 16 in a news release which focuses on poor treatment, abuse and fraud at nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

The state has over 370 long-term facilities with over 11,000 residents.

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“The overarching goal is to make sure we elevate the care in long-term care facilities across the state of New Mexico, that we make sure residents are safe, that their rights are protected, that these facilities know that when it comes to issues of abuse, neglect or assault, that we take a very strong stance in stopping and preventing that,” New Mexico Ombudsman Zack Quintero told *The Gallup Sun* Sept. 23.

The state ombudsman’s role is to address and investigate complaints against mismanagement. This partnership allows for the office to forward specific cases to other agencies where needed.

Reports of abuse will be forwarded to the office of the New Mexico State Auditor Brian Colón.

“I think what we found to be true in this administration is a real desire to make sure that there is no static in the line; that lines of communication are completely open, and there’s collaboration when it comes to protecting New Mexico’s taxpayers, that’s how government serves the people best,” Colón told *The Gallup Sun* Sept. 26.

Colón said the Ombudsman’s office got in touch with his office to work together on this initiative.

He said the partnership will help the Ombudsman’s office do its job more effectively.

“No one had to sell me on the idea, you had me at ‘hello’,” Colón said. “When it comes to protecting New Mexico’s most vulnerable, that’s the bottom line for me.”

Colón, who takes care of his 89-year-old mentor’s widow, said it’s personal.

“She’s like a mother to me. She’s in an assisted living facility, and so for me, I understand that journey, both for care providers and for the loved ones that need our care,” Colón continued. “Anything I can do to bolster the support and responsiveness we give that community, is something I’m very excited about.”

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Quintero pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for better communication.

“We’re going to do everything in our power to make sure these residents are protected and their family members know that they have a strong ally that can advocate for them,” Quintero said. “We noticed that we didn’t have a direct line and communication with the attorney general and state auditor. It was kind of sporadic, it would rotate, depending on the case, and now what we have in place is much more robust.”

***Volunteers interested in helping the State Ombudsman or who wish to raise an issue can contact the New Mexico Ombudsman at (866) 451-2901.***

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