STATE COUNCIL MEETING
Friday, July 24, 2026
2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. EST
(Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams)
OPEN SESSION MINUTES

STATE COUNCIL MEMBERS			
Alanna Lavelle, Northwest (1)	Present ☒	Wanda Harrison, South Central (17)	Present ☒
Richard Gordon, Panhandle (2)	Present ☐	**Jane Horowitz, Pinellas (6) *CHAIR**	Present ☒
Vacant, North Central (3)	Present ☐	Patrick Cannan, Palm Beach (11)	Present ☒
Vacant, Withlacoochee (4)	Present ☐	Sandra Rae, Treasure Coast (16)	Present ☒
Terry Lonczak, Pasco (7)	Present ☒	Rita Duncan, Southwest (10)	Present ☒
Vacant, Brevard (18)	Present ☐	Maggie Zalamea, Broward (12)	Present ☒
Vacant, First Coast South (15)	Present ☐	Clive Pearce, North Dade (13)	Present ☐
Demetrice Dowdell, First Coast (5)	Present ☒	Charles Garavaglia, South Dade (14)	Present ☒
Benjamin Adamo, *Acting (9)*	Present ☒	Mary Darling, At-Large Member	Present ☐
Brooke Becker, West Central (8)	Present ☐		

OTHER OMBUDMSAN PROGRAM REPRESENTATIVES	
Terri Cantrell	State Ombudsman
Jo Ann Quiles	Deputy State Ombudsman
Erica Hill	Legal Advocate
Angela Andrews	Legal Assistant
Diandra Taylor	Training and Development Manager
Tracie Rayfield	Transfer and Discharge Manager
Stephan Adelson	Special Projects Manager
Tracy Schooley	Volunteer Coordinator
Gloria Freyre	East Regional Manager
Lisa Dale	North Regional Manager
GUESTS:	
None	

Chair: Jane Horowitz

1. Call to Order / Quorum (2:30 p.m.)

- Quorum confirmed by Angela Andrews.
- April 2026 minutes approved (motion by Rita Duncan; seconded by Maggie Zalamea; approved by voice vote, no objections).

Welcome New / Newly Confirmed Members

- Demetrice Dowdell (First Coast, D-5) and Maggie Zalamea (Broward, D-12) have now been voted on by their local councils and are official State Council members.

- A prospective new representative joined the meeting and expressed interest in serving; he still needs to be formally voted on by his local council before becoming an official member.

2. Chair's Remarks – State Council Direction & Member Survey (Jane Horowitz)

- Chair Horowitz reflected on the Council's evolution from a listen-and-comment body to an advocacy-focused group, driven in large part by newer members.
- A recently completed member survey showed a range of capacity for advocacy work — some members are at capacity, some can maintain current involvement, and some have room to take on more.
- Members were reminded that participation is voluntary and should fit within each person's local district responsibilities and personal capacity.
- The new State Council Command Center was highlighted as an upcoming resource to make information-sharing and advocacy tracking easier.

3. State Ombudsman Report (Terri Cantrell)

- Mileage reimbursement: Florida's rate remains $0.44/mile. Raising it to $0.60/mile was discussed but would require diverting funds from OPS staffing, which is not recommended. Cantrell will request additional funding through the Legislative Budget Request (LBR) process; impact would not be seen before 2028.
- CMP (Civil Money Penalty) funds: Florida holds over $41 million in unused CMP funds. NASOP (National Association of State Ombudsmen) is pursuing federal rule changes to ease access; the State Council may consider supporting NASOP's initiative once more details are available.
- Memory Care Bill: AHCA has not yet produced a first draft of proposed rulemaking language. A draft is hoped for by September/October, after which the Council will have the opportunity to review and suggest changes. Rulemaking must be finalized by June 1, 2027.
- Staffing: Several long-standing OPS staff vacancies are close to being filled.

4. Volunteer Recruitment Update (Stephan Adelson)

- The state-council-sponsored volunteer recruitment campaign (primarily via Facebook) generated over 16,000 site visits and 165 completed applications; roughly 120 are currently in process, with an estimated 40% expected to become certified volunteers.
- Each application requires roughly 20 administrative steps (interview coordination, packet distribution, background checks, online and field training, Get Care enrollment, etc.).
- Charles Garavaglia asked whether experienced volunteers could help mentor and vet new applicants; Adelson confirmed a Training & Development portal is planned to support a formal mentorship pipeline, building on Diandra Taylor's mentor training program.
- The campaign is currently paused (recruitment goals met for now), but the site continues to accept applications.

5. State Council Command Center Demonstration (Stephan Adelson)

- Adelson demonstrated the new Command Center, accessible via a link at the bottom of every page of the State Council website. It will centralize: a member "feed" for updates and discussion, task/to-do tracking linked to specific bills, a legislative calendar, bill tracking with status and talking points, one-off legislative "asks," a communication log, a member contact/profile directory, a survey tool, and admin management.
- Members will receive an email invitation with a one-time "magic link" for secure, password-free login.
- The tool is in an early "foundation" stage; feedback and suggestions are welcome as it continues to be built out.
- Consensus was that the Command Center is not yet ready to be rolled out to local councils or general volunteers; staff will continue refining it first.

6. State Council Survey Follow-Up

- The recent member survey was described as a helpful first step in learning more about members' interests, capacity, and availability.
- Members can add a short personal profile to the Command Center so others can find shared interests and make connections.

7. Social Media Presence (Erica Hill / Terri Cantrell)

- Staff raised the idea of a State Council social media presence (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) to promote advocacy work, education, and volunteer recruitment.
- Discussion covered content creation (member-driven, staff-supported), page administration (staff would set up the page and add interested members as co-administrators), and the level of ongoing commitment required.
- Maggie Zalamea and Jennifer Brannan expressed interest in learning more; Erica Hill and Stephan Adelson will follow up with interested members to discuss further, including whether the effort is worth the time investment.

8. Advocacy Updates

- **ALF Ownership Transparency:** Erica Hill reported that AHCA's existing change-of-ownership form already captures controlling interests of 5% or greater, so a rule change may not be necessary. However, that information is not readily available to the public. The Council discussed advocating to make ownership information publicly accessible (e.g., a public-facing database).
- **CMS Ownership Scrutiny:** Alanna Lavelle reported that CMS is increasing scrutiny of complex ownership structures nationally, particularly for Medicaid-funded facilities, due to concerns about fraud and abuse. She will research and report back on developments.
- **Memory Care Bill – Med Tech Training:** Wanda Harrison asked whether the bill/rulemaking will address specialized medication technician training for memory care staff, given residents' cognitive impairment. Staff confirmed this will be raised for consideration once the first rulemaking draft is available.
- **Hill Day Legislator Follow-Up:** Chair Horowitz noted that follow-up materials (e.g., a State Council priorities letter) were not fully distributed after Hill Day. Members are asked to notify staff of any specific information requested by legislators/aides so it can be provided.
- **Legislative / Candidate Outreach:** Members discussed additional ways to educate candidates and legislators, including responding to campaign emails/texts with program information and engaging candidates through town halls, community forums, and social media. Maggie Zalamea offered to represent the Council at Broward-area candidate events.

9. Federal Legislation – Access Act & Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act

- Stephan Adelson presented two related federal bills: the Access Act (creates a Medicaid/ALF voucher program for individuals who don't qualify for skilled nursing care but cannot afford assisted living) and the Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act (raises wages, training standards, and labor protections for direct care workers).
- Staff recommended supporting both bills as a linked package, since the Access Act alone could allow underqualified ALFs to accept vulnerable residents without adequate staffing or training safeguards.
- **Motion:** to support the Access Act and Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act as a linked federal legislative package (motion by Maggie Zalamea; seconded by Rita Duncan). **Passed** by voice vote.
- Wanda Harrison raised questions about the scope of "ombudsman access to Medicaid ALF residents" language and potential state funding/match implications; staff will follow up with additional detail as it becomes available.

10. District & Regional Updates

- **North Region (Lisa Dale, ROM):** Continued staffing challenges, though several success stories have been highlighted in the newsletter.
- **Miami-Dade / Care Portal (Gloria Freyre):** Florida's First Lady launched the "Care Portal" initiative connecting long-term care residents with community-based volunteer support; Miami-Dade was selected as a pilot site.
- **Guardianship / Power of Attorney Trend (Demetrice Dowdell, Lisa Dale):** Both reported a growing trend of guardians and powers of attorney overriding a capable resident's own wishes (e.g., regarding memory care placement) rather than deferring to facility assessments of resident capacity and consent. Staff will raise the trend on an upcoming ROM staff call and share any resulting guidance or resources with members.
- **Transfer & Discharge Portal (Tracie Rayfield):** The new transfer/discharge notice portal is piloting in Jacksonville; Pensacola facilities go live by end of August. A presentation is planned at a joint training with AHCA, with statewide rollout (approximately 700 facilities) targeted for the third week of September.
- **AI-Driven Referral (Charles Garavaglia):** Shared that a resident learned about the Ombudsman Program through an AI assistant recommendation, illustrating growing public awareness of the program through technology.

11. Consumer Voice National Conference

- Stephan Adelson and Jane Horowitz will present on the Florida State Council's advocacy model at the Consumer Voice national conference in St. Louis, the last week of September.

12. At-Large Members (Erica Hill)

- Three at-large seats remain open. At-large members do not visit facilities but participate in Council meetings and advocacy.
- Members were asked to submit a short bio and contact information for potential candidates (community members with relevant expertise — e.g., elder-law attorneys, medical professionals, aging advocates). Candidates will be reviewed by staff, then forwarded to State Ombudsman Terri Cantrell for a recommendation list to the Secretary for approval.

13. Next Meeting

- Tentatively scheduled for October 2026; exact date to be announced.

14. Closing Remarks / Adjournment

- Chair Horowitz thanked all participants and reiterated that questions, ideas, and Command Center feedback can be sent to staff at any time.
- Meeting adjourned (4:15 p.m.)

Summary of Decisions & Motions

- April 2026 minutes approved.
- Demetrice Dowdell and Maggie Zalamea confirmed as official (non-acting) State Council members.
- Motion to support the Access Act and Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act as a linked federal legislative package – **Approved.**
- Next meeting: October 2026 (date to be determined).