



Voices Forum 2025

Stand With Me





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VOICES FORUM: Stand With Me

October 3, 2025

Agenda

Arrival and Registration

Pledge of Allegiance

John Banks | Council President from Sgt. John Levitow

Welcome

Mairead Painter | State Long Term Care Ombudsman

Opening Remarks

Amy Porter | Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services

Presentation – National Consumer Voice Lori Smetanka

Lori Smetanka | *Executive Director of the National Consumer Voice*

Raffle

Presentation – Fear of Retaliation Teaser/Video

Mairead Painter | State Long Term Care Ombudsman

Presentation on MFC Strengthening Resident Council Guide

Alice Bonner

Jeanette Sullivan Martinez

Presentation – COLA Campaign and Call to Join E-Board

Statewide Executive Board of Resident Council Presidents

Award Presentations

Carol Rosenwald Spirit of Advocacy Award – Mitch Bolinsky State Representative CT General Assembly

Brian Capshaw Rock Star Award- Lori Smetanka Director of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

Legislative Update

Daniel Beem | Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

Lunch and Raffle

Open Mic & Panel Discussion

Closing Remarks

From One Voice to Many: Advancing Rights and Quality in Long-Term Care

Lori Smetanka



Executive Director of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

Lori Smetanka, J.D., serves as the Executive Director of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, the foremost national nonprofit advocacy organization championing the rights and quality of care for individuals in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and home- and community-based settings. In her current role, she provides visionary leadership on advocacy initiatives, program development, fundraising, and strategic partnerships with federal agencies and other organizations committed to long-term care policy and consumer protection. Lori has been widely recognized as a national expert in long-term care policy. She has testified before Congress, served on federal task forces and expert panels, and continues to work closely with federal agencies on policy matters affecting individuals receiving their long term services and supports in long term care and community settings.



Breaking the Silence

Fear of Retaliation

BREAKING THE SILENCE

THE FEAR OF RETALIATION

Moving Forward Coalition Strengthening Resident Council Guide



The [Moving Forward Coalition](#) has developed a [***Strengthening Resident Council Guide***](#) to enhance the effectiveness of resident councils in all nursing homes. These councils play a critical role in ensuring residents' voices are heard, but some homes may lack the standardized practices needed to fully support them.

The guide offers a structured approach to creating and sustaining inclusive, resident-directed councils in compliance with CMS Federal Regulations (**CFR 483.10(f)(5)**). It provides resident councils and those who support them with tools to foster engagement, address grievances, and maintain effective council activities.

This resource empowers residents to take the lead in shaping the culture and care within their community.

Connecticut Resident Council Presidents Executive Board – Combined Campaign: “Got COLA? Get PNA Raised!”

Jeanette Sullivan-Martinez



Dear Long-Term Care Residents of Connecticut Nursing Homes,

As the Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils across Connecticut, we remain united in our mission to protect and improve the well-being, dignity, and quality of life for all nursing home residents in our state.

The 2025 legislative session has officially ended, and while progress was made on many important fronts, we know that one critical issue still demands urgent attention: ensuring fair and ongoing increases to the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) through Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA).

Over the past few years, the cost of everyday essentials—like hygiene products, snacks, seasonal clothing, and small comforts—has continued to rise, while the amount residents receive each month has stayed the same. Many residents are finding it harder to afford basic personal items that contribute to a dignified and independent life.

This year, we are combining our voices for a powerful campaign:

“Got COLA? Get PNA Raised!”

What Are We Fighting For?

The Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) is a vital resource for Medicaid recipients in nursing homes, enabling us to cover personal expenses not included in Medicaid coverage, such as clothing, toiletries, and other essentials. Right now, the PNA is \$75 per month in Connecticut—a figure we fought hard to increase in 2021.

But with the rising cost of living, we know that \$75 doesn't stretch as far as it used to. Prices go up every year—shouldn't our allowance keep up, too? That's why we're demanding that PNA increases be tied to Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA). Your needs don't stay flat—your allowance shouldn't either!



Call to Action – We Need Your Help!

We are collecting testimonials from residents across Connecticut nursing homes to show lawmakers the real impact of the current PNA and the benefits of tying it to COLA in order to hopefully pass a bill next session like **HB 6775** which would automatically increase our personal needs allowance every time there is a cost of living adjustment to our income. To strengthen our advocacy efforts, and to get this bill passed, **we need your help!** Lawmakers need to hear directly from residents about the importance of increasing the PNA.

How You Can Participate:

1. Share Your Experience:

- How does the current \$75 PNA affect your ability to purchase personal items and services?
- What challenges do you face with the current amount?
- How would an increase tied to COLA improve your daily life and well-being?

2. Submit Your Story:

- **Online:** Fill out our quick and easy form at <https://forms.ct.gov/LTCOPSupport/got-cola> or Scan this QR Code



- **By Email:** Complete the attached paper form and email it to us at LTCOP@ct.gov.

The 2025 legislative session ran from January 8th to June 4th. While we made our voices heard, our work isn't done. Now is the time to prepare for the next session and show lawmakers that residents across Connecticut are united: the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) must keep pace with the rising cost of living—because our dignity matters.

We're building our campaign now to be ready on day one. Your input, stories, and support are essential to driving this change. If you'd prefer to share feedback in person or need help completing the online form, please reach out to your Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman or contact us at LTCOP@ct.gov.

Together, we can secure a PNA that truly reflects the cost of living and supports the dignity and quality of life all residents deserve.
Thank you for being part of this effort.

In Solidarity,

The Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils

Connecticut Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP)

*Susan Bilansky John Jeanette Martinez Richard Hodges
Cohen Robert Willis
Martha Leland*

Jeanette Sullivan-Martinez; President
John Balisciano Jr; Vice President
Ivette Alvarez
Robert Willis

Richard Hodges
Martha Leland
Susan Bilansky
Richard Metayer
Cindy Michaud

Got COLA? Get Heard on PNA! – Resident Feedback Form

Consent and Privacy Notice:

By submitting this form, you authorize the Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman to use your responses in our advocacy efforts to increase the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) in Connecticut. We value your privacy and understand that you may wish to support this cause without fully disclosing your personal information.

Your Options:

- **Full Disclosure:** *Providing your full name, facility, and town allows us to demonstrate the widespread impact across the state.*
- **Partial Disclosure:** *If you prefer, you may share only your first name and town, or any combination of details you are comfortable with.*
- **Anonymity:** *You may choose to remain anonymous; however, please note that anonymous testimonials may have less impact in our advocacy efforts.*

Rest assured, any information you provide will be used solely for the purpose of advocating for residents' rights and will be handled with the utmost care to protect your privacy.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us at LTCOP@ct.gov. Thank you for your support and participation.

Online Form Questions:

Resident Name:
Nursing Facility Name:
Town:
1. Personal Impact: How does the current PNA affect your ability to buy personal items and services?

2. Challenges Faced: Have you had trouble meeting your personal needs because of the current PNA amount?
3. Benefits of an Increase: How would an increase in the PNA improve your daily life and well-being?
4. Specific Needs: Are there specific items or services you currently can't afford that you would prioritize if the PNA were increased?
5. Additional Comments: Please share any other thoughts or suggestions about the PNA and how it affects your quality of life.



It's Your Choice — Let's Hear Your VOICE!

Join the Statewide Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils (SCPRC)

- ✓ Are you a nursing home resident interested in making a difference?
- ✓ The SCPRC is a resident-led group of nursing home leaders from across Connecticut who work together to strengthen resident councils and advocate for the rights and quality of life of over 30,000 residents statewide.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS!

WHAT TO EXPECT:



Just 2 hours per month to attend meetings and share your input

AS A MEMBER YOU WILL:



Be a Voice for nursing home residents



Represent your peers



Advocate for resident rights and interests

TO LEARN MORE



Talk to your Regional Ombudsman or call 1-866-388-1888

Carol Rosenwald Spirit of Advocacy Award

***“You Must Hold onto Your Ideals and Always Have the
Courage to Speak Your Mind” ~ Carol Rosenwald***



In September of 1996, nursing home resident and activist Carol Rosenwald, with assistance from the Ombudsman Program, began organizing residents across the state to advocate for improvements in the long-term care system. Carol envisioned a time when the “VOICES” of nursing home residents could be heard “beyond the walls” of their facilities. She became the founder of the Statewide Coalition of Resident Councils and the driving force behind the first “VOICES” Forum in 1997. As a large group of voting constituents, residents were able to speak directly with political leaders and public officials about important issues affecting their quality of life.

The Carol Rosenwald Award is named in her honor and each year, this award is given to an advocate who carries forward her legacy — working tirelessly to protect and advance the rights, dignity, and quality of life for long-term care residents here in Connecticut.

This Year We are Pleased to award the Carol Rosenwald Spirit of Advocacy Award To

Mitch Bolinsky
State Representative,. Ranking Member – Aging Committee



This year, the Coalition proudly recognizes Representative Mitch Bolinsky for his unwavering commitment to long-term care residents. Now serving his seventh term in the Connecticut General Assembly, he represents Newtown with integrity, compassion, and a genuine connection to the community.

Since 2019, Representative Bolinsky has served as Ranking Member of the Aging Committee and Assistant Republican Leader, championing key legislation that has made a lasting difference; from raising the Personal Needs Allowance and increasing minimum staffing levels, to ensuring residents could testify virtually and remain connected to loved ones during the pandemic, and much more. His history of leadership and the support he has received within his caucus reflect the respect he has earned from colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

In the spirit of Carol Rosenwald's legacy of grassroots advocacy and heartfelt service, we commend Representative Bolinsky for his leadership, partnership, and enduring dedication to the well-being of Connecticut's aging residents. He embodies the kind of representative Carol wanted at the table; one who listens to residents, values their voices, and turns their concerns into meaningful action. His commitment to heartfelt service and support for grassroots advocacy continues to make a lasting difference in the lives of those he serves.

Brian Capshaw Rock Star Award



The Brian Capshaw “Rock Star” Award is named in honor of Brian Capshaw, a nursing home resident and extraordinary advocate whose voice carried far beyond the walls of his facility. Brian’s work reached both Connecticut and the national stage, where he fought tirelessly for the rights, dignity, and quality of life of those living in long-term care.

He served as the resident representative on the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, testified at countless hearings, and walked the halls of the Capitol to speak directly with legislators about critical issues such as improved staffing levels, video monitoring, and increasing the Personal Needs Allowance. Nationally, Brian chaired the Leadership Council of the Consumer Voice, participated in high-level workgroups, and was even invited to the White House for the 2015 Conference on Aging.

Outside of advocacy, Brian loved sports, his family and friends, and hopping in his van to meet up for concerts. He had a deep love for rock music — and he brought that same energy, passion, and rhythm to his advocacy work.

Each year, this award is presented to someone who embodies Brian’s spirit — a true “rock star” when it comes to advocacy at both the state and national level. Like Brian, they amplify the voices of residents, drive the momentum for change, and stand center stage in the fight for justice and quality of life in long-term care.

This Year We are Pleased to award the Brian Capshaw Rock Star Award To

Lori Smetanka

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care



This year, we are proud to present the Brian Capshaw Rock Star Award to Lori Smetanka, a national leader and lifelong advocate for the rights and dignity of individuals receiving long-term care.

As Executive Director of the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, Lori leads the nation's premier nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving care and amplifying the voices of residents in nursing homes, assisted living, and home and community-based settings.

Lori is a nationally recognized expert in long-term care policy, with a career defined by her deep commitment to justice and person-centered care. She has testified before Congress, served on numerous federal task forces and technical panels, and collaborates closely with federal agencies to influence meaningful policy change. Her leadership is grounded in hands-on advocacy, including her twelve years as Director of the National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center, where she supported Ombudsmen nationwide in protecting residents' rights.

In the spirit of Brian Capshaw; whose name is synonymous with fierce advocacy and compassion, we honor Lori Smetanka for her enduring dedication, national impact, and unwavering support of long-term care consumers.

PANEL



Moderated by News Anchor / Reporter Kathryn Hauser

Lori Smetanka, Executive Director
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

The Department of Public Health
Facilities Licensing Division

Jillian Gilchrest
State Representative

Department of Social Services (DSS)
Community Options Unit



Executive Board Members

E-board Member Name	Facility & Contact Information
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**To our Resident Advocates who selflessly volunteer their
time advocating on behalf of nursing home residents.**

Thank You!

<u>Volunteer</u>	<u>Facility</u>
Maureen McNamara	Gladeview
Joyce Werden	Norwich Sub-Acute (Norwichtown)
Kevin Place	Candlewood Valley Nursing Home
Richard Steel	Beechwood
Susan William	Touchpoints at Chestnut
Joann Seraphin	Douglas Manor
Allan Johanson	Wadsworth Glen Health Care and Rehab
Katie Kwong	Connecticut College

Contact The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program:



Email Us: ltcop@ct.gov

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/CTLTCOP

Voices Forum 2025 Post Event Survey

Anyone can respond, Anonymous

Scan the QR or use link to Complete Online Prior to 10/11/25

OR

COMPLETE PAPER COPY ATTACHED TO END OF PACKET



Link: <https://forms.office.com/g/UhA2qTSJCf?origin=lprLink>

2025 VOICES FORUM Post Event Survey Paper Copy

1. Please Choose One: I am a

- ☐ Resident
- ☐ Facility Staff Member
- ☐ Volunteer Resident Advocate
- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ Other Guest

2. Please Rate your overall level of Satisfaction with Todays VOICES Forum



3. What did you like best about the VOICES Forum today?

4. What Improvements or Suggestions do you have for next year's VOICES Forum?

5. Was the Live Question and Answers session helpful?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

6. What preference of music genres would you like to see at next year's VOICES Forum?