



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **WISE & Healthy Aging Supports Three-Bill Package To Protect California Seniors And Other Residents Of Long-Term Care Facilities**

**SANTA MONICA (March 31, 2009)** - Screams of pain and cries for help greeted James Bond's daughter last July as she entered the San Gabriel Valley long-term care facility where her 72-year-old father resided.

Sprinting down the hall and into his room, she found him in bed with his eyes squeezed shut and his entire body completely covered by hundreds of biting ants. His call button was on the floor out of reach.

A double-amputee with a feeding tube and a catheter, the former Little League coach from Pasadena was unable to get out of bed without help, and his cries were ignored. James ended up in the hospital emergency room that night.

As they began seeking answers, James' children were horrified to learn that this was not the first time that James had been attacked by ants. It had happened twice before, but management at the facility had not notified his family, nor had they taken measures to eradicate the ants.

In this instance, nurses had not only ignored his cries of pain, but had neglected to check on him hourly as they were required to.

When his children began asking questions of the facility and its management, their concerns were brushed aside, and they were told, "Those things happen."

It was not until they contacted a WISE & Healthy Aging Ombudsman— who met with them within two hours of when they first called her — that they were able to get help for their father.

Two short months later, Gov. Schwarzenegger slashed by half the funding for California's Ombudsman programs, leaving people like James — some of the most vulnerable members of our society — without anyone to protect their rights, ensure their well-being and articulate their needs.

However, a new three-bill package, introduced last month by Assembly Member Mike Feuer (D-Los Angeles), is designed to protect seniors who are vulnerable to abuse in nursing homes and exploitation in the marketplace. If passed, the package will:

- Restore some funding to local Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs, ensuring that nursing home abuse cases are investigated (AB 392)
- Help families seeking a nursing home for a loved one by requiring skilled nursing facilities to prominently post quality of care ratings; and
- Give new rights to seniors contemplating reverse mortgages.

According to a statement from Assembly Member Feuer's office, "AB 392 helps reverse the damage created by the Governor's veto of \$3.8 million in funding for local Long Term Care Ombudsman programs. These programs are the only advocacy services that protect vulnerable residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities from abuse and neglect... The bill would restore funding by using existing penalties paid by long-term care facilities that fail to comply with federal and state laws."

According to the bill's joint author, Assembly Member Dave Jones (D-Sacramento), "This is not the time to roll back the oversight and protections provided by the Long-Term Care Senior Ombudsman program, or to silence the voices of seniors," he says.

Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging, agrees.

"The statistics are staggering," she says. "The Governor's budget cut last year impacted an estimated 80,000-plus facility residents in Los Angeles County, alone. Like James, many of these people are disabled or verbally impaired and desperately need advocates to protect their rights and ensure their well-being."

"When one considers that our county has more licensed long-term care facilities than all other California counties combined and more than are in any other entire state, one begins to appreciate the magnitude of this problem," says Cheng Braun. "As the only organization authorized by the state to provide long-term care ombudsman services within the City and County of Los Angeles, we see first-hand what can happen when a senior or other resident of a long-term care facility does not have an advocate."

Consider this:

- According to a recent report by the [California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform](#)
- The [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) reported that more than 90 percent of the nation's nursing homes violated federal standards last year.
- An Ombudsman is often the only regularly available advocate to residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Ombudsmen are obligated to investigate all complaints or allegations of abuse or neglect in these facilities.
- They conduct regular, unannounced visits, advocate on residents' behalf with staff and administrators, and identify and resolve issues and complaints
- About 9% of complaints evolve into elder abuse investigations, including physical, sexual, verbal or psychological abuse, as well as gross neglect.
- In the last fiscal year, WISE & Healthy Aging ombudsmen responded to 2,086 abuse complaints.
- By conservative estimates, the budget cut will result in 12,000 fewer unannounced visits in Los Angeles County this year. In addition, 11,500 fewer complaint investigations, including abuse and neglect investigations, will be identified and investigated annually.

"Passage of this bill is vitally important to the residents of long-term care facilities in California," says Cheng Braun. "We encourage everyone to write letters of support to their

assembly members and senators. We also need Ombudsman volunteers and welcome donations to help fund this important program.”

For information on volunteering or monetary donations, please call WISE & Healthy Aging at 310-394-9871.

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Victims of elder abuse who have been helped by the WISE & Healthy Aging Ombudsman Program are available for interviews, as is Grace Cheng Braun, President and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging. Note: Mr. Bond passed away a few months after this incident.

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WISE & Healthy Aging, a social services organization, enhances the independence, dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. This nonprofit is the result of a Nov. 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and Center for Healthy Aging.