

# All Things Media

## Notes to Accompany Presentation

---

### **Intro**

As ombudsmen, we are allowed to talk with members of the media under certain circumstances. Sometimes a resident may decide to turn to the press for a situation they feel needs a larger audience, and they want us to speak on their behalf. Occasionally, the media will pick up a story that is related to the work we do and may call us for comment. We prefer that you call the state office to discuss your response or involvement in a media story before you give a statement. Sometimes, even if a resident has given us permission to discuss a case, we may feel it would do more harm to speak to the press. Every situation is different and it is important to handle media inquiries appropriately.

### **Writing for the Press**

The media can be a great way to get the word out about volunteering opportunities with the ombudsman program. Learning to write for the press is an important part of getting your story noticed. Most reporters and news rooms are very busy and generally understaffed. Some TV stations even share camera crews. It helps to give your local reporter a complete package – make sure your writing is succinct, well-written, and includes anything they'd need to run the story. Contact information, high-resolution photos, etc. Generally, writing for the press follows the “inverted pyramid” format. Make sure you write about the most important thing first, then follow with details. If you write about details first, or wait to say what's most important, we call that “burying the lead” and reporters probably won't use it.

### **Press Releases**

Press releases tell the reader a story. For example, you're telling the story of the ombudsman program and why you need volunteers. These should be brief – try to stick to one page. Include your contact information, the date it can be released, location, and a boilerplate. A boilerplate is a very short, one-paragraph description of your program. The state office has developed a boilerplate you should use when writing about the ombudsman program. See our example for more details, and feel free to customize to use it for your own program.

### **Media Advisories**

Media advisories invite the press to see the story. You're telling the reporter about an event, so they can attend and cover the story themselves. Be choosy about which events you invite press to. Pay attention to what kinds of things a reporter would look for – interactions with residents, family members, people in the community, etc. A TV station will be more likely to attend an event with good visuals, things they can film and use in a TV news report. The example we've provided is an advisory for a real event held in South Texas, with fantastic visual opportunities and chances to interview actual residents and community members.

Remember that news changes constantly, and stay flexible. Offer your contact information and be available for any logistical questions about the event. We always hope reporters will cover our events, but sometimes things happen that require them to be elsewhere. If a major accident or breaking news happens the day of your event, you may not get many reporters. Remember that they are working with short staffs and limited budgets, and do the best they can. The more understanding and helpful we are, the more likely they are to come back to us in the future.

### ***Community Calendars***

Community calendars go directly to the audience and invite them to participate in the story. Most news websites, including your local NPR station, will have these. This is a great place to post anything your local program is hosting or presenting at – volunteer engagement events, health fairs, community meetings, etc. Usually all you have to do is fill out a form and get it up there.

### ***Other Thoughts***

Try to cultivate relationships with the reporters in your area over time. Be responsive to requests for information (bearing in mind our confidentiality requirements and what we may or may not be allowed to say). The more helpful we are, the more we prove ourselves to be a resource for our local media. Remember that you are an expert in your field, and you have a lot to offer a reporter.

### **Movie Clip**

This clip is from the movie *Fun with Dick and Jane*. It is here to illustrate the importance of being prepared for media interviews. While it's unlikely you will ever find yourself in this situation in your role as an ombudsman, it's always a good idea to anticipate questions and have key messages handy!

### **Media Interviews**

You may have the opportunity to do a media interview in your role as an ombudsman. You might be asked to appear on a morning show to talk about your volunteer opportunities (that you've worked so hard to market!), or you may be responding by phone to a request for comment. Keep these tips in mind as you navigate these situations.

### ***Ask For More Time***

You can, and should, ask for more time. You may feel pressured to give a statement right away, but it never hurts to see if you can have even a few minutes to collect your thoughts and decide how to respond. Most of us get flustered and say things we wish we hadn't when we feel pressured to answer right away. Ask the reporter what their deadline is, and if you can have more time. Even if it's half an hour. I find that most reporters are happy to give you more time.

### ***Have a Conversation***

In most interviews, but especially in on-camera interviews, remember that you're just having a conversation. It's easy to get nervous and feel the need to be very formal, but you'll come across as more personal and relaxed if you can remember that you're just having a conversation. For example, if you do a morning show, you'll probably be seated next to or across from your interviewer. Remember that you talk to lots of people, every day, about what an ombudsman does and how we serve residents.

### ***Brevity is Good***

Try to be brief in your answers. Not terse (as in one-word answers), but not verbose. This is why it helps to have key messages that are no more than one or two sentences. Answer the question, and then stop. No need to keep talking! And, the less wordy you are, the less likely it is that you'll say something you don't want to say.

### ***Don't Say "No Comment"***

Do your best to avoid saying "no comment". This is one of those overused phrases that makes it look like you have something to hide – when you probably don't. We are sometimes asked about situations we cannot comment on, like a specific resident case or a problem happening at a facility. Work with the state office to come up with a good way to tell the reporter about our confidentiality requirements. Once you state that you cannot discuss a specific case, you can redirect to a general key message.

### ***Look at Your Interviewer, Not the Camera***

Unless you are doing a direct interview (where it's just you behind the camera and your interviewer is standing behind the cameraman, which forces you to look at the camera), try hard not to look at the camera. We tend to get unnerved about having a camera around, but try to pretend it isn't there unless you're asked by the producer or interviewer to look at the camera. This goes back to "have a conversation." Look at your interviewer and ignore the camera. You'll appear much more relaxed and genuine.

### ***Don't Forget***

Our privacy and confidentiality rules all apply. Unless you have the permission of the resident to discuss a specific situation with a news organization, you cannot even indicate that you have been involved in the case. You will have to give a general answer. Please contact the state office to discuss an appropriate response before you give a statement.

### ***Facebook and Other Media Matters***

We're on Facebook! Our Facebook page is for you and ombudsmen across the state to connect, and we post information, stories, and events that are of interest to ombudsmen and advocates who work in long-term care.