

A PROPOSAL FOR A PROVINCE OF ALBERTA INDEPENDENT SENIORS' ADVOCATE BY
A CIRCLE OF ALBERTA SENIORS' ADVOCACY GROUP CHAIRPERSONS

"When you're down and out, when you're on the street, when evening falls so hard,
I'll comfort you, I'll take your part" - Simon and Garfunkel

A Circle of Chairs of seniors' groups has been developing, and working to get adopted by the Province, a proposal to establish an Independent Seniors' Advocate (ISA) in Alberta to assist seniors in distress. The ISA would be an officer of the Legislature like the Auditor General or Ombudsman. The proposal has been in the works now for nearly five years.

Over that time, three Ministers for Seniors have been contacted for their support. The last Minister under the Klein administration, Honourable Yvonne Fritz, was supportive of the idea. However, with Mr. Klein's resignation the issue was put in the hands of the current Minister. His Ministry is not convinced of the need for the ISA.

The Circle was informed by the MLA who chairs the Minister's advisory committee that the last thing the government would want is another officer of the Legislative Assembly because these people have their own bureaucracies and "we can't get at them!"

The full ISA document can be found on the internet at <saltalberta.blogspot.com>. Seniors in Alberta who think the ISA concept is worthwhile should contact their MLA to get their support for the idea.

Paper's Intention: That the Government of Alberta establish an Independent Seniors' Advocate and an Office of the Seniors' Advocate with the characteristics and capabilities outlined in this paper. The Circle of Chairpersons wishes to be consulted in the development of this initiative.

There are at least nineteen Government of Alberta Departments involved in seniors' matters. A senior in distress who phones for help is often necessarily referred to other Departments. Seniors seeking such help, while in distress are also short on energy, hearing impaired and sometimes have trouble being understood on the phone because English is not their first language. Not infrequently, they are frustrated to the point of tears with the process.

A search for resources available to distressed seniors has found that there is no province-wide, provincial, interdepartmental service with intergovernmental linkages and home-based investigative capabilities to help seniors in distress.

This paper proposes the establishment of an Independent Seniors' Advocate (ISA) and Office of the Independent Seniors' Advocate (OSA). The ISA is intended to compliment rather than replace the role of a Minister for Seniors.

The ISA would be an officer of the Legislative Assembly such as, for example, the Auditor General or Ombudsman, who cannot act as an advocate. She or he would have a small permanent staff.

In addition to the ISA, there would be one professional responsible for collecting and continually updating the considerable and impressive resources already available Provincially, Federally, and locally to assist seniors in distress. A second professional would be responsible for recruiting, training, and deploying a corps of seniors, called ISA Elders, the Elders would be paid hourly and expenses to be the field officers of the ISA. They would be able to visit seniors in distress, listen to their stories and shepherd them in seeking the existing resources to relieve their distress. The corps of Elders would be more economical than a permanent staff, can easily be expanded or contracted.

In addition to this individual advocacy work, the ISA would have two other critical roles. A second function would be to refer cases of administrative unfairness to the Ombudsman, or where evidence of irregularities warrants, to the Police, Human Rights, Privacy Commissioner, etc. The third role would be to identify evidence grounded deficiencies or gaps in service to assist seniors in distress and advocate for the elimination of those deficiencies, whatever the level of government. The budget is \$1,840,000.

Jerry Pitts, Chair, Coalition of Seniors' Advocates (COSA)

Irl Miller, Chair, Seniors' One Voice

Wanda Cree, Chair, Seniors' Health Council;

Peter Stewart, Chair, Edmonton Branch, Canadian Association for Retired Persons (CARP)

Lynda Jonson, Chair, Seniors I Care

Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director, Public Interest Alberta

Ron Ellis, Executive Director, Seniors United Now (SUN)

Jack Fulwiler, Chair, Alberta Retired Teachers' Association (ARTA)

Brian Staples, Chair, Seniors Action and Liaison Team (SALT)

This paper is endorsed in principle by the Alberta: Liberals, New Democrats, Alliance and Green Parties.

Submitted Dec 12, 2007 by Brian Staples.

The full proposal is available on the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team website at

<http://saltalberta.blogspot.com/>