

**RCW 18.20.185 Complaints—Toll-free telephone number—**

**Investigation and referral—Rules—Retaliation prohibited.** (1) The department shall establish and maintain a toll-free telephone number for receiving complaints regarding a facility that the department licenses.

(2) All facilities that are licensed under this chapter shall post in a place and manner clearly visible to residents and visitors the department's toll-free complaint telephone number and the toll-free number and program description of the long-term care ombuds as provided by RCW 43.190.050.

(3) The department shall investigate complaints if the subject of the complaint is within its authority unless the department determines that: (a) The complaint is intended to willfully harass a licensee or employee of the licensee; or (b) there is no reasonable basis for investigation; or (c) corrective action has been taken as determined by the ombuds or the department.

(4) The department shall refer complaints to appropriate state agencies, law enforcement agencies, the attorney general, the long-term care ombuds, or other entities if the department lacks authority to investigate or if its investigation reveals that a follow-up referral to one or more of these entities is appropriate.

(5) The department shall adopt rules that include the following complaint investigation protocols:

(a) Upon receipt of a complaint, the department shall make a preliminary review of the complaint, assess the severity of the complaint, and assign an appropriate response time. Complaints involving imminent danger to the health, safety, or well-being of a resident must be responded to within two days. When appropriate, the department shall make an on-site investigation within a reasonable time after receipt of the complaint or otherwise ensure that complaints are responded to.

(b) The complainant must be: Promptly contacted by the department, unless anonymous or unavailable despite several attempts by the department, and informed of the right to discuss alleged violations with the inspector and to provide other information the complainant believes will assist the inspector; informed of the department's course of action; and informed of the right to receive a written copy of the investigation report.

(c) In conducting the investigation, the department shall interview the complainant, unless anonymous, and shall use its best efforts to interview the resident or residents allegedly harmed by the violations, and, in addition to facility staff, any available independent sources of relevant information, including if appropriate the family members of the resident.

(d) Substantiated complaints involving harm to a resident, if an applicable law or regulation has been violated, shall be subject to one or more of the actions provided in RCW 18.20.190. Whenever appropriate, the department shall also give consultation and technical assistance to the facility.

(e) After a department finding of a violation for which a stop placement has been imposed, the department shall make an on-site revisit of the provider within fifteen working days from the request for revisit, to ensure correction of the violation. For violations that are serious or recurring or uncorrected following a previous citation, and create actual or threatened harm to one or more residents' well-being, including violations of residents' rights, the

department shall make an on-site revisit as soon as appropriate to ensure correction of the violation. Verification of correction of all other violations may be made by either a department on-site revisit or by written or photographic documentation found by the department to be credible. This subsection does not prevent the department from enforcing license suspensions or revocations. Nothing in this subsection shall interfere with or diminish the department's authority and duty to ensure that the provider adequately cares for residents, including to make departmental on-site revisits as needed to ensure that the provider protects residents, and to enforce compliance with this chapter.

(f) Substantiated complaints of neglect, abuse, exploitation, or abandonment of residents, or suspected criminal violations, shall also be referred by the department to the appropriate law enforcement agencies, the attorney general, and appropriate professional disciplining authority.

(6) The department may provide the substance of the complaint to the licensee before the completion of the investigation by the department unless such disclosure would reveal the identity of a complainant, witness, or resident who chooses to remain anonymous. Neither the substance of the complaint provided to the licensee or contractor nor any copy of the complaint or related report published, released, or made otherwise available shall disclose, or reasonably lead to the disclosure of, the name, title, or identity of any complainant, or other person mentioned in the complaint, except that the name of the provider and the name or names of any officer, employee, or agent of the department conducting the investigation shall be disclosed after the investigation has been closed and the complaint has been substantiated. The department may disclose the identity of the complainant if such disclosure is requested in writing by the complainant. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to interfere with the obligation of the long-term care ombuds program to monitor the department's licensing, contract, and complaint investigation files for long-term care facilities.

(7) The resident has the right to be free of interference, coercion, discrimination, and reprisal from a facility in exercising his or her rights, including the right to voice grievances about treatment furnished or not furnished. A facility licensed under this chapter shall not discriminate or retaliate in any manner against a resident, employee, or any other person on the basis or for the reason that such resident or any other person made a complaint to the department, the attorney general, law enforcement agencies, or the long-term care ombuds, provided information, or otherwise cooperated with the investigation of such a complaint. Any attempt to discharge a resident against the resident's wishes, or any type of retaliatory treatment of a resident by whom or upon whose behalf a complaint substantiated by the department has been made to the department, the attorney general, law enforcement agencies, or the long-term care ombuds, within one year of the filing of the complaint, raises a rebuttable presumption that such action was in retaliation for the filing of the complaint. "Retaliatory treatment" means, but is not limited to, monitoring a resident's phone, mail, or visits; involuntary seclusion or isolation; transferring a resident to a different room unless requested or based upon legitimate management reasons; withholding or threatening to withhold food or treatment unless authorized by a terminally ill resident or his or her representative pursuant to law; or persistently delaying responses to

a resident's request for service or assistance. A facility licensed under this chapter shall not willfully interfere with the performance of official duties by a long-term care ombuds. The department shall sanction and may impose a civil penalty of not more than three thousand dollars for a violation of this subsection. [2013 c 23 § 9; 2001 c 193 § 2; 1997 c 392 § 214.]

**Short title—Findings—Construction—Conflict with federal requirements—Part headings and captions not law—1997 c 392:** See notes following RCW 74.39A.009.