

National Long-Term Care Residents' Rights Week Rally The Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Reform

The Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents (AANHR) has organized the Annual Residents' Rights Week Rally at the Arkansas State Capitol for the past seven years. The goal of the Rally is to celebrate and bring attention to National Residents' Rights Week, which honors residents living in all long-term care facilities. AANHR carries out multiple steps to organize a successful Rally. First, AANHR determines the logistics of the Rally. This includes determining when National Residents' Rights Week takes place, making a list of speakers, dignitaries, and others who should speak at the Rally, and inviting and confirming those speakers. Additionally, the location is secured, and the date and time are set; an event held in the late morning/early afternoon are the most feasible times for dignitaries to attend while providing enough time for the media to produce their stories for the evening news. Securing the location and finalizing the date/time should be done at least a month prior to the event, and it is necessary to determine inclement weather needs, audio-visual needs, and seating needs.

The next steps involve calling the governor or mayor's office – at least one month prior to the event – and asking for a Residents' Rights Proclamation, which they send to AANHR. After downloading sample Proclamations from the NORC website to ensure that the application is properly completed, the completed Proclamation and application are sent back to the Governor or Mayor's office. Marketing the Rally to the general public is the next step. This involves creating press releases, emails and fliers with basic information about the event. The fliers should be sent, mailed, and faxed at least one month before the Rally. The event should be publicized to CAGs, ombudsmen, and organizations with related missions. Submitting letters to the editor of local/state newspapers is the next step, along with inviting the media. The media should typically be invited about one week in advance of the Rally. It is also important to ask local nursing homes to bring residents to the Rally – this can be achieved by working with the state or regional ombudsman.

Once the signed Proclamation arrives in the mail, AANHR frames it and prepares an easel to display it at the Rally (it is important to know the rules and regulations for the Rally location, as some sites may require certain types and sizes of signs). AANHR also creates and copies programs, and includes other items such as banners and small ribbons to be used as awareness ribbon pins. AANHR orders plastic bags for Rally attendees, and fills them with a program, a copy of Residents' Rights, their organization's newsletter, and an ombudsman pamphlet with contact information. They also create packets for the media that attend the Rally: a 2-pocket folder with the agenda and program, the press release, information about their organization/the event/the speakers, and the history of Residents' Rights Week. AANHR finds an artificial tree to display next to the podium at the Rally. They determine how many nursing homes in the state were cited for immediate jeopardy, purchase pre-made bows that represent these nursing homes, and hang the bows on the tree, along with information for the public about each of these homes. The entire cost is low (about \$50), and over 100 attendees participate.

AANHR has collaborative relationships with several organizations, including: Area Agency on Aging; AARP State Chapter; Alzheimer's Association State Chapter; Disability Rights Groups; NCCNHR; Ombudsman Programs; and State Culture Change Coalitions. Regarding advocacy strategies, AANHR's CAG has found that letter writing/email campaigns to legislators, letters to the editor, calling/visiting legislators, coalition development, family council development, rallies, working with the media, and group education/outreach have been the most successful in their advocacy strategy.