

How To Organize A National Long-Term Care Residents' Rights Rally In Your State

The Arkansas Advocates for Nursing Home Residents (AANHR) organized the 2008 5th Annual Residents' Rights Week Rally at the Arkansas State Capitol. The goal of the Rally was to celebrate and bring attention to National Residents' Rights Month, which honors residents living in all long-term care facilities. AANHR carried out multiple steps to organize a successful Rally. First, AANHR determined the logistics of the Rally. This included 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, a location was secured, and the date and time were 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 involved calling the governor or mayor's office – at least one month prior to the event – and asking for a Residents' Rights Proclamation, which they sent to AANHR. After downloading sample Proclamations from the NORC website to ensure that the application was properly completed, the completed Proclamation and application were sent back to the Governor or Mayor's office. Marketing the Rally to the general public was the next step. This involved 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 was the next step, as was inviting the media. The media should typically be invited about one week in advance of the Rally. It was also important to ask local nursing homes to bring residents to the Rally – this could be achieved by working with the state or regional ombudsman.

Once the signed Proclamation arrived in the mail, AANHR framed it and prepared 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 created and copied programs, and included other items such as banners and small ribbons to be used as awareness ribbon pins. AANHR ordered plastic bags for Rally attendees, and filled them with a program, a copy of Residents' Rights, their organization's newsletter, and an ombudsman pamphlet with contact information. They also created packets for the media that attended 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 found an artificial tree to display next to the podium at the Rally. They determined how many nursing homes in the state were cited for immediate jeopardy, purchased pre-made bows that represented these nursing homes, and hung the bows on the tree, along with information for the public about each of these homes. The entire cost was low (about \$50) and over 100 attendees participated.

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.