

# News Release



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## **DHS Aging and People with Disabilities leader to join Long-Term Care Ombudsman**

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(Salem, Ore.) – Ashley Carson Cottingham, director of the Department of Human Services' Office of Aging and People with Disabilities, will join State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Fred Steele to serve as his deputy agency director. In her new role, Carson Cottingham will work for Steele in leading the state's Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, which advocates for individuals living in state-licensed, long-term care facilities including nursing and assisted living facilities as well as adult foster homes.

Carson Cottingham will remain in her current position through September to allow for a smooth leadership transition.

"Ashley brought to DHS a combination of strong leadership, vision and a rigorous focus on safety and performance that has elevated the Aging and People with Disabilities program," said DHS Director Fariborz Pakseresht. "Her unfailing compassion and dedication reflect the kind of heart we value in the people who carry out the DHS mission. She will be missed, but I am pleased that she will have the opportunity to use her experience and skills in new ways to improve the lives of Oregonians."

Carson Cottingham has dedicated her career to serving older adults and people with disabilities by improving the policies and programs intended to meet their needs. The [AARP ranked Oregon as 4th in the nation](#) for its long-term care services and supports and Oregon's Office of Aging and People with Disabilities has been looked to as a national leader in providing community-based long-term care options as well as culturally sensitive services and supports.

"Changing how older adults and people with disabilities are supported and served in Oregon has been among the most rewarding chapters of my career," Carson Cottingham said. "I'm proud of the close collaboration that the Aging and People with Disabilities leadership team has built with advocates, stakeholders, consumers and members of the state legislature to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. I look forward to being able to expand upon this work in the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman."

The leadership opportunity with the Office of the Long-term Care Ombudsman will not only build upon Carson Cottingham's work in the state but provides her with more schedule flexibility to prioritize her family, particularly her two young sons.

In her more than five years working with the Office of Aging and People with Disabilities, Ashley and her team have:

- Reorganized program resources to prioritize safety for vulnerable populations, including creating a dedicated safety manager position to triage the DHS response to incidents of abuse or neglect.
- Introduced a [consumer-friendly website](#) through which the public can easily research the compliance history of long-term care facilities.
- Collaborated with stakeholders and legislators to shape and implement House Bill 3359 – the Omnibus Long-Term Care Safety and Quality Improvements law – which updated and strengthened regulation of licensed long-term care settings.
- Implemented a statewide Centralized Abuse Management System to standardize investigations and shore up the state’s capability to use data to see trends and take measures to prevent abuse.
- Initiated a registry for long-term care referral agents, which made Oregon one of the first of states with this oversight and provided consumers with a [website to research registered agents](#).
- Developed a strategic plan in partnership with stakeholders which establishes two- and five-year initiatives toward achieving our collective programmatic goals.

Carson Cottingham joined DHS in 2014 as deputy director of the Office of Aging and People with Disabilities. When she was promoted to director in late 2015, she was among the youngest leaders to be named a program director at DHS. Prior to joining DHS, Ashley worked as the staff director for the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. In this role, she worked on Medicare, Medicaid, aging, disability and primary health care issues for the subcommittee chairman, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). Most notably, her team was tasked with pushing the bi-partisan reauthorization of the Older Americans Act forward. She also worked for the Senate Special Committee on Aging for chairman, U.S Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI), specifically policies related to preventing elder abuse and strengthening retirement security. She received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Oregon and her law degree from the Vermont Law School.

After Carson Cottingham starts her new position in October, Michael McCormick, deputy director of the Office of Aging and People with Disabilities, will lead the program while a national search is conducted to replace her.

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