# When Oversight Fails, the Story Escapes the Institution

*Lessons for CCRC governance from Spotlight PA's "Unprotected" series and Pennsylvania's 2026 aging audit*

**By Richmond Shreve – September 24, 2026**

For more than two years, Spotlight PA[i] investigative reporter Angela Couloumbis has been examining Pennsylvania's system for protecting older adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and abandonment. Her "Unprotected" series began in July 2024 with reporting that many of Pennsylvania's 52 Area Agencies on Aging were taking too long to investigate complaints, sometimes exceeding the 20-day period required by state regulations. Subsequent stories examined deaths during open investigations, cases rejected without investigation, weaknesses in state monitoring, lack of sanctions, disputed performance data, and concerns raised by current and former officials.

The reporting has persisted because the underlying questions have persisted: When warning signs appear, who notices? Who acts? Who checks whether the action was adequate? And what happens when the institution responsible for oversight is itself not asking those questions rigorously enough?

On September 23, 2026, Pennsylvania Auditor General Timothy DeFoor released a performance audit of the Department of Aging that gave many of those questions new weight. The audit did not examine individual Area Agencies on Aging as institutions; it examined the Department of Aging's oversight of them. It identified weaknesses in monitoring, follow-up, staff training, transparency, data quality, and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements. The auditors issued 10 findings, 39 recommendations to the department, and three recommendations to the General Assembly.

Among the findings were particularly troubling examples. The auditors reported that the department's newer monitoring system did not adequately measure whether older adults had actually been left at risk. They found that required 20-day investigation deadlines were being treated as goals rather than requirements, that there was no maximum time for financial-exploitation investigations, and that annual evaluations required by law were not being conducted as required.

The timing naturally raises the question of whether Couloumbis's reporting helped prompt the audit or intensified scrutiny of the system. The public record does not establish that causal connection. What can be said is that the Auditor General's findings independently echo many of the problems Spotlight PA had been documenting.

For NaCCRA members concerned with governance, there is a lesson here larger than Pennsylvania's protective-services system. No provider, board, or community benefits when preventable failures become the subject of a multi-year investigative series, legislative hearings, whistleblower allegations, and a critical government audit. By that point, the issue is no longer simply whether a particular complaint was handled correctly. The institution's judgment, transparency, culture, and credibility are all under examination.

The better course is prevention. CCRCs and other senior-living organizations should have governance systems designed to identify problems before outsiders must expose them. That means reliable complaint procedures, protection against retaliation, meaningful resident participation, independent review of serious incidents, transparent reporting to boards, clear escalation procedures, and regular examination of whether policies actually protect people in practice.

Those protections should extend across the continuum. Dependent residents need safeguards against neglect, abuse, exploitation, and failures of care. Independent-living residents also need protection against coercion, retaliation, disregard of contractual or resident rights, and governance practices that leave legitimate concerns without an effective hearing.

Good governance is therefore more than risk management or public relations. It is a system of early warning and correction. A community that listens carefully to residents, investigates problems promptly, measures outcomes honestly, and corrects weaknesses openly is much less likely to discover its failures through a reporter, regulator, auditor, or courtroom.

The lesson from Pennsylvania is not that scrutiny should be avoided. It is that responsible institutions should do the work that makes extraordinary outside scrutiny unnecessary.

## Sources


- Spotlight PA — "Unprotected" investigation series
- Spotlight PA — "New film reveals faults in PA's system to protect older adults from abuse, neglect"
- Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General — Performance Audit of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, published Sept. 23, 2026
- Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General — News release on the audit


---

[i] The author is a financial supporter of Spotlight PA.