



Child Protection Ombuds: A 50 State Review Background Review

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Summary: Ombuds are public officials whose role is to be problem solvers and watchdogs. States have recognized that ombuds can help protect the rights of vulnerable populations. This is especially true for people in the child protection system. Child protection comprises a complex arrangement of agencies, systems, and stakeholders. Even with existing advocacy and oversight, the child protection system contains blind spots.

The Office of Performance Evaluations was asked to review other states' use of ombuds in the child protection system. Information was collected from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have forty-nine agencies that perform ombuds functions. Four states have a general ombuds that investigate complaints about executive branch agencies, including child protection. Of the seven states that do not have an identified ombuds agency, five have some form of heightened complaint process that exceeds what is available in Idaho.

This background review identifies states with agencies that provide children's ombuds services and describes their scope of services and structure.



Introduction

Child protection comprises a complex arrangement of systems, agencies, community partners, and stakeholders that span jurisdictions and disciplines with a common goal of preventing abuse and neglect. Despite collaboration and multiple forms of accountability, Idaho has persistent challenges in achieving positive outcomes. A child ombuds is one strategy other states use to bolster accountability and help individuals and families navigate this complex system.

OMBUDS (OM-budz)

An independent, impartial public official with authority and responsibility to receive, investigate, or informally address complaints about government actions, and, when appropriate make findings, recommendations, and publish reports.

- **United States Ombudsman Association**

Ombuds¹ are public officials whose role is to be problem solvers and watchdogs.² The role was created in the early 1800's in Europe to balance legislative (or parliamentary) and executive powers.³ The role has evolved into a citizen-focused tool for public accountability. Hawaii established the first public sector ombuds office in the United States in 1969.⁴

States have recognized that ombuds can help protect the rights of vulnerable populations, including children and youth in the child protection system. State and federal law provide a series of advocacy and oversight functions when children are involuntarily removed from their homes, including:

- judicial review
- appointed counsel for parents
- appointed guardian ad litem, attorney, or both for children
- case review by citizen review panels
- case review by multidisciplinary teams

¹ Ombuds is a shorter, synonymous term to ombudsman or ombudsperson.

² *Ombudsperson*, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LAW & SOCIETY: AMERICAN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES (2007). Ombudsmen are often tasked with a “variety of complaint-handling and dispute-resolution” tasks. They are characterized “as the defender of citizens and the public watchdog.”

³ *Id.*

⁴ *History of the Public Sector Ombudsman*, UNITED STATES OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION (2019), <https://www.usombudsman.org/about/history-of-the-public-sector-ombudsman/> (last visited Dec 21, 2023). While this report says the starting date for Hawaii's office was 1967, the annual report of the Office of Ombudsman states 1969. See *Office of the Ombudsman State of Hawaii Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Report*, HAWAII OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN (2022), <https://www.ombudsman.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Annual-Report-53-For-Web.pdf>



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child fatality review teams

legislative review by the Child Protection Oversight Committee

policy review and advisory boards in the executive and judicial branch

federal Child and Family Services Review

Even with existing advocacy and oversight, this complex system contains blind spots. Child protection agencies struggle to improve outcomes for children and youth. Families and individuals often have concerns about their experiences with child protection agencies and seek a neutral avenue for redress. As states seek to emphasize prevention, more families will have the potential to receive safety and family preservation services without judicial oversight. Less frequently, a high-profile event or fatality draws attention to gaps in system oversight. A 2011 case study of ten child ombuds programs found that eight were established in the aftermath of tragic child fatalities.⁵ In 2023, Louisiana established a child ombuds after department staff did not promptly respond to allegations of maltreatment and multiple children died.⁶

Senator Abby Lee asked the Office of Performance Evaluations to conduct a background review of other states' use of child protection ombuds. Background reviews, also called 24-hour reviews, are expedited reports that supply a summary of best practices and publicly available information to meet the time-sensitive needs of legislators. This report does not make findings or recommendations like those found in our evaluations. However, this report does offer information that should be useful if policymakers wish to take further action.

This report provides a high-level summary of information from other states and best practices to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is a children's ombuds?
- 2) How many states have child protection ombuds or child advocate offices?
- 3) What is the scope of services provided by the ombuds?
- 4) How have other states structured ombuds or child advocate offices?

⁵ Moira, Kathleen O'Neill, *Pulling Back the Curtain State Ombudsmen at Work*. Yale University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing at 93-94 (2011).

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/884262952?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&source-type=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

⁶ Andrea Gallo, *Louisiana Has Created a New Watchdog for vulnerable Children. Here's How It'll Work*. The Advocate (Jun. 20, 2023).



Methods

The Child Welfare Information Gateway published a list of complaint offices that included ombuds.⁷ We cross-referenced this list with a 2021 report by the National Conference of State Legislatures on children’s ombuds and advocate offices.⁸ We then verified and collected additional from all fifty states and the District of Columbia by visiting agency web pages and reading agency reports. We also reviewed academic, government, and policy papers.

Based on the data we collected, we developed a classification system based on (1) the type of office or role and (2) the level of structural independence.

Type

To identify the type of office, we reviewed how the agency self-identified. When the type of office was ambiguous, we reviewed the agency's mission statement or other descriptions of its functions. We classified the types of agencies into four categories:

- ombuds
- advocate
- complaint and client services
- inspector general

⁷ Child Welfare Information Gateway, *State Contacts & Related Organizations*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/states-territories-tribes/related-organizations/> (last visited Jan. 5, 2024; filtered for “Child Welfare State Complaint Offices”).

⁸ *Children’s Ombudsman Offices: Office of the Child Advocate*, National Conference of State Legislatures (2021), <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/childrens-ombudsman-offices-office-of-the-child-advocate> (last visited Jan. 5, 2024).



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The distinctions between the categories are not consistently clear, especially between ombuds and advocate offices. Ombuds and advocates tend to have more authority to conduct independent investigations and to advocate for individuals and system reform. Complaint and client services offices tend to focus on informal problem resolution. Inspectors general tend to focus on investigating and detecting fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, and mismanagement in government.⁹

The list of complaint or client services agencies may not be complete. This report includes complaint offices that were either identified through the Child Welfare Information Gateway or NCSL reports or when the state did not have an ombuds or advocate. States often have more than one mechanism for resolving complaints.

Independence

Independence was categorized based on the agency's level of separation from the department providing child protection or other direct services. More details about these categories are in section 4 of this report.

⁹ Inspector general positions are generally modeled after the Inspector General Act of 1978, Pub. L. No. 95-452, 92 Stat. 1101. The Act created inspectors general to promote effectiveness, detect fraud and abuse, and provide a means for keeping the legislative branch informed about problems and deficiencies in administrative programs.



1. What is a children's ombuds?

Across the states, children's ombuds offices provide oversight and advocacy services that span a variety of programs, including:

- child protection
- foster care
- juvenile justice
- residential care
- child care
- other programs serving children receiving state funds

Ombuds offices are also organized by the population served. For example, an ombuds may have the authority to oversee any program supporting children under 18.

While states have customized ombuds offices to meet the specific emerging needs of their child welfare system, four best practices are essential to structure an ombuds office with the information, authority, and credibility necessary to improve outcomes. These practices, established by the United States Ombudsman Association, include:¹⁰

- independence in structure, function and appearance from the program the ombuds oversees
- impartiality when assessing the root cause of complaints and seeking resolution
- confidentiality protections that allow discretion to weigh the needs for privacy and transparency
- credibility when creating professional review processes

¹⁰ *Children's Ombudsman Offices: Office of the Child Advocate*, National Conference of State Legislators (Oct. 5, 2021) <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/childrens-ombudsman-offices-office-of-the-child-advocate>. Best practices are adapted from the 2003 Governmental Ombudsman Standards of the United States Ombudsman Association. A model Ombudsman Act for a general ombuds office can be found on the association's website: <https://www.usombudsman.org/about/model-legislation/>



2. How many states have child protection ombuds or child advocate offices?

39 states and the District of Columbia have 49 agencies dedicated to resolving complaints in children’s services.

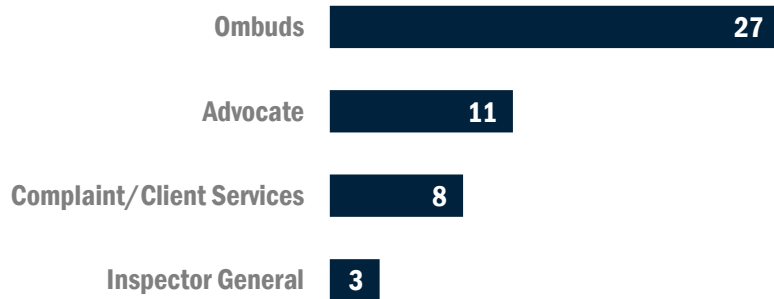
Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have 49 ombuds, advocate, inspector general, or client services agencies dedicated to children’s services. Massachusetts has both a children’s ombudsman and children’s advocate agency. Oklahoma has four agencies:

two complaint/client services agencies, one for foster youth and one for foster parents

two ombuds agencies, one embedded within the Department of Human Services and one in the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

Florida has an ombuds and an inspector general. Arkansas and Maryland have two separate ombuds agencies that interact with the child protection system. Exhibit 1 shows the number of states that have each type of agency. Appendix A lists the states by type of agency with links to the agency website and a reference to the enacting statute and agency mission, when available. Some of these states have general government ombuds or constituent services agencies in addition to the agencies dedicated to children’s services.

EXHIBIT 1. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have 49 agencies dedicated to resolving complaints in children’s services.



Source: OPE’s review of other state agencies with purpose or mission like a traditional ombuds role. Appendix A lists the states and agencies by category.



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Four states¹¹ have a general government ombudsman that investigate complaints about executive branch agencies, which would include children's services and child protection.

Only 7 states do not have a children's ombuds, advocate, or complaint/client services office.

Seven states do not have an agency identified to fill an ombuds role: Alabama, Idaho, Mississippi, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Five of these states have some form of heightened complaint process that exceeds what is available in Idaho.

5 of the these states have some form of heightened complaint process that exceeds what is available in Idaho.

Alabama has an Office of Child Abuse/Neglect Administrative Reviews where substantiated findings of abuse or neglect can be appealed to an independent agency.¹²

Mississippi has an Office of Inspector General within the Department of Child Protection Services that investigates complaints or offenses committed by agency employees or contractors.¹³

North Dakota has a Client Rights and Appeals Supervisor who is responsible for processing administrative appeals, including appeals of child abuse and neglect assessments.¹⁴

Pennsylvania has several regional child welfare services offices, and Philadelphia has a youth ombudsman at the city level.¹⁵

Wyoming has a Complaint Resolution Office within the Department of Family Services that can resolve concerns and complaints and conduct legal or other research on child welfare laws.¹⁶

¹¹ Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, and Kentucky

¹² Child Abuse/Neglect Administrative Reviews, Alabama Department of Human Resources, <https://dhr.alabama.gov/child-protective-services/child-abuse-neglect-administrative-reviews/>

¹³ Office of Inspector General, Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services, <https://www.mdcp.ms.gov/about/leadership/christopher-rand>

¹⁴ Client Rights and Appeals, North Dakota Health and Human Services, <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/about-us/client-rights-and-appeals>

¹⁵ Office of the Youth Ombudsperson, City of Philadelphia, <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-the-youth-ombudsperson/>

¹⁶ Complaint Resolution, Wyoming Department of Family Services, <https://dfs.wyo.gov/about/complaint-resolution/>



3. What are the scopes of services provided?

Of the 39 states with agencies dedicated to resolving complaints in children’s services, the most common services provided are:¹⁷

- investigate complaints or grievances
- provide information and referrals about available services
- resolve complaints through alternative dispute resolution or mediation
- advocate on behalf of the client or complainant
- advocate for system outcomes
- make policy recommendations to the agency, legislature, and governor’s office
- create public reports of child welfare performance

Some ombuds agencies provide legal services including statewide coordination of attorney advocates and Court Appointed Special Advocates.

A few ombuds agencies provide legal services. For example, the Delaware Office of the Child Advocate coordinates the legal representation for children, including the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (CASA).¹⁸ The Arkansas Child Welfare Ombudsman Division ensures that every child being served by the child welfare system knows their legal rights under the law.¹⁹ The Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate is authorized to “take all possible action necessary to secure the legal and civil rights of children.”²⁰ New York’s Office of the Ombudsman’s mission is to protect the legal rights of youth in residential placements, close-to-home placements, county detention facilities, and voluntary agencies.²¹

Ombuds may be required to oversee residential services to protect the rights and safety of children who are in foster care or voluntarily receiving mental health or behavioral services.

Ombuds are often required to visit residential facilities to ensure all children in residential care have their needs met, their legal rights honored, and their safety protected. Ombuds in these states look after the interests of children who are voluntarily participating in residential treatment programs as well as children in foster care. The Arkansas Juvenile Justice Ombuds provides independent oversight of foster care facilities as well as unlicensed

¹⁷ OPE summary of services and duties we identified in our review.

¹⁸ 92 Del. C. § 9005A

¹⁹ Child Welfare Ombudsman, Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence, <https://accardv.uams.edu/child-welfare-ombudsman/>.

²⁰ 2021-2022 Annual Report, Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate at 1, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OCA/OCA-Recent-Publications/2022-OCA-Annual-Report-1-pdf>.

²¹ The Office of the Ombudsman, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/ombudsman/>.



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Ombuds often provide capacity building and coordination of regional and statewide programs.

or unaccredited facilities.²² The newly created Louisiana ombuds is required to “prepare biennial, in-depth report[s] on conditions of confinement regarding children 21 years of age or younger who are held in secure detention in any facility operated by a state agency.”²³

Capacity building is another important component of several agencies that provide ombuds services. Ombuds can serve as statewide capacity building and coordination hubs for a variety of regional or statewide programs, including:

guardians ad litem or Court Appointed Special Advocate programs²⁴

citizen review panels²⁵

multidisciplinary teams²⁶

²²Arkansas Public Defender Juvenile Ombudsman, <https://apdc.arkansasadmin.net/juvenile-ombudsman/>

²³ La. Stat. Ann. § 24:525(11).

²⁴ 2022 Annual Report, State of Rhode Island Office of the Child Advocate at 3, <http://www.child-advocate.ri.gov/documents/reports/Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>. The Office has several statutory authorities including “Provide training and technical assistance to guardian ad litem and special advocates appointed by the Family Court to represent children in proceedings before that court.”

²⁵ Alaska, West Virginia, and the District of Colombia ombuds made presentations to citizen review panels.

²⁶ 2022 Annual Report, Michigan Children’s Ombudsman at 21, <https://www.michigan.gov/oco/-/media/Project/Websites/oco/Annual-Reports/2022-Office-of-Childrens-Ombudsman-Annual-Report.pdf?rev=d8cd7f51947f45879aae466fba8d8a23&hash=270735DE768B8BB3510C30541F15D1FB>. The Michigan’s Children’s Ombudsman made recommendations to improve communication and coordination with the state’s multidisciplinary teams and monitored the progress and improvements that were implemented.

4. How have other states structured their child ombuds or advocate offices?

Most states have located their child protection ombuds, advocate, and inspector general offices within the executive branch, as shown in exhibit 2.

EXHIBIT 2. Most agencies providing children's ombuds services are in the executive branch.

Type of Agency	Government Branch			Total
	Executive	Legislative	Judicial	
Ombuds	25	1	1	27
Advocate	11	0	0	11
Complaint/ Client Services Office	8	0	0	8
Inspector General	2	1	0	3
Grand Total	46	2	1	49

Source: OPE's review of other state agencies with a purpose or mission like a traditional ombuds role.

Two agencies are in the legislative branch. Louisiana's Child Ombudsman is appointed by the legislative auditor and standing legislative committees provide biennial performance reviews for the agency.²⁷ Nebraska's Office of the Inspector General is a subdivision of the Office of Public Counsel (the state's general government ombuds) located in the legislative branch.²⁸ One other agency exists outside the executive branch. Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman is an independent agency located in the judicial branch.²⁹

A best practice of ombuds agencies is that they maintain a degree of independence from the agency they oversee.

A best practice of ombuds agencies is maintaining a degree of independence from the agency they oversee. Of the 49 agencies that provide ombuds services located in the executive branch, 27 were independent of the human services programs they oversaw. (See Exhibit 3).

²⁷ La. Stat. Ann. § 24:525.

²⁸ *What does the OIG do?*, Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, http://oig.legislature.ne.gov/?page_id=7 (last visited Dec. 5, 2024).

²⁹ Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 19-3.3-102



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We classified offices into three independence types, reflecting their level of independence and location within the child protection system.

- 1) **Independent:** an independent office or agency not embedded within the child protection agency it oversees
- 2) **Embedded, autonomous:** an office that operates within the state agency providing child protection services while retaining independent control over its operations
- 3) **Embedded, non-autonomous:** a non-independent office established within the state agency providing child protection services

EXHIBIT 3. Most executive agencies offering ombuds services are independent or autonomous from the programs they oversee.

Type of Agency	Independence			Total
	Independent	Embedded, autonomous	Embedded, nonautonomous	
Ombuds	16	10	1	27
Advocate	8	2	1	11
Complaint/ Client Services Office	2	3	3	8
Inspector General	1	2	0	3
Grand Total	27	17	5	49

Source: OPE's review of other state agencies with a purpose or mission like a traditional ombuds role.

Agency size varied considerably among the states we reviewed. Several variables that would affect the size include:

- the number of populations served
- the number of government services that fall within the scope of services
- the level of statutory authority to conduct independent evaluations or investigations
- the amount of capacity building or training conducted
- the degree of independence the agency has



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the extent to which contractors are used to perform work
public awareness of provided services
ease of public access to services

The age of the agency is another factor that may impact the agency size. New organizations tend to have startup costs that may stabilize or diminish over time. For example, a backlog of system issues may require more intensive upfront evaluation to properly identify, measure, and produce recommendations. There may be a flood of citizen complaints as people with concerns have a new agency to turn to for resolution. Initially, the staff may require more time to work through complaints and investigations as there would likely be an initial learning curve.

If a desired scope of service, including the populations served, can be identified, then OPE could provide more in-depth information about specific states, including their staff size, organization chart, and budget.



APPENDIX A

States with an Agency Providing Ombuds Services for Children

States with a traditional children's ombuds

18 states and the District of Columbia have 27 children's ombuds agencies

Arizona

Agency name	Department of Child Safety Ombudsman's Office
Website	https://dcs.az.gov/resource/complaint-or-disagreement
Enacting statute	Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 41-1371-83
Mission	The Department of Child Safety (DCS) Office of the Ombudsman strives to provide a conflict resolution process that is as neutral as possible within the limits of its role as part of the DCS management structure, to facilitate fair and equitable resolutions to concerns from complainants. The DCS Office of the Ombudsman shall serve as an information and communication resource, upward feedback channel, advisor, dispute resolution expert, and change agent.

Arkansas

Agency name	Child Welfare Ombudsman Division
Website	https://accardv.uams.edu/child-welfare-ombudsman/
Enacting statute	Ark. Code Ann. § 20-82-211
Mission	To review an issue or complaint in any child welfare case or investigation in which a child or their family needs assistance from the Ombudsman; to bring resolution when possible; and to advocate for policies and procedures that will improve the child welfare system in Arkansas.



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Agency name	Juvenile Ombudsman
Website	https://apdc.arkansasadmin.net/juvenile-ombudsman/
Enacting statute	Ark. Code Ann. § 16-87-216
Mission	The Arkansas Public Defender Juvenile Ombudsman advocates on behalf of youth who have been committed to the Division of Youth Services. The Ombudsman provides independent oversight at all facilities, group homes, and step-down placements for committed youth and their guardians while they are in the juvenile prison system and while they are on aftercare. The primary mission of this position is to make certain these youth are safe while in custody and to assure they have access to the services for which they are entitled.

California

Agency name	Foster Care Ombudsperson
Website	https://fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/
Enacting statute	Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code Ann. §§ 16160–69
Mission	The mission of the California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO) is to advocate on behalf of foster children and youth regarding their care, placement, and services. The OFCO is an autonomous entity that is empowered to investigate and informally resolve complaints impacting foster youth, increase awareness about foster youth rights, and make recommendations to help support systemic change.

Colorado

Agency name	Child Protection Ombudsman
Website	https://coloradocpo.org/
Enacting statute	Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 19-3.3-101–11
Mission	The Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman is committed to ensuring the state’s child protection system consistently provides high quality services to every child, family, and community in Colorado.



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District of Columbia

Agency name	Child and Family Services Agency Youth Ombudsperson
Website	https://ofc.dc.gov/
Enacting statute	D.C. Code § 23-270
Mission	The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children is committed to working collaboratively across systems that impact Child and Family Services Agency children to foster improved outcomes, strengthen service delivery, and increase accountability.

Florida

Agency name	Children's Ombudsman
Website	https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/child-family/child-and-family-well-being/florida-childrens-ombudsman
Enacting statute	Fla. Stat. § V-39-4085(4)(a)
Mission	The Children's Ombudsman can listen and be a voice for children and youth; take complaints about placement, care, or services from youth without fear of retribution; and serve as a resource to identify and explain relevant policies and procedures.

Indiana

Agency name	Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau
Website	http://www.in.gov/idoa/2610.htm
Enacting statute	Ind. Code § 4-13-19-3
Mission	The Department of Children's Services (DCS) Ombudsman Bureau effectively responds to complaints concerning DCS actions or omissions by providing problem resolution services and independent case reviews. The Bureau also provides recommendations to improve DCS service delivery and promote public confidence.



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Louisiana

Agency name	Child Ombudsman
Website	https://lla.la.gov/services/child-ombudsman
Enacting statute	La. Stat. Ann. §§ 24:513(D)(7); 24:525
Mission	Advocates for Louisiana's children, responsible for reviewing complaints regarding state services for children, making appropriate referrals for the child and family, and advocating on behalf of the child's best interest. Evaluates delivery of services by state agencies and recommends systemic reform.

Maine

Agency name	Children's Ombudsman
Website	https://cwombudsman.org/
Enacting statute	Me. Rev. Stat. § 22- 4087-A
Mission	Provide information and referrals to individuals requesting assistance and to set priorities for opening cases for review when an individual calls with a complaint regarding child welfare services.

Maryland

Agency name	Foster Youth Ombuds
Website	https://dhs.maryland.gov/foster-care/youth-resources/foster-youth-ombuds/
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	Protect the rights of youth and ensure accountability in treatment and service delivery by providing a platform for voices of children and youth in Maryland's foster care system.



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Agency name	Foster Parent Ombuds
Website	https://dhs.maryland.gov/foster-care/resource-parents/dhs-ombudsman/
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The Foster Parent Ombuds advocates on behalf of foster parents in Maryland, supports their rights, and ensures their voices are heard and concerns are addressed.

Massachusetts

Agency name	Department of Children and Families Office of the Ombudsman
Website	http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/dcf-ombudsman.html
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	Our role is to respond to consumers, foster and adoptive parents, advocates, legislators and concerned citizens regarding agency programs, policies, and services. Our staff provides information regarding the appropriate steps you can take to address a problem you may be experiencing with the Department of Children and Families or direct you to additional sources of help or information.

Michigan

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate (Office of the Children’s Ombudsman until December 2023)
Website	https://www.michigan.gov/oco
Enacting statute	Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. §§ 722.921 –35
Mission	To help improve Michigan’s child welfare system through awareness, advocacy, public education, review, and recommendation. We accomplish this through independently investigating complaints, advocating for children, and recommending changes to improve law, policy, and practice for the benefit of current and future children involved in the child welfare system.



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Minnesota

Agency name	Office of the Ombudsperson for Families
Website	http://mn.gov/ombudfam/
Enacting statute	Minn. Stat. Ann. §§ 257.0755–69
Mission	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF) is an independent state agency whose goals are to reduce racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality in Minnesota’s child welfare system, to improve outcomes for children and their families involved in child protection cases, to ensure that all laws governing the protection of children and their families are implemented in a culturally and linguistically competent manner; and, to ensure that laws protecting children and families are adhered to in decision-making processes. The OBFF Ombudsperson is an independent government official responsible for reviewing government and government-regulated agencies in an effort to ensure their practices are fair, reasonable and appropriate.

Montana

Agency name	Office of the Child and Family Ombudsman
Website	https://dojmt.gov/enforcement/specialservices/ocfo-home/
Enacting statute	Mont. Code Ann. § 41-3-12
Mission	The Office of the Child and Family Ombudsman responds to requests to protect the rights of children and families by improving case outcomes and strengthening Montana’s child welfare system.



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New York

Agency name	Office of the Ombudsman
Website	https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/ombudsman/
Enacting statute	N.Y. Exec. Law § 523
Mission	Protect the legal rights of youth in residential placements, close to home placements, county detention facilities, voluntary agencies. The Office of the Ombudsmen (OOTO) is a connection between youth and their placement administration, families, attorneys, and other offices within OCFS. The ombudsmen visit the sites regularly to counsel youth, take verbal reports, and provide recommendations to sites. The ombudsmen also take reports from youth, family members, attorneys, site staff, and other concerned parties who contact OOTO through phone calls, letters, or email.

Ohio

Agency name	Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office
Website	https://youthandfamilyombudsmen.ohio.gov/
Enacting statute	Ohio Rev. Code Ann. §§ 5101.891-90
Mission	We receive, review, and resolve complaints to improve service delivery and outcomes for Ohio youth and families involved with the children services system.

Oklahoma

Agency name	Office of Client Advocacy
Website	https://oklahoma.gov/okdhs/about-us/ar/oca.html
Enacting statute	Okla. Stat. 10A §§ 1-9-112
Mission	The Office of Client Advocacy protects children residing outside of a home through investigations, protects vulnerable adults receiving community services through advocacy and investigations, and ensures foster parents and children served by Child Welfare Services have a voice through the grievance process and are free from retaliation or harassment.



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Agency name	Office of Juvenile System Oversight
Website	https://oklahoma.gov/occy/departments/juvenile-system-oversight.html
Enacting statute	Okla. Stat. tit. 10 § 601.6
Mission	The Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) has the responsibility to investigate and report wrongful/unlawful conduct whether intentional or unintentional within Oklahoma's children and youth service system, to inquire into areas of concern, and to provide independent monitoring of residential and non-residential services to children and youth.

Oregon

Agency name	Foster Care Ombuds
Website	https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/ABOUTDHS/Pages/foster-care-ombuds.aspx
Enacting statute	Or. Rev. Stat. § 417.810
Mission	We are an independent resource to investigate complaints, concerns, or violations of rights for children in the custody of the Oregon Department of Human Services. We receive, investigate, and help resolve complaints and concerns from a wide range of people. This includes foster youth, parents and relatives, Court Appointed Special Advocates, attorneys, social workers, and many others.

Tennessee

Agency name	Commission on Children and Youth Ombudsman for Children and Families
Website	https://www.tn.gov/tccy/programs0/ombuds.html
Enacting statute	Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 37-3-101-07
Mission	The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth's Ombudsman Program is an external, third-party resource for children involved with the TN Department of Children's Services. The ombudsman advocates for transparency, fairness, accountability, timeliness, and best practice.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Texas

Agency name	Ombudsman for Children and Youth in Foster Care
Website	https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/your-rights/hhs-office-ombudsman/ombudsman-foster-care-help
Enacting statute	Tex. Gov't Code Ann. §§ 531.991–98
Mission	Serve as a neutral party in assisting children and youth in foster care with complaints regarding programs and services within the Department of Family Protective Services and Health and Human Services system.

Utah

Agency name	Child Protection Ombuds
Website	https://dhhs.utah.gov/ocpo/
Enacting statute	Utah Code Ann. § 62A-4a-208
Mission	We will advocate for, support, and serve all individuals and communities in Utah. We will ensure all Utahns have fair and equitable opportunities to live safe and healthy lives.

Virginia

Agency name	Office of the Children's Ombudsman
Website	https://www.oco.virginia.gov/
Enacting statute	Va. Code Ann. §§ 2.2-438–49
Mission	There is hereby created the Office of the Children's Ombudsman as a means of effecting changes in policy, procedure, and legislation; educating the public; investigating and reviewing actions of the Department, local departments, child-placing agencies, or child-caring institutions; and monitoring and ensuring compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to child protective services and the placement, supervision, and treatment of, and improvement of delivery of care to, children in foster care and adoptive homes.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Washington

Agency name	Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds
Website	http://ofco.wa.gov/
Enacting statute	Wash. Rev. Code Ann. §§ 43.06A.010–900
Mission	The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds works to protect children, youth and families from harmful agency action or conduct, and to make agency officials and state policy makers aware of system-wide issues and recommendations in the child protection and child welfare system to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children and youth.

West Virginia

Agency name	Foster Care Ombudsman
Website	https://www.wvdhhr.org/oig/fco.html
Enacting statute	W. Va. Code Ann. §§ 49-9-101–10
Mission	The Foster Care Ombudsman is an independent, impartial, and confidential resource that advocates for the rights of foster children and foster/kinship parents, investigates and resolves complaints, and makes recommendations for systemic reform.



States with a child advocate agency

11 states have 11 child advocacy agencies

Connecticut

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	https://portal.ct.gov/OCA/Common-Elements/Common-Elements/About-Us
Enacting statute	Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 46a-13k
Mission	The Office of the Child Advocate monitors and evaluates public and private agencies that are charged with the protection of children, and reviews state policies and procedures to ensure they protect children's rights and promote their best interest.

Delaware

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	https://courts.delaware.gov/childadvocate/
Enacting statute	Del. Code Ann. 29 §§ 9001A-9A
Mission	The Office of the Child Advocate shall safeguard the welfare of Delaware's children through educational advocacy, system reform, public awareness, training, and legal representation of children as set forth in 29 Del. C., Ch. 90A.

Georgia

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	https://oca.georgia.gov/about-us
Enacting statute	Ga. Code Ann. §§ 15-11-740-47
Mission	To protect the children of the State of Georgia and to assist and restore the security of children whose well-being is threatened by providing independent oversight of persons, organizations, and agencies responsible for providing services to or caring for children who are victims of child abuse and neglect or whose domestic situation requires intervention by the state. O.C.G.A. § 15-11-740 (b) Our mission includes identifying patterns of treatment and service for children and making recommendations for necessary policy implications, legislative changes and systemic improvements.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Illinois

Agency name	Advocacy Office for Children and Families
Website	https://dcfs.illinois.gov/contact-us/get-help.html
Enacting statute	20 Ill. Comp. Stat. 505/5e
Mission	The Advocacy Office for Children and Families responds to complaints, concerns, inquiries and suggestions about the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The staff provides referrals to appropriate DCFS staff and suggestions to executive staff for improvements and changes to the department. Anyone can contact the Advocacy Office. Frequent callers include foster parents, biological parents, adoptive parents, service providers, children, and adolescents and DCFS staff.

Massachusetts

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	https://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-child-advocate
Enacting statute	Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 18C, §§ 1–14
Mission	The Office of the Child Advocate’s mission is to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely and quality state services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable and at-risk children can have the opportunity to thrive.

Missouri

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	http://www.oca.mo.gov
Enacting statute	Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 37.700–30
Mission	To enhance the lives of Missouri children by receiving, investigating, and acting on complaints regarding the child welfare systems, and also making case specific and system-wide recommendations.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Nevada*

Agency name	Systems Advocate
Website	http://dcfs.nv.gov/Programs/SA/
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The purpose of the Systems Advocate Unit is to respond to inquiries and complaints from consumers, service providers, elected officials, stakeholders and interested citizens to ensure that proper services are provided by the Department of Child and Family Services.

*Nevada also has an Office of the Advocate for Missing or Exploited Children. Upon initial review, this office seems to have a more narrowly tailored focus than some of the other advocate offices. Other states may also have a missing and exploited children advocacy center that was not captured in our review.

New Hampshire

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	https://www.childadvocate.nh.gov/
Enacting statute	N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 21-V:1-10
Mission	The mission of the Office of the Child Advocate is to lift up children by promoting equitable and effective reforms that meet the best interests of all New Hampshire children and strengthen public confidence and accountability in the State's systems that support children and families.

New Jersey

Agency name	Office of Advocacy
Website	http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/oa/
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Office of Constituent Relations supports the DCF's mission of ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children and families in New Jersey by providing information and responding to the concerns of parents, youth, foster parents and others affected by DCF services.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Rhode Island

Agency name	Office of the Child Advocate
Website	http://www.child-advocate.ri.gov/index.php
Enacting statute	R.I. Gen. Laws Ann. §§ 42-73-1-11
Mission	The mission of the Office of the Child Advocate is to protect the legal rights of children in State care. To promote policies and practices which ensure that children are safe and to make certain that children have permanent and stable families. To ensure that children placed out of their home have their physical, mental health, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral needs met.

South Carolina

Agency name	Department of Children's Advocacy
Website	https://childadvocate.sc.gov
Enacting statute	S.C. Code Ann. § 63-11-2210
Mission	The Department of Children's Advocacy champions advocacy, accountability, and service to improve outcomes for children served by state agencies in South Carolina.



States with complaint resolution or client services offices

7 states have 8 complaint resolution or client services offices dedicated to resolving issues in child protection

Connecticut

Agency name	Office of Community Relations
Website	https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/OCR/Home
Enacting statute	Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-10c
Mission	The Office of Community Relation's mission is to provide a solution oriented, proactive approach to engage families and stakeholders. We strive to understand the problem presented while emphasizing a strength-based approach with all those contacting our office. Our role is to support both our families and youth, individuals from the community, as well as Department of Children and Families staff.

Kansas

Agency name	Office of Client Services
Website	http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/Pages/Client-Services.aspx
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The Kansas Department for Children and Families' Office of Client Services seeks to provide excellent customer service. We are here to listen to what our clients need. We assist Kansas residents, State and federal legislators and also other State agencies that may need to verify information regarding former Kansas residents.

New Mexico

Agency name	Office of Constituent Affairs
Website	http://cyfd.org/about-cyfd/constituent-affairs
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The Office of Constituent Affairs is responsible for processing discrimination complaints that we receive from constituents, which include parents of children and youth involved with the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD), resource families, children and youth who are or have received services through CYFD, contractors, and the general public.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

North Carolina

Agency name	Child Welfare Services Constituent Concerns Office
Website	https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/child-welfare-services/child-welfare-services-constituent-concerns-office
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	The Constituent Concerns Office responds to questions, concerns, complaints, and general questions about Child Welfare Services within North Carolina and the role of the county/local Department of Social Services in child welfare matters.

Oklahoma

Agency name	Foster Parent Voices
Website	https://www.okfosterparentvoices.org
Enacting statute	Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 10A, § 1-9-112(A)(3)(c)
Mission	Facilitate 24-hour access to a neutral complaint system for foster parents and compile and annual report to the Legislature in partnership with the Commission on Children and Youth and the Department of Human Services Office of Client Advocacy.

Agency name	Foster Youth Matters
Website	https://www.okfosteryouthmatters.org/index.php
Enacting statute	Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 10A, § 1-9-112(A)(3)(c)
Mission	In partnership with the Commission on Children and Youth and the Department of Human Services Office of Client Advocacy, facilitate a neutral grievance process for foster youth and report to the Legislature.

Vermont

Agency name	Department for Children and Families Commissioner's Office
Website	https://dcf.vermont.gov/contacts/concerns
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	Not found



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Wisconsin

Agency name	Department of Children and Families
Website	https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/about-us/complaint/child-welfare
Enacting statute	Not found
Mission	All child welfare agencies in the state of Wisconsin are required to have an established complaint\grievance process for addressing concerns about the child welfare and youth services they provide.



States with children’s inspector general

3 state have an inspector general dedicated to child protection services

Florida

Agency name	Office of the Inspector General
Website	https://www.myflfamilies.com/about/additional-services-offices/office-inspector-general
Enacting statute	Fla. Stat. § 20.055
Mission	In accordance with Children and Families Operating Procedure (CFOP) 180-4, employees are required to report certain violations to the OIG within two days of discovery. Complaints may also be made by providers, clients, or the general public. Complaints and reports may be sent to the OIG via mail, e-mail, or submission of a web complaint.

Nebraska

Agency name	Office of the Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Website	https://nebraskalegislature.gov/divisions/oig.php
Enacting statute	Neb. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 43-4301–32
Mission	The Office of the Inspector General provides an independent form of inquiry and review of the actions of individuals and agencies responsible for the care and protection of children in the Nebraska Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation systems.



Child Protection Ombuds: Background Review

Illinois

Agency name	Office of the Inspector General
Website	https://dcfs.illinois.gov/about-us/com-communications-inspector.html
Enacting statute	20 ILCS 505/35.5 – 35.7
Mission	The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or the Department) was created by a unanimous vote of the Illinois General Assembly in June 1993 to reform and strengthen the child welfare system. The mandate of the OIG is to investigate misconduct, misfeasance, malfeasance, and violations of rules, procedures, or laws by DCFS employees, foster parents, service providers and contractors with the Department (20 ILCS 505/35.5 – 35.7). To that end, OIG conducts investigations and makes recommendations to protect children, uncover wrongdoing, improve practice, and increase professionalism within the Department.