



### **Purpose of the OCO:**

The Office of Children's Ombudsman is an autonomous agency created to advocate for effective change in policy, procedure, and legislation; to educate the public and review actions of MDHHS, child placing agencies and/or child placing institutions.

The Children's Ombudsman is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Michigan Senate.

### **Mission of the OCO:**

The mission of the Children's Ombudsman Office is to help ensure the safety and well-being of Michigan's children in need of foster care, adoption and children's protective services and to promote public confidence in the child welfare system.

### **Vision of the OCO:**

The vision of the Children's Ombudsman Office is to advocate for children by transforming the office to accomplish influence within Michigan's child welfare system.

### **Key Principles of the OCO:**

The OCO operates according to four key principles as stated in the United States Ombudsman Association Governmental Ombudsman Standards. These principles are as follows:

- a. **Independence:** The OCO must be free from outside control or influence. This standard enables the Ombudsman to function as an impartial and critical entity that reports findings and makes recommendations based solely on a review of facts and law, in the light of reason and fairness.
- b. **Impartiality:** The OCO receives and reviews each complaint in an objective and fair manner, free from bias, and treats all parties without favor or prejudice. This standard instills confidence that complaints reviewed and investigated by the OCO will receive a fair review and encourages all parties to accept the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations.

- c. **Confidentiality:** The OCO maintains the confidentiality of complainants and may not be compelled to testify or to release records. The OCO maintains the confidentiality of individuals from whom information is acquired except as necessary to perform the duties of the office. These confidentiality protections encourage individuals to come forward with information and concerns without fear of possible retaliation by others.
- d. **Credible Review Process:** A credible review process promotes respect and confidence in the OCO's oversight of Michigan's child welfare system. The OCO is qualified to analyze issue and matters of law, administration, and policy. The OCO has collective experience and expertise in child welfare law, social work, mediation, and clinical practice; and in conducting investigations. The OCO has been granted authority and responsibility necessary to thoroughly investigate complaints and conduct a credible review process under MCL 722.921 et seq. For the OCO to conduct a credible review process the OCO shall be permitted to have direct contact with individuals, evidence and records that the Ombudsman deems relevant and necessary to an OCO investigation.

#### **Complaints made by members of the public:**

The OCO has the authority to investigate complaints made by the public against child protective services, foster care programs and agencies, adoption services, and juvenile justice programs. You can file an online complaint by clicking on this link; <https://dtmb.state.mi.us/OCOFom/>

The complainant's identity is strictly confidential. To protect confidential records, the office is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act nor are the records subject to subpoena.

#### **Child Fatality Cases:**

The OCO is required by Michigan law to investigate all child fatality cases that are alleged to have occurred due to child abuse and neglect where MDHHS Child Protective Services or Foster Care was involved with the family. Specifics of this requirement can be found in MCL 722.926.

The OCO strives for three main goals:

- Conduct independent, impartial investigations
- Make impactful recommendations to advocate for change in statute, policy, or administrative rules with to goal of having a positive impact on the child welfare system
- Promote transparency in the child welfare system

### **Authority of the OCO:**

The Children's Ombudsman has the authority to investigate administrative actions of child protective services, foster care programs and agencies, adoption services, and juvenile justice programs. The Ombudsman has no authority once a court has made a ruling.

After investigating the Children's Ombudsman may make a finding and a recommendation to the agency it investigated. The goal of the Ombudsman is to formally or informally influence policy and rule changes for the betterment of all children involved with the child welfare system.

As required by law the Ombudsman provides any agency it investigated the opportunity to respond to the findings and recommendations. The responding agency can agree with or disagree with the findings and the recommendations.

### **Contact Information:**

Office of Children's Ombudsman  
PO BOX 30026  
Lansing MI 48909

Phone: 517-241-0400

Toll Free: 1-800-642-4326

Website: [www.michigan.gov/oco](http://www.michigan.gov/oco)

### **Immediate concern for the health and safety of a child:**

#### **Centralized Intake Contact Information:**

Anyone, including a child, who suspects **child abuse** or neglect, can **make a report** by calling 855-444-3911.