



**All contact with the OCO is strictly confidential.**

**The OCO is not an emergency intervention service. If you have a concern that needs immediate attention, call your county Department of Human Services office or law enforcement.**

### **How are complaints investigated?**

If the OCO decides to open a case for investigation of your complaint, you will be notified by letter. The OCO will order a copy of the child's confidential DHS and/or private child-placing agency case file. An OCO investigator will then conduct an independent investigation of the complainant's issues by:

- Reviewing documents contained in the file (agency documents, court documents, medical records, etc.)

### **Mission Statement**

**The mission of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman is to assure the safety and well-being of Michigan's children in need of foster care, adoption and protective services and to promote public confidence in the child welfare system. This will be accomplished through independently investigating complaints, advocating for children, and recommending changes to improve law, policy and practice for the benefit of current and future generations.**



- Interviewing caseworkers, supervisors and other professionals, who have knowledge of the child's case.
- Determining whether the agency's actions and decisions complied with laws and policies in the best interest of the child or children involved.

If the OCO cannot investigate your complaint, you will be provided with information that may assist you in resolving your concerns.

### **What happens after an investigation is completed?**

All complainants will receive written notification of the results of OCO 's investigation.

If the OCO finds that the actions of DHS or a private child-placing agency complied with law, rule, or policy, the OCO will send a letter to you, DHS, and the child-placing



agency stating that the OCO has completed its investigation and closed your case.

If the OCO finds that an agency did not comply with law, rule, or policy, the OCO will notify DHS and the private-child placing agency of the results of the OCO's investigation. After the agency responds in writing to the OCO, you will receive a closing report that informs you of the results of the OCO's investigation, the agency's response, and any actions taken to address or correct the identified problem(s).

### **How do I get more information about the OCO?**

Contact our office and request a copy of our Annual Report. Each fiscal year, the Ombudsman submits an annual report to the Governor, Legislature, and DHS Director. The report contains statistical information about the work of the OCO and recommendations for changes in the child welfare system.

Visit our website at [www.michigan.gov/oco](http://www.michigan.gov/oco). You will find our annual reports in addition to helpful information for parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents.

**Dedicated to Serving Michigan's Children**

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# **OFFICE OF**

# **CHILDREN'S**

# **OMBUDSMAN**

**P.O. Box 30026  
Lansing, MI 48909**

**Phone: (517) 373-3077 or  
1-(800) 642-4326**

**Fax: (517) 335-4471**

**TTY: 1-(800) 649-3777**

**Email: [childombud@michigan.gov](mailto:childombud@michigan.gov)**

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

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## What is an Ombudsman?

Ombudsman (om-buds-man) is a Swedish term for appointed government official who investigates citizen complaints, reports findings, and helps achieve solutions.

## What is the Office of Children's Ombudsman?

The Office of Children's Ombudsman (OCO) is an independent state agency created by Public Act 204 of 1994 (the Children's Ombudsman Act.) The Children's Ombudsman is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Michigan Senate. The OCO staff consists of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals.

## What does the OCO do?

The OCO has the legal authority to:

- Independently investigate complaints about children involved with protective services, foster care, adoption services, and juvenile justice.
- Determine if an action or decision was made according to the laws, rules and policies governing the Department of Human Services (DHS) and private

child placing-agencies.

- Take all necessary action, including legal action, to protect the rights and welfare of a child.
- Investigate cases involving children who have died as a result of child abuse or neglect when there has been previous agency involvement.
- Make recommendations to the Governor, Legislature and the DHS Director to improve the child welfare system.
- Educate the public about child welfare laws and policies.

## What issues are not investigated by the OCO

The OCO has no legal authority to investigate complaints that exclusively involve:

- Friend of the Court issues (custody, parenting time, child support)
- Guardianship
- School problems
- Law enforcement
- Court orders
- Judges

The OCO can provide you with referral

information regarding who may be able to help you.

## What should I do before calling the OCO?

Anyone may file a complaint with the OCO. If possible, first, try to resolve your problem by contacting DHS or the child-placing agency handling the case. Many times an agency official can explain a specific policy or correct a problem. When you contact the agency remember to:

- Have all the relevant information. It helps to write down the problem and your questions ahead of time.
- Talk to the right people. If you cannot resolve the problem with the caseworker, ask to speak to the worker's supervisor. If you are still not satisfied, contact the program manager and agency director. Be sure to clearly state what you want the agency to do.
- Keep careful notes and records of who you spoke to, the dates, times and phone numbers and what you were told.
- Carefully read all information that is sent to you since there are often rules and deadlines that must be followed.



## How are complaints filed with the OCO?

There are several ways to file a complaint:

- Email the complaint form found on our website at [www.michigan.gov/oco](http://www.michigan.gov/oco).
- Call our toll free number, 1-800-642-4326, to request a complaint form and postage-paid envelope.
- Call our toll free number during business hours, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. (you may also leave a message after hours and on the weekends) and provide the following information:
  - Child or children's names and birth-dates
  - County DHS office or private agency involved
  - Brief description of the problem
  - Actions you are requesting from the OCO
- Mail a letter that includes the above information and a phone number where you can be reached.

After you have provided the necessary information, the Intake Investigator will call you to gather additional information so that a decision can be made regarding whether to open a case for investigation.

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