



## Key Components



### **Independent**

Placed outside children's services state and local agencies



### **Dedicated**

A dedicated toll-free number and office designed for foster youth and not combined with a service for foster parents



### **Holds accountable**

Power to hold people and systems accountable to create change



### **Offers Resources**

Refers youth to resources in addition to investigation and resolution services



### **Responsive**

Starts a relationship with youth who seek help and communicates regularly about the status

## Foster Youth Ombudsman Issue Brief

Youth who have experienced foster care learn to be resilient and overcome hardships, but they often feel powerless when placed in unsafe conditions after being removed from their homes. We have a responsibility to create a system that allows them to voice concerns when they are placed in harmful situations. We must empower them to change their situations by giving them a direct line to caring adults who can advocate on their behalf.

***An Ombudsman office would give youth a voice by documenting and investigating their reports of unsafe conditions in the foster care system.***

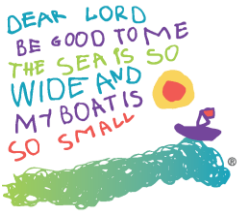


## State Spotlight: Texas

The Texas Ombudsman for Children and Youth in Foster Care (FCO) was created in 2015 by [S.B. 830](#).

# 250

Number of substantiated cases in 2019 [Annual reports](#) show that the office is an effective tool at creating change within the system by empowering youth.



# children's defense fund ohio



## Former Foster Youth Spotlight: Jonathan Thomas

I dedicate my time advocating for foster youth, and other associations to help youth such as Wood County CASA, ACTION Ohio, and The Ohana Project. I would like to share why having an Ohio Foster Care Ombudsman Office is important. When first entering the foster care system at the age of 14 I was placed into a home in Fremont, Ohio. At first, the family was wonderful; much better than my biological family. But, over the course of the two years I lived there, things began to drastically change. As the stress of adding my two brothers, and I to the household began to settle in, so did the neglect, and mistreatment. The three of us, (and 1 other foster boy) were forced to treatment that their 2 biological children did not have to undergo. I begged my caseworker for over a year to remove my brothers, and I from such an environment, and for the longest time, she refused.

**I believe issues like that can be eradicated with an Ombudsman office.**

With voices in the Ohio Attorney General's office actively advocating, and investigating children's concerns, and issues, then the system will be that much closer to providing children with what they truly need. A loving, and supportive family.

**The Ombudsman office will act as an independent forum for the investigation and resolution of complaints made by, or on behalf of the youth.**

## A Look at the Numbers

*An independent and autonomous Ombudsman office would serve as a protective measure to safeguard the physical safety and emotional well-being of youth whose lives are entrusted to the foster care system.*

# 13

States that have independent Ombudsman Offices established by the legislature

*Former foster youth would be involved in design to emphasize youth-centered service delivery*

# 4,826

Ohio teenagers were in care in August 2020

*As COVID-19 makes it harder for caring adults like teachers and coaches to identify abuse and neglect, an Ombudsman office would facilitate self-reporting without fear of retribution.*

# -22%

Decline in reports of child abuse since COVID-19 shut down schools and sports