



### 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

The DeWine Administration announced it would support an annual budget of \$500,000 for an Ombuds office in the FY22-23 State Budget, but this is not included in explicitly in HB 110 legislation.

HB 110 is an opportunity for Ohio to follow the example of 13 other states that have independent Ombudsman's Offices established by the legislature, and to define its purpose and design.

*Creating an Ombuds office through HB 110 will protect children and teens by empowering them to self-report abuse and following up with an independent investigation.*



### 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.

## Current and former foster youth must be involved in design to emphasize youth-centered service delivery

### Population Served

- Youth experiencing abuse in bio, foster, adoptive, kinship, respite, residential and group home placements
- This office needs to be youth-specific, and separate from whatever mechanism is established to support foster caregivers

### Proposed Location

- Independent and autonomous agency with oversight specific to child welfare
- Not part of the state's division of child and family services
- Possessing regulatory powers

### Daily Operations

- Youth-centered
- Available statewide for youth to reach out and share concerns related to their safety and well being
- Independent investigations taking place within a speedy timeframe

### Requests of Ohio Legislators

- To earmark funding for this office as part of HB 110 provisions
- To clarify that it be created through a procurement process, and that the requests for proposals should be designed by current and former foster youth, and that proposals scored by them
- To ensure that this office is designed by and for foster youth

## Voices of Ohio foster care youth and alumni

“When I was a child, I used to wish that someone would stop by our house and that they would find us. It never happened. My summers were filled with abuse and fear... By providing a venue where the voices of youth can be heard without fear of retribution, this office will ensure the safety of Ohio's youth.” ~ *Jonathan Thomas, NW Ambassador of the OHIO YAB*

“My siblings and I had no one. At times, I didn't know if I would make it through the night. At the age of nine, I began to fear death... A few of my siblings tried to report the abuse, but no one would believe us. I never tried to report the abuse myself due to fear and because I didn't know who to call.” ~ *Julius Kissinger, former foster youth and spokesperson for Children's Rights*

“The voices and involvement of those with lived experience is key to making this office a success. My recommendation for an ombudsman goes beyond just having an independent agency/office doing the necessary investigations and advocating for youth. I believe that having someone working in this office, with the experience of going through foster care, is essential. While anyone can work to understand what it is like to go through the system, there is no better expert than those that have directly experienced it.” ~ *Jeremy Collier, former foster youth and current advocate*

“The struggles that foster adoptive, respite and primary families face are important, and we care about and recognize the need for better accountability and communication between foster parents and their agencies. However, this needs to be addressed by a different mechanism, such as a separate office or a statewide grievance procedure. Because it doesn't make sense for a future Ombudsman's Office to both defend allegations against parents and safeguard young people from further abuse. The office can't do both of those things at the same time. Those two tasks will inevitably come into conflict with each other.” ~ *Official stance of the OHIO YAB and ACTION Ohio*