



# COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

## MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date/Time:** December 9, 2015, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

**Location:** Environmental Protection Agency, William Jefferson Clinton North, Conference Room 6013

### **Agenda:**

1. Update on the election of Executive Officers
2. Discussion and vetting of "Program and Practice Standards" for internal ombudsman offices; discussion about drafting a similar document adapted for external ombudsman
3. Role of COFO with respect to proposed legislation establishing new ombudsman offices
4. Discussion of annual reports and significant accomplishments by members in 2015
5. Chi Resolutions and ACUS study
6. Internships/Other Announcements

### **Highlights:**

1. Update on the election of Executive Officers

The nominating committee is in place and nominations for Executive Officers have been solicited. Ombudsman working for federal agencies, who are part of the voting membership, are eligible to be nominated for these positions. Please review more detailed information from the COFO Nominating Committee sent through the Listserv on December 1, 2015. The committee members are: Kakeisla Qaasim ([Kakeisla.Qaasim@cfpb.gov](mailto:Kakeisla.Qaasim@cfpb.gov)); Stephanie Luckam ([Stephanie.Luckam@tsa.dhs.gov](mailto:Stephanie.Luckam@tsa.dhs.gov)); and Rea Wynder ([Rea.Wynder@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:Rea.Wynder@fema.dhs.gov)).

If you are interested in nominating someone, including yourself, the deadline for nominations is December 14, 2015; the email with final candidates and their biographies will be sent the first week in January.

2. Discussion and vetting of "Program and Practice Standards" for internal ombudsman offices; discussion about drafting a similar document adapted for external ombudsman

How does the draft document work together with IOA, USOA and the ongoing ACUS study? The concept evolved from a number of undertakings, including COFO and the

IADRWG's work on conflict resolution standards and COFO's former Standing Up an Ombuds Office Subcommittee's guidelines to assist new offices. This document is an extension of that work, hoping to eliminate confusion in terms of the ombudsman role. There are examples of ombuds offices established in recent years by statute that don't appear to reflect recognized ombuds standards of practice in the federal government or in the private sector.

We all face challenges, e.g., requests for involvement in investigations or administrative proceedings. Although there is no perfect ombuds program, it seemed advisable to have a federal source to supplement the standards of IOA and USOA to help new ombuds programs establish well-functioning offices. It would not affect who qualifies for COFO membership.

Others raised the earlier suggestion of a voluntary review pilot program to assist offices and support professionally recognized standards of operation for all of the different kinds of federal ombudsman. Another suggestion involved having an outside panel of advisors who could provide guidance to ombudsman when faced with a difficult situation, which would also be helpful when an ombudsman has been requested to undertake activities that conflict with recognized professional standards.

3. Role of COFO with respect to proposed legislation establishing new ombudsman offices

A bill before Congress would establish an ombudsman within an agency that would seemingly function in an advocacy role rather than as a designated neutral. Other similar positions, such as the long-term care ombudsman were discussed. Does COFO have a role in strengthening the concept of neutrality for ombudsman and is there an appropriate way to make any concerns known when legislative proposals arise? At the same time, the legislation in question raises the potential benefit of the classical ombudsman model.

4. Discussion of annual reports and significant accomplishments by members in 2015

Accomplishments for the year included the establishment of a program adopted in conjunction with OPM to assist the transition for intermittent employees facing FEHB terminations; leadership's follow through on a recommendation to share publicly an agency's resolutions/settlements for constituents; and the opening of a new ombudsman office at DIA.

5. Chi Resolutions and Administrative Conference of the U.S. (ACUS) study

Members were updated on the upcoming survey. Chi Resolutions requested that everyone be sure to share your contact information with them (at [lmrx@chiresolutions.com](mailto:lmrx@chiresolutions.com)), especially emails and phone numbers that are not easily obtained from other sources. The confidentiality of this information, as well as your responses to the survey, will be protected.

The survey of federal ombudsman is planned for January. Each ombudsman office will be asked to complete one survey. If an agency has multiple and independently run offices, and perhaps different types of ombudsman (e.g., organizational, external, acquisition, etc.), that agency would provide a separate survey for each office. This applies to subcomponents as well, such as the various offices at FDA. The survey itself should be completed on line, presumably by the senior ombuds in a given office. Each invitation will have an attachment for “review and preview,” which can be discussed with other ombudsman in the office, public affairs or a supervisor, if helpful or appropriate. The team requested that it not be sent to anyone beyond that scope.

The final list of survey participants will specify the agencies to which a survey was sent. ACUS will not know which agencies and offices filled out a survey unless a respondent provides his or her name, for example, in order to include an innovative practice or other helpful information in the final report. Also, an office may request inclusion as a case study for the report. There will be no computerized or other tracking of survey participants; each office contacted may receive a follow-up after the survey is sent, reminding the office to participate or thanking them for participation.

The ACUS research team is very interested in innovative practices, any notable achievements, and recommendations and ideas for the future of federal ombudsman and of COFO.

If any ombuds would prefer, they may talk with the chair of COFO about how to provide a survey through another means. If anyone knows of other ombuds offices not participating as members of COFO, please share this information research study with them and direct them to Lauren Marx, ([lm Marx@chiresolutions.com](mailto:lm Marx@chiresolutions.com)), for inclusion in the study.

#### 6. Internships/Other Announcements

There is a Presidential Management Fellow who is interested in a three-month detail to an ombudsman office. If you are interested in hosting the candidate, please contact Scott Deyo at [Scott.M.Deyo@nga.mil](mailto:Scott.M.Deyo@nga.mil).

#### **Attendees in person:**

Mollie Berg, Department of Defense

Scott Kimberley Day-Lewis, Department of Homeland Security

Scott Deyo, Department of Defense

Michael Janson, Federal Communication Commission

Lauren Marx, Chi Associates

William Maurer, Department of Energy

Dawn Miller, "Conflict Transformation Associates"

Julie Smith, Department of State

Lexi Wolfe, Small Business Administration

Ella Yeargin, Department of Health and Human Services

**Attendees by phone:**

Riley Barrar, Department of Defense

Virginia Behr, Department of Health and Human Services

Andrea Brown, Department of State

Monique Bookstein, Department of Justice

Shireen Dodson, Department of State

Ayanna Epps, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

Rita Franklin, Department of Energy

Claire Heffernan, Department of Homeland Security

Patrick Holman, Department of Energy

Noreen Kinnavy, International Broadcasting Bureau

Jenifer Kirkpatrick, Department of Homeland Security

Sarah Kith, Department of Homeland Security

Becky Kurtz, Department of Health and Human Services

Marcia Larkins, Department of Health and Human Services

Laurie Lenkel, Department of Health and Human Services

Carrie McGuire, Office of Government Information Services

Carla Miller, Department of Justice

Kakeisla Qaasim, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Sara Roberts, Department of Homeland Security

Miriam Rodon, National Aerospace and Space Administration

Mary Rowe, MIT and Chi Resolutions

Paul Sotoudeh, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Dale Vergott, Department of Defense

Guy Weber, Department of Defense

Fred Whittington, Department of Labor

Rea Wynder, Department of Homeland Security

John Zinsser, Pacifica Communications

Tom Zrubek, Department of Defense