

Comments on the Draft Ombudsman Recommendation, submitted by Mauricio A. Ramos, President of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA)

Mon 11/14/2016 1:43 PM

Dear Mr. David Pritzker,

I am sharing this comment both as President of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and on behalf of the IOA Board. IOA is the largest international association of professional organizational ombuds practitioners in the world, representing over 700 members from the United States and across the globe. A significant portion of our members practice in the government sector and so IOA appreciates the opportunity to endorse the efforts of the ACUS.

I am writing to endorse the Proposed Recommendations included in the ACUS Report on the Use of Ombuds in Federal Agencies and to emphasize several aspects of the recommendations included in the Report.

As noted in the Report, there are many forms of alternative dispute resolution expressly embraced by the ADRA. However, among the many approaches identified, only the ombudsman model enables a Federal Agency to proactively identify and address constituent or workforce concerns *before* they have become polarized and formal. The ombudsman model enables agency managers to receive early warnings about issues and concerns and to work with their constituents or employees to address these concerns and the options to resolve the concern generally remain completely internal to the agency and within the control of the managers to promptly address and resolve.

In addition the ombuds model enables an agency to build bridges and enhance trust with its constituents and workforce. The ability of an ombuds to provide a place that is perceived as safe in which a person receives responsive and respectful audience and where one is encouraged to consider credible options, in itself builds trust. And trust is a commodity without which government in a democratic society cannot function effectively.

The advantages of an ombuds program are many. Ombuds (1) serve as an early warning channel where issues of misconduct, fraud, waste, abuse, or harassment can be safely surfaced and effectively channeled for early resolution; (2) identify significant new issues and patterns of concerns that are not well known or being ignored; (3) support significant procedural changes; (4) contribute to significant cost savings by dealing with identified issues, often at the earliest or pre-complaint stages, thereby reducing litigation and settling serious disputes; (5) prevent problems through training and briefings; (6) serve as an important liaison between colleagues, units or agencies; and (7) provide a fair process for constituents.

I would strongly encourage those agencies that have not yet implemented a program to consider creating ombuds offices to provide safe places for their constituents and workers to raise issues confidentially and receive assistance in resolving them without fear of retribution. They should ensure that the office is able to, and does in fact adhere to, the three core standards of independence, confidentiality, and impartiality, as these standards are described in the IOA Standards of Practice, and other practice standards depending on the particular ombuds model and setting.

Thank you for your attention to my input.

Mauricio A. Ramos

IOA Board President

2015-2017

[Mauricio A. Ramos](#)

[Corporate Ombudsman](#)

[Sandia National Laboratories](#)

[925-294-2065](#)

The Ombuds Office is an independent, neutral, confidential and informal resource for conflict management. The office practices according to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association. It does not accept formal complaints or notice for SNL, nor does the office retain records of confidential communications; communications with the Ombuds Office are considered off the record. If a visitor wishes to make a record, or put the Institute "on notice"—to make SNL formally aware of a particular problem—the Ombuds Office can provide information on how to do so. Please remember that email is not appropriate for confidential communications.