

My name is Jonathan Thomas, and I am a former foster youth. 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.

When I was a child I used to wish that somebody, anybody, would come by. That somebody would stop by my house, that they would find us. It never happened. I hear of what other young adults my age would do during their summers as kids, and I never had summers like that. I am then reminded of the very dark situation that I found myself born, and raised in for 15 years, and cannot help but think of other children who suffer through similar circumstances. I cant help but notice the difference in me, and some of those other children who's summers were filled with sunny days, and adventures with their friends, and families. While most of my summers were filled with abuse, and fear. Therefore they go throughout life perpetuating that which has always been forced on them. And so the cycle continues.

The Ohio Ombudsman Office can shine a light on homes in the system, and biological parents all over the state. By providing a venue where the voices of the foster care youth can be heard without fear of retribution, the Ombudsman Office, can ensure that foster youth are cared for, and receiving the services they need.

I am honored to know individuals who adamantly fight on behalf of children's rights. For those foster parents who, in love, open the doors of their homes, minds, and hearts to receive children that aren't biologically theirs. I thank you all for allowing me this platform to share my thoughts, and feelings about this topic, and matter. I will choose to continue to advocate on behalf for youth of all ages, and help create better, and safer communities.

May God bless you,

Jonathan Thomas