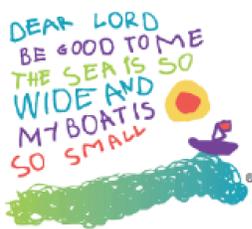




**The OHIO YAB (Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio)** is Ohio's statewide voice of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

**ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)** is a statewide foster care alumni group that heads up ongoing initiatives including Thanksgiving Together and Three Days on the Hill.



children's  
defense fund  
ohio



**Children's Defense Fund-Ohio** is a private, nonprofit organization that provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. Children's Defense Fund-Ohio champions policies and programs that protect young people from abuse and neglect, help provide them with a fair and safe start, and a successful passage into young adulthood. CDF is a national leader when it comes to harnessing statewide and national networks to change the lives of children and teens.

**Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection™ (ANC)** provides information, advocacy, education and support for adoptees, birthparents, foster/ adoptive/kinship care providers, foster youth and their siblings, and professionals. Their initiatives include Reconnections, which provides peer group and/or one-on-one support for young adults who have aged out of foster care and are exploring relationships with birth family members.

## **1.) Need for a Statewide Foster Youth Ombudsman**

- Ohio foster youth have shared concerns that their basic needs are not being met in certain foster care, group home, residential and adoptive placements.
- They have reported being placed in unsafe and/or unsanitary conditions.
- They have expressed difficulties in contacting their caseworker and/or GAL/CASA.
- They shared feedback that their local agency hotlines often have long wait times, lack of follow-through on reports made directly by youth, and staff answering the phone who are not youth-friendly.

## **2.) Role of the Statewide Foster Youth Ombudsman**

- To act as an independent forum for the investigation and resolution of complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care and make appropriate referrals.
- To independently investigate concerns expressed by foster care youth and young adults related to placement, care and services.

## **3.) Benefits of having a Foster Youth Ombudsman's Office**

- To 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.
- To ensure that foster youth are cared for and receiving the services they need
- To provide a venue for the voices of concerned foster care youth and teens be heard, without fear of retribution.

## **4.) Services provided by Foster Youth Ombudsman's Office**

- Maintain a toll-free telephone number which foster children and teens may call from anywhere in the state with questions about their rights, their care and well-being, issues with their placement or services received while in foster care.
- Listen to complaints, documents concerns, gather all relevant information, remain neutral and impartial and provide information on how to help.

## **5.) Risks of not establishing a Foster Youth Ombudsman**

- When a child or teen continues to experience abuse without intervention, the greatest risk is death.
- When an abused child or teen runs away, that young person is at risk of human trafficking.

## **6.) Two Examples from Other States:**

1.) **California's State Ombudsman for the Foster Care Program** was created in 1998 with the passage of *Senate Bill 933, Chapter 311*; which required the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson to be established within the State Department of Social Services with prescribed powers and duties. *The fact that this position exists within the California Department of Social Services has created concerns that to effectively execute this role requires more authority and independence. The office is valuable, but its location creates a conflict of interest.*

2.) **Oregon's Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman** was created in 2013 with the passage of *Senate Bill 123 (section 2, part 7)*: which established a hotline phone number that is available to the foster child at all times for the purposes of enabling the foster child to make complaints and assert grievances regarding the foster child's care, safety or well-being.

## **6.) Additional Insights from Ohio Foster Youth**

a.) Ohio foster care youth have expressed urgency that this future Ombudsman needs to be available to young people in group homes and residential placements, as well as foster homes.

b.) They shared concerns that youth in group homes or residential aren't believed, and their concerns are disregarded. Quote from youth: *"The danger of some group homes and residential placements is that things happen behind walls, and other people don't know what's really going on."*

c.) In terms of defining 'What is abuse?' Youth felt that a good rule of thumb is that: *"If a caseworker would open a case against my biological parents for this allegation, then if it happens in a kinship care placement, guardianship, foster home, group home or residential placement, it should also be thoroughly investigated."*