

On *Thursday, October 11, 2018*, the American Bar Association's (ABA) Dispute Resolution Section Ombuds Committee invites you to the inaugural celebration of a profession that has existed for centuries yet remains relatively unknown: the ombuds.

### **Background: What is an ombuds and why Ombuds Day?**

Ombuds—also known as ombudspersons, ombudsman, ombudsmen—are considered a valuable form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and provide significant benefit to organizations and their members. As confidential, impartial, and independent conflict management professionals, ombuds offer responsive and respectful services designed to aid problem solving, the development of options, and reducing the human and organizational costs of conflict. Ombuds work to informally address or resolve individual and systemic issues outside of and complementary to formal channels such as litigation, grievances, equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaints, and more.

Ombuds are uniquely qualified to serve as a conduit for change through their ability to bring significant and/or repetitive issues to management's attention in a safe and confidential way—particularly with controversial issues that might not otherwise come forward—and raising issues to leadership others cannot or will not discuss. This includes identifying unintended consequences of programs and policies that negatively affect constituents. The systemic feedback the ombuds provides serves as useful information to improve organizations by helping enhance image, legitimacy, and commitment to accountability for its operations. The ABA Ombuds Committee believes ombuds programs are an essential supplement to formal conflict management procedures that protect legal rights or address allegedly inappropriate or wrongful conduct.

Ombuds are found in a wide variety of organizations worldwide including universities and colleges, governments at all levels, health-care institutions, corporations, financial institutions, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, the media, and international organizations. However, their roles and functions are not widely understood. As the need for comprehensive conflict management options grows, so has the use of ombuds. Given the profession's versatile nature, many variations or types of ombuds practices have emerged. For example, certain ombuds work exclusively with visitors who are external to their organization while others work with internal constituents such as employees or students. Some have an advocate function. This versatility has resulted in a lack of understanding of the profession.

Yet, at their core, ombuds share three professional standards (confidentiality, impartiality, and independence) and three definitional characteristics (informality, credible review process, and fairness). These standards and characteristics unite the ombuds' practice and enable ombuds to provide distinct value to the institutions and constituents they serve.

To ensure the profession's continued development and to support the mission of the ABA Ombuds Committee, the ***ABA has designated the second Thursday of October as Ombuds Day*** to coincide with Conflict Resolution Month and Mediation Week. Ombuds Day is an opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of the ombuds profession, highlight their value, and encourage the greater use of ombuds programs.

By making Ombuds Day inclusive to all the various types and configurations of ombuds, we hope to aid the development of a shared understanding of the value and services an ombuds provides.

## Ombuds Day 2018 Details

**When:** Thursday, October 11, 2018.

**Where:** An in-person event in Washington, D.C. at the ABA headquarters and wherever ombuds programs are located!

**Who:** Leadership and decision makers of organizations. We would also like to celebrate with our institutional stakeholders and partners such as HR, Legal Counsel, ADR, Compliance Offices, Citizen Advocates, etc., and our fellow ombuds practitioners. All members of organizations are also welcomed to participate by attending Ombuds Day celebrations!

**Why:** To explain the value of having an ombuds program in organizations, government, etc.; to strengthen the ombuds community of practice; encourage the use of ombuds programs; and educate leaders and decision-makers about why having an ombuds program at their organization is important.

**What:** The ABA Ombuds Day Task Force, in conjunction with liaisons from a variety of other ombuds groups and organizations, are in the process of developing materials, messaging, a tool-kit, social media posts, templates, and more for Ombuds Day.

If you have resources (articles, presentations, videos, visuals, reports, etc.) you think should be included in the Ombuds Day Tool-kit or would like to volunteer or participate in the DC event, please contact Lauren Marx at [lmarx@chiresolutions.com](mailto:lmarx@chiresolutions.com) or Jon Lee at [jonlee@unm.edu](mailto:jonlee@unm.edu).

The ABA Task Force plans to have all Ombuds Day materials for the tool-kit *finalized and available for access by the end of August*.

Regards,

Ombuds Day Task Force