

Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries, Inc. (ACAM)
Association for Family and Community Integrity, Inc.
Behavioral Health Alliance of Texas
Bering Omega Community Services
Care for Elders
Career and Recovery Resources, Inc.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
CHILDREN AT RISK
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris Co., Inc.
Coalition of Behavioral Health Services
Collaborative for Children
Communities In Schools
Community Family Centers
Community Health Choice, Inc.
Covenant House of Texas
DePelchin Children's Center
Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance Greater Houston (DBSA)
Easter Seals of Greater Houston, Inc.
Family Services of Greater Houston
Fort Bend Regional Council on Substance Abuse, Inc.
Good Neighbor Healthcare Center
Greater Houston Healthconnect
Harris County Healthcare Alliance
Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston
Houston Area Association for the Education of Young Children
Houston Area Community Services
Houston Area Women's Center
Houston Food Bank
Houston Methodist Hospital
IntraCare Behavioral Health
Jewish Family Service
League of Women Voters Houston
Legacy Community Health, Services Inc.
Lesbian Health Initiative
March of Dimes
Memorial Assistance Ministries (MAM)
Memorial Hermann Healthcare System
Mental Health America of Greater Houston
NAMI Greater Houston
National Association of Social Workers-Houston
Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
New Hope Housing, Inc.
Northwest Assistance Ministries
Phoenix Houses of Texas, Inc.
Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast
Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services
Santa Maria Hostel, Inc.
SEARCH Homeless Services
Spaulding for Children
Spring Branch Community Health Center
Springfield College School of Human Services
St. Joseph House
Texas Children's Hospital
Texas Health Institute
Texas Hunger Initiative
The Arc of Greater Houston
The Council on Alcohol & Drugs Houston
The Immunization Partnership
The Living Bank
The Network of Behavioral Health Providers
The Rose
The Walk for Mental Health Awareness-Houston
The Women's Home
United Way of Greater Houston
Vita-Living, Inc.
Wesley Community Center
Worklife Institute
YMCA of Greater Houston

One Voice Texas

A Collaborative for Health & Human Services



Children and Youth *Protecting the Rights of Children in Foster Care*

Position Statement Approved by One Voice Texas: December 10, 2014

Issue/Concern:

Frequently, youth who age out of the foster care system talk about how their rights were violated while they were there. Sometimes these violations include abuse or neglect they suffered while in their placement. There are a variety of reasons that these situations are not reported at the time of the incident including distrust of the staff who placed them in a home where they were abused, perception that nothing will be done based on previous concerns that were not addressed, and a fear that there will be retaliation. The Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA), the ombudsman office for the Department of Family and Protective Services, is responsible for taking complaints and conducting independent investigations to ensure that policy and procedure is being followed. However, the office is not independent in terms of budget, policy or personnel and needs its authority and function strengthened to ensure youth in state custody are aware of the protections the office is intended to provide.

Specific Policy Recommendations:

- Make the OCA a truly independent office, which is defined as having control over its policy, personnel decisions and budget;
- Extend current confidentiality protections for reports of child maltreatment to cover reports to the OCA;
- Require the OCA and Child Care Licensing to develop policies regarding retaliation for reporting to the OCA, including consequences for individuals, organizations and/or agencies that engage in this behavior;
- Establish specific protocols for managing calls from children/youth in foster care;
- Support consumer knowledge of the role of the OCA by requiring an annual outreach plan;
- Strengthen the ability of the OCA to investigate and substantiate valid complaints;
- Increase the value of information the OCA receives by requiring annual reporting of data and trends to the legislature and the general public.

What Can Be Accomplished?

This policy change will strengthen the function and authority of the OCA and ensure that state agency consumers, particularly children in foster care, are afforded the full rights and protections intended by the state of Texas.

How Will This Impact State Funding?

Strengthening the OCA will ensure children in foster care are safe, thereby protecting the state from federal fines and penalties associated with poor outcome performances.

Supporting Facts/Research Resources:

- ✓ National Council of State Legislatures. 2014. *Children's Ombudsman Offices/Office of the Child Advocate*. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/childrens-ombudsman-offices.aspx>
- ✓ American Bar Association. 2004. *Standards for the Establishment and Operation of Ombuds Offices*.

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