



## Office of the Public Access Ombudsman

### The Basics

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*Public Access Ombudsman*

#### **What is an Ombudsman?**

- The term “ombudsman” comes from a Scandinavian word meaning “representative.” It is now used worldwide to describe independent, impartial, and confidential officials designated to address complaints and achieve fair outcomes.
- The Public Access Ombudsman is directed by law to make reasonable attempts to resolve disputes between applicants and governmental custodians relating to requests for public records. *Md. Code, General Provisions Article, § 4-1B-04(a)*.

#### **The Ombudsman is Independent.**

- The Ombudsman is not part of or aligned with any governmental agency.

#### **The Ombudsman is Neutral.**

- The Ombudsman does not take sides; she remains neutral during the mediation process and seeks to facilitate agreement between the participants.

#### **The Ombudsman is Confidential.**

- The Ombudsman by law cannot disclose information received from the mediation participants without their prior written consent. *See “Confidentiality of Ombudsman Mediations” one-pager.*

#### **The Ombudsman is Informal.**

- The Ombudsman’s mediation process is an efficient and free way to address PIA disputes without resorting to the costly and time-consuming judicial process.
- The Ombudsman cannot force anyone to participate in mediation, and cannot order a governmental custodian to disclose records or information.

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