

# Ombudsman Consolidation

*Relating to consolidating and making uniform the several ombudsman programs administered by the Health and Human Services Commission*



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

*Sen. Lois W. Kolkhorst • Senate Bill 1101*

## Problem

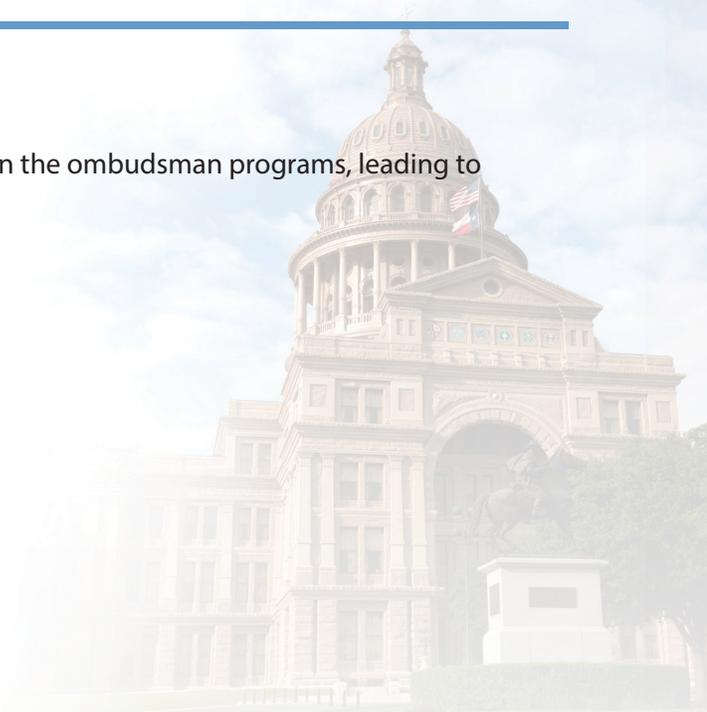
- HHSC's 2015 Sunset bill directed consolidation of ombudsman offices and functions across Texas HHS system agencies but it didn't consolidate related statutes. As a result, clients, ombudsman staff and HHS programs staff face a confusing set of inconsistent authorities and procedures established by existing ombudsman statutes.
- These differing statutes are not co-located or consistent in their treatment of basic ombudsman principles such as independence, neutrality, confidentiality and reporting.

## Solution

- Consolidate the following statutes:
  - HHS Office of the Ombudsman
  - Ombudsman Managed Care Assistance Team
  - Ombudsman for Behavioral Health
  - Foster Care Ombudsman
- Consolidation of the statutes would allow clients, ombudsman staff and HHS programs staff to clearly understand the role of the office, resulting in better service provided to clients.

## What happens if we don't change the statute?

Inconsistent authorities and procedure will continue to prevail in the ombudsman programs, leading to confusion for HHS clients.



**Questions, comments or concerns?**

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## Q&A

### Is there any change in authority with this initiative?

Taking the best practices and processes from each of the programs, the initiative is co-locating the various statutes. It also aims to establish consistencies and alignment around the different programs so they have homogeneous authority, processes and practices.

### What are the four ombudsman principles?

The United States Ombudsman Association identifies four principles that should be intrinsic to any ombudsman program:

- Independence
- Confidentiality
- Neutrality
- Credible review process

These have been widely recognized and utilized among other states' ombudsman programs, and HHSC consistently aims to achieve these within our various ombudsman programs as well.

### Are you changing or reducing the Foster Care Ombudsman authority or strength?

No. Everything is still in statute regarding the Foster Care Ombudsman.

### Would this consolidate all the ombudsman offices into one (structurally)?

There are six ombudsman programs within the Texas HHS system. This initiative would consolidate the statutes of four of them. A fifth program is already structurally part of the HHS Office of the Ombudsman but it has a separate statute in compliance with federal law. The only ombudsman program not part of the HHS Office of the Ombudsman is the Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers, which is led by an appointee of the governor.

Questions, comments or concerns?

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