



children's
defense fund
ohio



To: Kristi Burre, Director of Children's Initiatives, Molly Rafeld, ODJFS Chief of Staff, Nikki Cooper, ODJFS Legislative Lead

From: Todd Brooklyn, OHIO YAB, Lisa Dickson, ACTION Ohio, Jermaine Ferguson, ACTION Ohio, Kim Eckhart, Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

Date: January 4, 2022

Re: Youth Ombudsman planning

Overview of Recommendations

1. Experience, Education and Characteristics of Youth Ombudsman candidates
2. Recommendations for next steps for OHIO YAB involvement
 - a. Survey/Questionnaire for candidates (with scenarios)
 - b. Survey/Scoring tool for OHIO YAB
3. Youth recommendations for implementation
 - a. Youth Ombudsman access to records
 - b. Consistency and continuity in this role
 - c. Future training
4. Request for a future meeting
 - a. Draft MOU and flowchart
 - b. Grants for hiring youth, website design and communications

1. Experience, Education, and Characteristics of Youth Ombudsman Candidates

The following requirements tend to be boiler-plate expectations for this type of position:

- Experience in advocating for youth in and from care (such as a CASA)
- Prior experience doing investigations
- Has a degree in law or social work
- Knows the rules and laws of the child welfare system in Ohio
- Aware of the crossover between child welfare and other systems
- Understands the challenges youth face when they age out of care
- Understands the different processes among counties in Ohio
- Ability to inform youth about their rights and how this office can help to safeguard those rights
- Commitment to focus on both individual case-level investigations and system-level accountability recommendations

During the initial virtual meeting, Ohio youth spoke at length about wanting the Youth Ombudsman to demonstrate:

- A sense of urgency when a young person needs to have an unsafe situation addressed immediately
- Efforts to protect youth from retaliation when they report experiencing abuse or rights violations
- An understanding of trauma and how it affects behavior



- Respect for individuals who have experienced foster care personally
- Willingness to hire staff members with lived experience in foster care
- Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Willingness to work nontraditional hours/ outside the typical work week, such as evenings and weekends

Follow-up discussions brought to light the desire for the Youth Ombudsman to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- A commitment to systems improvement
- Visionary leadership, not content with compliance with the system
- A sense of curiosity, rather than being tied to the status quo
- Firm and diplomatic, rather than emotionally reactive
- Receptiveness to youth, rather than dismissing their concerns
- Skill in communicating with children and teens
- Does not over-promise
- Safeguard youth confidentiality
- The ability to inspire trust

2. Recommended next steps for OHIO YAB involvement

Per the proposed language in HB4, that the Youth Ombudsman be appointed “with advice from the overcoming hurdles in Ohio youth advisory board,” we recommend the following:

- Youth identify key characteristics and create a survey/scoring rubric to measure these for each candidate
- Youth create scenarios that candidates would respond to, for example: Describe how you would handle an investigation when a youth reports abuse.

The January OHIO YAB meeting will have time dedicated to developing these tools. Other virtual meetings can be planned with the OHIO YAB in January to finalize them.

3. Youth Recommendations for implementation

- The Youth Ombudsman would complete at least the following training: Crucial Conversations, Mental Health First Aid and Safe Ally Training
- The Youth Ombudsman be allowed access to confidential information, similar to frontline caseworkers, including all SACWIS files and records. This is vital to ensure timeliness and effectiveness.
- The Youth Ombudsman be allowed to participate in child fatality reviews and access record such as medical records and police reports
- The Youth Ombudsman be empowered to monitor foster care review boards and review training in partnership with Family Ombudsman
- Youth Ombudsman Office be nonpartisan and does not change with administration

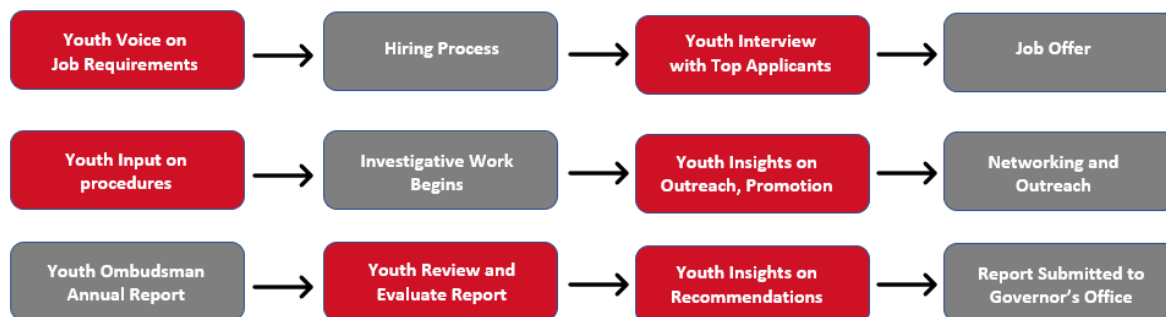


4. Request for a Follow-up Meeting:

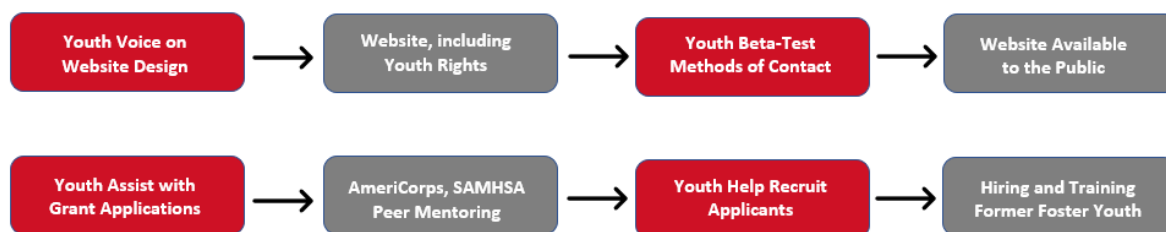
We respectfully request to schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss:

- A written agreement (MOU) around OHIO YAB's involvement, including a flowchart (see example below)
- Ways that we can partner to ground recruitment efforts in the story of youth advocacy for this role
- Timeline for recruitment, selection, hiring and onboarding
- Starting some projects before the Youth Ombudsman is hired, such as website design, communications, and grant applications to hire those with lived experience in foster care to serve as paid staff members through AmeriCorps or SAMHSA Peer Mentoring grants.

Ohio Youth Ombudsman ~ Draft Flowchart



Could some of this work begin before the Youth Ombudsman is hired?
Please see below:



**AmeriCorps funding and/or SAMHSA Peer Mentoring grants could be utilized to hire a team of former foster youth to assist in manning the hotline, ongoing promotion to courts, agencies and public schools, etc.*