

**RCW 43.382.005 Developmental disabilities ombuds—Office creation.**

(1) There is created an office of the developmental disabilities ombuds. The department of commerce shall contract with a private, independent nonprofit organization to provide developmental disability ombuds services. The department of commerce shall designate, by a competitive bidding process, the nonprofit organization that will contract to operate the ombuds. The selection process must include consultation of stakeholders in the development of the request for proposals and evaluation of bids. The selected organization must have experience and the capacity to effectively communicate regarding developmental disabilities issues with policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public and must be prepared and able to provide all program and staff support necessary, directly or through subcontracts, to carry out all duties of the office.

(2) The contracting organization and its subcontractors, if any, are not state agencies or departments, but instead are private, independent entities operating under contract with the state.

(3) The governor or state may not revoke the designation of the organization contracted to provide the services of the ombuds except upon a showing of neglect of duty, misconduct, or inability to perform duties.

(4) The department of commerce shall ensure that the ombuds staff has access to sufficient training or experience with issues relating to persons with developmental disabilities and the program and staff support necessary to enable the ombuds to effectively protect the interests of persons with developmental disabilities. The office of the developmental disabilities ombuds shall have the powers and duties to do the following:

(a) Provide information as appropriate on the rights and responsibilities of persons receiving developmental disability [disabilities] administration services or other state services, and on the procedures for providing these services;

(b) Investigate, upon its own initiative or upon receipt of a complaint, an administrative act related to a person with developmental disabilities alleged to be contrary to law, rule, or policy, imposed without an adequate statement of reason, or based on irrelevant, immaterial, or erroneous grounds; however, the ombuds may decline to investigate any complaint;

(c) Monitor the procedures as established, implemented, and practiced by the department to carry out its responsibilities in the delivery of services to a person with developmental disabilities, with a view toward appropriate preservation of families and ensuring health and safety;

(d) Review periodically the facilities and procedures of state institutions which serve persons with developmental disabilities and state-licensed facilities or residences;

(e) Recommend changes in the procedures for addressing the needs of persons with developmental disabilities;

(f) Submit annually, by November 1st, to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature a report analyzing the work of the office, including recommendations;

(g) Establish procedures to protect the confidentiality of records and sensitive information to ensure that the identity of any complainant or person with developmental disabilities will not be

disclosed without the written consent of the complainant or person, or upon court order;

(h) Maintain independence and authority within the bounds of the duties prescribed by this chapter, insofar as this independence and authority is exercised in good faith and within the scope of contract; and

(i) Carry out such other activities as determined by the department of commerce within the scope of this chapter.

(5) The developmental disabilities ombuds must consult with stakeholders to develop a plan for future expansion of the ombuds into a model of individual ombuds services akin to the operations of the long-term care ombuds. The developmental disabilities ombuds shall report its progress and recommendations related to this subsection to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature by November 1, 2019. [2016 c 172 § 5.]

**Finding—2016 c 172:** "The legislature finds and declares that the prevalence of the abuse and neglect of individuals with developmental disabilities has become an issue that negatively affects the health and well-being of such individuals. In order to address this issue, the state seeks to increase visitation of clients who are classified at the highest risk of abuse and neglect based on the assessment of risk factors by developmental disabilities administration case managers, and to create an independent office of the developmental disabilities ombuds to monitor and report on services to persons with developmental disabilities." [2016 c 172 § 1.]