

Let the Sun Shine In: Maryland Public Access Ombudsman Program

March 15, 2019

It's sunshine week and the Ombudsman has some light to shed on Maryland's Public Access Ombudsman program. On February 25, 2019, the Ombudsman's office disseminated a stakeholder survey to nearly 950 people who have participated in either Ombudsman mediation or PIA training, or who have otherwise interacted with the Ombudsman's office. The recipients included PIA custodians, agency attorneys, PIA requestors, PIA advocates, and others. After just a couple weeks, we received 132 responses that have provided insight on some of these stakeholders' experiences with the Ombudsman program.

Quick Takes

Who responded?

- The respondents were split almost evenly between requestors (47%) and agency staff (53%).
- The largest category of respondents was agency custodians at 39%.

Additionally, we are still collecting responses. At this point, we want to emphasize two things:

1. The survey is still available to take on line. Visit <https://goo.gl/forms/niyRoECeAWNrk3Kf2> to provide your input on the Public Access Ombudsman program. See it as an opportunity to have your voice heard.
2. We will shortly send the survey to persons who are incarcerated, so our preliminary results do not yet include those requestors. Of 450 requestors who have contacted the Ombudsman's office over nearly 3 years of operation, 23 percent of them are incarcerated. As a general rule these requestors do not have access to the internet or email, so we are sending the survey to these requestors via regular mail.

Key Findings

Training. Respondents generally consider themselves knowledgeable about the PIA, but are not averse to additional training. Forty-five percent of respondents consider themselves well-versed in the PIA, while only 1.5 percent indicated that they have "little to no knowledge" about the PIA. Some 65% of respondents indicated an interest in training. Suggested categories of PIA training topics include:

Agencies	Requestors
Responses to Requestors	Making a Request
Exceptions to the PIA	How to deal with request denials

Administration of an Agency's PIA Response Program	General and Legal Information on the PIA
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Soon, we are going to look into the possibility of having online training modules for some of these topics. In the meantime, if you would like to **request a training/presentation** for your group or agency on the PIA or the Ombudsman program, please email pia.ombuds@oag.state.md.us.

Outreach. A little over a quarter of respondents learned about the Ombudsman program through our website. The Ombudsman's survey asked multiple questions about the platforms we use for outreach, including our website, twitter, and this blog, and the website appears by far to be the most effective way we have shared information with our stakeholders. Few survey respondents were aware of our twitter account, and though some showed interest in our blog, few knew about it before the survey. This is all valuable information as we move forward in the important public outreach component of our mission.

More information will be forthcoming as we receive more survey results and delve into those responses. Thank you for taking the time to read this post. We welcome your input on this post or any others.

Sincerely,

The Public Access Ombudsman Family