

Office of the Public Access Ombudsman

The Basics

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*.

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.

LISA KERSHNER, Maryland Public Access Ombudsman

PHONE: 410-576-6560

EMAIL: pia.ombuds@oag.state.md.us

WEBSITE: piaombuds.maryland.gov

