

WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?

An Ombudsman is a person who serves as a designated neutral party who advocates for a fair process and provides confidential, informal assistance and support to parents, guardians, advocates, educators, and students with disabilities. The Ombudsman for Special Education serves as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters.



KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- **Independence** - The Ombudsman is independent of the formal dispute resolution options of mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings and serves a key function of reporting to leadership at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) regarding the issues experienced by parties served.
- **Confidentiality** - The Ombudsman does not disclose personal information, discussions, and interactions.
- **Neutrality** - The Ombudsman does not take a side on the issues and serves as an advocate for a fair process.
- **Informality** - There is no formal complaint form or documentation required to access the services of the Ombudsman.

SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- Serve as a source of information and referral regarding state and federal laws and regulations governing special education.
- Provide information and support to parents of students with disabilities to help them understand and navigate the special education process.
- Provide communication strategies to parents and school divisions for resolving disagreements and special education issues.
- Assist parents in developing strategies and informal options to address issues and concerns.
- Promote collaboration and positive communication between parents and school division personnel in addressing special education issues.
- Provide information and resources on available options for dispute resolution, such as mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings when collaboration efforts fail.
- Serve as a resource for disability related information and referrals to available programs and services for individuals with disabilities.
- Identify, track, monitor, and report to the VDOE leadership on suspected systemic patterns of concerns that emerge from constituent contacts regarding special education services in local school divisions to aid in addressing noncompliance with special education laws and regulations.