# SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 4096

A bill to amend 1994 PA 204, entitled "The children's ombudsman act,"

by amending the title and sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 (MCL 722.922, 722.923, 722.924, 722.925, 722.926, 722.927, 722.928, 722.929, 722.930, and 722.931); and to repeal acts and parts of acts.

### THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN ENACT:

- 1 TITLE
- 2 An act to <u>create</u> **establish** the children's ombudsman
- 3 office; and to prescribe the powers and duties of the children's
- 4 ombudsman, certain state departments and officers, and certain
- 5 county and private agencies serving children; and to provide
- 6 remedies from certain administrative acts.
- 7 Sec. 2. As used in this act:
- 8 (a) "Administrative act" includes an action, omission,

- 1 decision, recommendation, practice, or other procedure of the
- 2 department -of social services, an adoption attorney, or a child
- 3 placing agency with respect to a particular child related to
- 4 adoption, foster care, or protective services.
- 5 (b) "Adoption attorney" means that term as defined in
- 6 section 22 of the adoption code, being section 710.22 of the
- 7 Michigan Compiled Laws.
- 8 (c) "Adoption code" means chapter X of Act No. 288 of the
- 9 Public Acts of 1939, being sections 710.21 to 710.70 of the
- 10 Michigan Compiled Laws.
- 11 (b) "Central registry" means that term as defined in section
- 12 2 of the child protection law, MCL 722.622.
- 13 (c) "Child" means an individual under the age of 18.
- 14 (d) "Child abuse" and "child neglect" mean those terms as
- 15 defined in section 2 of the child protection law, MCL 722.622.
- (e) "Child caring institution" means that term as defined in
- 17 section 1 of 1973 PA 116, MCL 722.111.
- 18 (f) —(d)— "Child placing agency" means an organization
- 19 licensed or approved by the department of -social services under
- 20 Act No. 116 of the Public Acts of 1973, being sections 722.111 to
- 21 722.128 of the Michigan Compiled Laws consumer and industry
- 22 Services [or its successor department or agency] under 1973 PA 116, MCL 722.111 to 722.128, to receive
- 23 children for placement in private family homes for foster care or
- 24 adoption and to provide services related to adoption.
- (e) "Child" means an individual under the age of 18.
- 26 (f) "Complainant" means an individual who makes a complaint
- 27 as provided in section 5.

- 1 (g) "Child protection law" means the child protection law,
- 2 1975 PA 238, MCL 722.621 to 722.638.
- 3 (h) "Children's ombudsman" or "ombudsman" means the
- 4 individual appointed to the office of children's ombudsman under
- 5 section 3.
- 6 (i) "Closed session" means that term as defined in the open
- 7 meetings act, 1976 PA 267, MCL 15.261 to 15.275.
- 8 (j) -(g) "Department" means the -department of social
- 9 services family independence agency.
- 10 (h) "Foster parent" means an individual licensed by the
- 11 department of social services under Act No. 116 of the Public
- 12 Acts of 1973 to provide foster care to children.
- (i) "Official" means an official or employee of the
- 14 department or a child placing agency.
- 15 (j) "Ombudsman" means the children's ombudsman created in
- 16 section 3.
- 17 (k) "Foster care" means care provided to a child in a foster
- 18 family home, foster family group home, or child caring
- 19 institution licensed or approved by the department of consumer
- 20 and industry services under 1973 PA 116, MCL 722.111 to 722.128,
- 21 or care provided to a child in a relative's home under a court
- 22 order.
- 23 (1) "Office" means the children's ombudsman office
- 24 established under section 3.
- Sec. 3. (1) As a means of effecting changes in policy,
- 26 procedure, and legislation, educating the public, investigating
- 27 and reviewing actions of state agencies or entities receiving

- 1 state funding, monitoring and ensuring compliance with relevant
- 2 statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to children's protective
- 3 services and the placement, supervision, -and- treatment, and
- 4 improving delivery of care of children in foster care and
- 5 adoptive homes, the children's ombudsman is -created established
- 6 as an autonomous entity in the department of management and
- 7 budget. The ombudsman shall exercise its powers and duties,
- 8 including the functions of budgeting and procurement and other
- 9 management-related functions, independently of the director of
- 10 the department of management and budget. The office of
- 11 children's ombudsman is established in the children's ombudsman
- 12 office.
- **13** (2) [
- 14 ] The governor shall
- 15 appoint an individual as the ombudsman, with the advice and
- 16 consent of the senate, from a list of not less than 3 individuals
- 17 submitted to the governor by a committee consisting of the
- 18 following members:
- (a) Two attorneys, 1 appointed by the state bar of Michigan
- 20 and 1 appointed by the governor.
- 21 (b) Two judges who are serving in the family division of
- 22 circuit court, 1 appointed by the supreme court and 1 appointed
- 23 by the governor.
- 24 (c) One physician appointed by the governor.
- 25 (d) One member of the house of representatives appointed by
- 26 the speaker of the house of representatives.
- (e) One member of the senate appointed by the senate majority

- 1 leader.
- 2 (f) One psychologist appointed by the governor.
- 3 (g) One social worker appointed by the national association
- 4 of social workers of Michigan.
- 5 (h) One representative of a child placing agency appointed by
- 6 the governor.
- 7 (i) One representative of the Michigan domestic violence
- 8 prevention and treatment board, appointed by the Michigan
- 9 domestic violence prevention and treatment board or its
- 10 designee.
- 11 (j) One member of the general public appointed by the
- 12 governor.
- 13 (k) One representative of the department of state police
- 14 appointed by the governor.
- 15 (3) The committee established under subsection (2) shall
- 16 recommend not less than 3 individuals to the governor for
- 17 selection as the children's ombudsman. [

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- 23 The committee shall not recommend an individual unless the
- 24 individual is qualified by training and experience to perform the
- 25 duties and exercise the powers of the children's ombudsman and
- 26 the children's ombudsman office as provided in this act.
- (4) [On the effective date of the amendatory act that added this subsection], a

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  committee consisting of members as provided in subsection (2)
  shall be formed and shall meet to interview and consider
  individuals to recommend for appointment as the children's
  ombudsman under the guidelines established by subsection (3).
- 5 Not more than 60 days after [the effective date of the amendatory act that added this subsection], the committee shall
- 6 submit to the governor a list of not less than 3 individuals,
- 7 ranked in order of committee preference.
  - [(5) If the office of children's ombudsman becomes vacant, not more than 60 days after that vacancy occurs, the committee established under subsection (2) shall submit to the governor a list of not less than 3 individuals, ranked in order of committee preference.]
- 8 [(6)] Not more than 60 days after the committee submits its
- 9 recommendations, the governor shall appoint 1 of the individuals
- 10 recommended under subsection (4) [or (5)] to fill the vacancy. An
- 11 appointment to fill a vacancy in the office of the children's
- 12 ombudsman is subject to the advice and consent of the senate. If
- 13 the governor fails to make the appointment within 60 days, the
- 14 individual ranked the highest in the committee's recommendation
- 15 under subsection (4) [or (5)] is appointed as the children's ombudsman.
- 16 [(7)] The governor may remove the children's ombudsman from
- 17 office for cause that includes, but is not limited to,
- 18 incompetency to properly exercise duties, official misconduct,
- 19 habitual or willful neglect of duty, or other misfeasance or
- 20 malfeasance in connection with the operation of the office of the
- 21 children's ombudsman. The governor shall report the reason for
- 22 the removal to the legislature.
- 23 [(8)] The children's ombudsman serving in office on the
- 24 effective date of the amendatory act that added this subsection
- 25 shall serve at the pleasure of the governor [until the governor makes an appointment under subsection (4)].
- Sec. 4. (1) —The— Independently from the department of management and budget and from the executive office of the

- 1 governor, the ombudsman shall establish procedures for the office
- 2 for budgeting, expending -funds- money, and employing personnel.
- 3 Subject to annual appropriations, the ombudsman shall employ
- 4 sufficient personnel to carry out the duties and powers
- 5 prescribed by this act.
- 6 (2) The ombudsman shall establish procedures for receiving
- 7 and processing complaints from -complainants the public,
- 8 conducting investigations, holding informal hearings, and
- 9 reporting findings resulting from investigations.
- 10 (3) Personnel employed by the office of the children's
- 11 ombudsman shall receive mandatory training conducted by the
- 12 Michigan domestic violence prevention and treatment board in
- 13 domestic violence and in handling complaints of [child abuse or child neglect]
- 14 that involve a history of domestic violence.
- 15 (4) If the subject matter of a complaint falls within the
- 16 duties and powers of the ombudsman to investigate, any individual
- 17 may submit the complaint to the ombudsman. The ombudsman has the
- 18 sole discretion and authority to determine if a complaint falls
- 19 within his or her duties and powers to investigate and if a
- 20 complaint involves an administrative act. The ombudsman may
- 21 initiate an investigation without receiving a complaint. The
- 22 ombudsman defines the scope, duration, and issues to be
- 23 considered as part of the investigation. During the course of an
- 24 investigation, the ombudsman may refer a case to the department
- 25 if the ombudsman determines that the department received a report
- 26 on the case, but did not conduct a field investigation. If the
- 27 ombudsman refers a case to the department, the department shall

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 1 conduct a field investigation of the case and report its findings
 2 to the ombudsman.
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        Sec. 5. All of the following individuals may make a
13 complaint to the ombudsman with respect to a particular child,
14 alleging that an administrative act is contrary to law, rule, or
15 policy, imposed without an adequate statement of reason, or based
16 on irrelevant, immaterial, or erroneous grounds:
17 (a) The child, if he or she is able to articulate a
18 complaint.
19 (b) A biological parent of the child.
20 (c) A foster parent of the child.
21 (d) An adoptive parent or a prospective adoptive parent of
22 the child.
23 (e) A legally appointed guardian of the child.
24 (f) A guardian ad litem of the child.
25 (q) An adult who is related to the child within the fifth
26 degree by marriage, blood, or adoption, as defined in section 22
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27 of the adoption code, being section 710.22 of the Michigan

- 1 Compiled Laws.
- 2 (h) A Michigan legislator.
- 3 (i) An attorney for any individual described in subparagraphs
- 4  $\frac{(a)}{(a)}$  to  $\frac{(g)}{(g)}$ . The children's ombudsman has the authority to do all
- 5 of the following:
- 6 (a) Pursue all necessary action, including, but not limited
- 7 to, legal action, to protect the rights and welfare of each child
- 8 or the class of children under the jurisdiction, control, or
- 9 supervision of the department, the Michigan children's institute,
- 10 the family division of circuit court under section 2(a)(1) of
- 11 chapter XIIA of the probate code of 1939, 1939 PA 288, MCL
- 12 712A.2, a child caring institution, or a child placing agency.
- 13 (b) Pursue [ ] legislative advocacy in the best
- 14 interests of children.
- 15 (c) Review policies and procedures relating to the
- 16 department's involvement with children and make recommendations
- 17 for improvement.
- 18 (d) Investigate each child's death that may have resulted
- 19 from child abuse or child neglect.
- 20 Sec. 6. The ombudsman may do all of the following in
- 21 relation to a child who may be a victim of child abuse or child
- 22 neglect:
- 23 (a) Upon its his or her own initiative or upon receipt of a
- 24 complaint, <u>from a complainant</u>, investigate an administrative
- 25 act that is alleged to be contrary to law or rule, —or— contrary
- 26 to policy of the department or a child placing agency, imposed
- 27 without an adequate statement of reason, or based on irrelevant,

- 1 immaterial, or erroneous grounds. The ombudsman has sole
- 2 discretion to determine if a complaint involves an administrative
- 3 act.
- 4 (b) Decide, in -its- his or her discretion, whether to
- 5 investigate -a complaint an administrative act.
- 6 (c) Upon its own initiative or upon receipt of a complaint
- 7 from a complainant, conduct a preliminary investigation to
- 8 determine whether an adoption attorney may have committed an
- 9 administrative act that is alleged to be contrary to law, rule,
- 10 or the Michigan rules of professional conduct adopted by the
- 11 Michigan supreme court.
- 12 (c) Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision, access
- 13 records and reports necessary to carry out the ombudsman's powers
- 14 and duties under this act to the same extent and in the same
- 15 manner as provided to the department under the provisions of the
- 16 child protection law. The ombudsman shall be provided access to
- 17 medical records in the same manner as access is provided to the
- 18 department under section 16281 of the public health code, 1978 PA
- 19 368, MCL 333.16281. The ombudsman shall be provided access to
- 20 mental health records in the same manner as access is provided to
- 21 the department in section 748a of the mental health code, 1978 PA
- 22 258, MCL 330.1748a.
- 23 (d) Issue a subpoena requiring the production of a record or
- 24 report necessary to carry out the ombudsman's duties and powers.
- 25 If the person to whom a subpoena is issued fails or refuses to
- 26 produce the record or report, the ombudsman may petition the
- 27 court for enforcement of the subpoena.

- 1 (e)  $\frac{d}{d}$  Hold informal hearings and request that individuals
- 2 appear before the ombudsman and give testimony or produce
- 3 documentary or other evidence that the ombudsman considers
- 4 relevant to a matter under investigation.
- 5 (f)  $\frac{(e)}{(e)}$  Make recommendations to the governor and the
- 6 legislature concerning the need for children's protective
- 7 services, adoption, or foster care legislation, policy, or
- 8 practice without prior review by other offices, departments, or
- 9 agencies in the executive branch in order to facilitate rapid
- 10 implementation of recommendations or for suggested improvements
- 11 to the recommendations. However, no other office, department, or
- 12 agency shall prohibit or inhibit the release of an ombudsman's
- 13 recommendation to the governor or the legislature.
- 14 Sec. 7. (1) Upon <u>rendering a decision</u> deciding to
- 15 investigate a complaint, <u>from a complainant</u>, the ombudsman
- 16 shall notify the -complainant- complaining individual of the
- 17 decision to investigate and shall notify the department -
- 18 adoption attorney, or child placing agency of the intention to
- 19 investigate. If the ombudsman declines to investigate a
- 20 complaint or continue an investigation, the ombudsman shall
- 21 notify the -complainant complaining individual and the
- 22 department -, adoption attorney, or child placing agency of the
- 23 decision and of the reasons for the ombudsman's action.
- 24 (2) If the preliminary investigation described in section 6
- 25 leads the ombudsman to believe that the matter may involve
- 26 misconduct by an adoption attorney, the ombudsman shall
- 27 immediately refer the complaint to the attorney grievance

- 1 commission of the state bar of Michigan.
- 2 (2) -(3) The ombudsman may advise a -complainant
- 3 complaining individual to pursue all administrative remedies or
- 4 channels of complaint open to the -complainant individual before
- 5 pursuing a complaint with the ombudsman. Subsequent to the
- 6 administrative processing of a complaint, the ombudsman may
- 7 conduct further investigations of -any- a complaint upon the
- 8 request of the complainant or upon the ombudsman's own
- 9 initiative complaining individual.
- 10 (3) -(4) If the ombudsman finds in the course of an
- 11 investigation that an individual's action is in violation of
- 12 state or federal criminal law, the ombudsman shall immediately
- 13 report that fact to the county prosecutor or the attorney
- 14 general. If the complaint is against a child placing agency, the
- 15 ombudsman shall refer the matter to the department of -social
- 16 consumer and industry services or its successor department for
- 17 further action with respect to licensing.
- 18 (5) The ombudsman may file a petition on behalf of a child
- 19 requesting the court to take jurisdiction under section 2(b) of
- 20 chapter XIIA of Act No. 288 of the Public Acts of 1939, being
- 21 section 712A.2 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, or a petition for
- 22 termination of parental rights under section 19b of chapter XIIA
- 23 of Act No. 288 of the Public Acts of 1939, being section 712A.19b
- 24 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, if the ombudsman is satisfied that
- 25 the complainant has contacted the department, the prosecuting
- 26 attorney, the child's attorney, and the child's guardian ad
- 27 litem, if any, and that none of these persons intend to file a

- 1 petition as described in this subsection.
- 2 Sec. 8. (1) The department and a child placing agency shall
- 3 do all of the following:
- 4 (a) Upon the ombudsman's request, grant the ombudsman or
- 5 <u>its</u> his or her designee access to all <del>relevant</del> information,
- 6 records, and documents in the possession of the department or
- 7 child placing agency that the ombudsman considers relevant and
- 8 necessary in an investigation.
- 9 (b) Assist the ombudsman to obtain the necessary releases of
- 10 those documents that are specifically restricted.
- 11 (c) Provide— Upon the ombudsman's request, provide the
- 12 ombudsman upon request with progress reports concerning the
- 13 administrative processing of a complaint.
- 14 (d) Upon the ombudsman's request, provide the ombudsman
- 15 information he or she requests under subdivision (a) within 5
- 16 business days after the date of request. Upon the ombudsman's
- 17 request, the attorney general may take appropriate action to
- 18 require that the information requested be provided to the
- 19 ombudsman.
- 20 (2) The department, an <del>adoption</del> attorney involved with an
- 21 adoption, and a child placing agency shall provide information to
- 22 a biological parent, prospective adoptive parent, or foster
- 23 parent regarding the provisions of this act.
- 24 (3) The department shall provide the ombudsman with access,
- 25 in the ombudsman's own office, to departmental computer networks,
- 26 including the central registry, service workers support
- 27 system/foster care, adoption, juvenile justice (SWSS), and

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- 1 customer information management system (CIMS) unless otherwise
- 2 prohibited by federal law, or the release of the information to
- 3 the ombudsman would jeopardize federal funding.
- 4 Sec. 9. (1) The ombudsman shall treat all matters under
- 5 investigation, including the identities of recipients or
- 6 individuals from whom information is acquired, as confidential,
- 7 except so far as disclosures may be necessary to enable the
- 8 ombudsman to perform the duties of the office and to support any
- 9 recommendations resulting from an investigation. A record of the
- 10 office of the ombudsman is confidential, shall be used only for
- 11 purposes set forth in this act, and is not subject to court
- 12 subpoena. A record of the office of the ombudsman is exempt from
- 13 disclosure under the freedom of information act, Act No. 442 of
- 14 the Public Acts of 1976, being sections 15.231 to 15.246 of the
- 15 Michigan Compiled Laws. Subject to [subsections (2) through (7)], all
- 16 information obtained or generated by the office of the children's
- 17 ombudsman is confidential [
- 18 ], is
- 19 not subject to a court subpoena, and is not discoverable in a
- 20 legal proceeding. [The ombudsman shall not disclose confidential information in response to a request under the freedom of information act, 1976 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246, unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in nondisclosure. The ombudsman shall not disclose any information that impairs the rights of the child or the child's parents or guardians.]
- 21 (2) The ombudsman may release information to a complainant or
- 22 to a closed session of a legislative committee that has
- 23 jurisdiction over family and children's services issues regarding
- 24 the department's handling of a case under the child protection
- 25 law that is obtained or generated during an investigation
- 26 conducted by the office.
- 27 (3) Unless otherwise part of the public record, the office  $H00117'03 \ (H-4)$

- 1 shall not release any of the following confidential information
- 2 to the general public:
- 3 (a) Records relating to mental health evaluation or treatment
- 4 of a parent or child.
- 5 (b) Records relating to the evaluation or treatment of a
- 6 substance abuse-related disorder of a parent or child.
- 7 (c) Records relating to medical diagnosis or treatment of a
- 8 parent or child.
- 9 (d) Records relating to domestic violence-related services
- 10 and sexual assault services provided to a parent or child.
- 11 (e) Records relating to educational services provided to a
- 12 parent or child.
- 13 (4) Notwithstanding subsection (3), if the ombudsman
- 14 determines that disclosure of confidential information is
- 15 necessary to identify, prevent, or respond to the abuse or
- 16 neglect of a child, the ombudsman may disclose information in his
- 17 or her possession to a public or private agency responsible for
- 18 the welfare of the child or to a court. The ombudsman shall not
- 19 release the address, telephone number, or other information
- 20 regarding the whereabouts of a victim or suspected victim of
- 21 domestic violence unless ordered to by a court.
- 22 (5) Except as necessary to support legal action initiated
- 23 under section 5(a), the ombudsman shall not disclose information
- 24 relating to an ongoing law enforcement investigation or an
- 25 ongoing children's protective services investigation.
- 26 (6) The ombudsman shall not disclose the identity of an
- 27 individual making a child abuse or neglect complaint under the

- 1 child protection law unless that individual's written permission
- 2 is obtained first or a court has ordered the ombudsman to release
- 3 that information.
- 4 (7) The ombudsman may release an individual's identity who
- 5 makes an intentionally false report of child abuse or neglect
- 6 under the child protection law.
- 7 Sec. 10. (1) The ombudsman shall prepare a report of the
- 8 factual findings of an investigation and make recommendations to
- 9 the department or child placing agency if the ombudsman finds
- 10 1 or more of the following:
- 11 (a) A matter should be further considered by the department
- 12 or child placing agency.
- 13 (b) An administrative act or omission should be modified,
- 14 -or canceled, or corrected.
- 15 (c) Reasons should be given for an administrative act or
- 16 omission.
- 17 (d) Other action should be taken by the department or child
- 18 placing agency.
- 19 (2) Before announcing a conclusion or recommendation that
- 20 expressly or by implication criticizes an individual, the
- 21 department, or a child placing agency, the ombudsman shall
- 22 consult with that individual, the department, or the child
- 23 placing agency. When publishing an opinion adverse to the
- 24 department or child placing agency, the ombudsman shall include
- 25 in the publication any statement of reasonable length made to the
- 26 ombudsman by the department or child placing agency in defense or
- 27 mitigation of the action. The ombudsman may request to be

- 1 notified by the department or child placing agency, within a
- 2 specified time, of any action taken on any recommendation
- 3 presented.
- 4 (2) -(3) The ombudsman shall notify the -complainant
- 5 complaining individual of the actions taken by the ombudsman and
- 6 by the department or child placing agency.
- 7 (4) The ombudsman shall provide the complainant with a copy
- 8 of its recommendations on a complaint.
- 9 (3) The ombudsman may provide to the individual making the
- 10 complaint to the office the following information:
- 11 (a) A copy of the ombudsman's report regarding the
- 12 investigation's findings, recommendations to the department made
- 13 according to the investigation, the department's response to the
- 14 ombudsman's findings and recommendations, and any epilogue to the
- 15 ombudsman's report and the department's response.
- (b) Information that has otherwise been made public.
- 17 (c) Confidential information, but only to the extent that
- 18 release is necessary to enable the individual making the
- 19 complaint to take action to protect the child from child abuse or
- 20 child neglect.
- 21 (4) The ombudsman shall not release information to the
- 22 individual making the complaint that will endanger the health or
- 23 welfare of a child or another individual.
- 24 (5) The ombudsman shall submit to the governor, the director
- 25 of the department, and the legislature an annual report on the
- 26 ombudsman's conduct, of the ombudsman, including any
- 27 recommendations regarding the need for legislation or for change

- 1 in rules or policies.
- 2 Sec. 11. (1) An Subject to subsection (4), an official,
- 3 the department, or a child placing agency shall not penalize any
- 4 person for filing a complaint or cooperating with the ombudsman
- 5 in investigating a complaint.
- **6** (2) An individual, the department, an <del>adoption</del> attorney
- 7 involved in an adoption, or a child placing agency shall not
- 8 hinder the lawful actions of the ombudsman or employees of the
- 9 ombudsman.
- 10 (3) A report by the ombudsman is not subject to prior
- 11 approval by a person outside of the office.
- 12 (4) An individual who intentionally makes a false complaint
- 13 of child abuse or neglect under this act is subject to the
- 14 penalties contained in section 13(5) of the child protection law,
- 15 MCL 722.633.
- 16 Enacting section 1. Sections 13, 14, and 15 of the
- 17 children's ombudsman act, 1994 PA 204, MCL 722.933, 722.934, and
- 18 722.935, are repealed.
- 19 Enacting section 2. Section 6(d) of the children's
- 20 ombudsman act, 1994 PA 204, MCL 722.936, is repealed 5 years
- 21 after the effective date of this amendatory act.