

# HOUSE BILL NO. 4397

April 12, 2023, Introduced by Reps. Andrews, Breen, Hood, Farhat, Brabec, Morse, Price, Weiss, Snyder, Brenda Carter, Tsernoglou, Hope, Haadsma and Scott and referred to the Committee on Labor.

A bill to create the office of the state employee ombudsman; to provide a process for investigating and evaluating reports of suspected violations of law, conduct or decisions that may endanger public health or safety, and gross mismanagement of public funds; to prescribe the powers and duties of the office, the ombudsman, the legislative council, and certain other state governmental officers and entities; and to prescribe penalties and provide remedies.

**THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN ENACT:**

1           Sec. 1. This act may be cited as the "state employee ombudsman  
2 act".

3           Sec. 2. As used in this act:

4           (a) "Administrative act" includes an action, omission,  
5 decision, recommendation, practice, or other procedure of a state  
6 department or agency.

7           (b) "Complainant" means an individual who submits a complaint  
8 to the ombudsman under this act.

9           (c) "Council" means the legislative council provided for in  
10 section 15 of article IV of the state constitution of 1963 and  
11 created in section 103 of the legislative council act, 1986 PA 268,  
12 MCL 4.1103.

13           (d) "Office" means the office of the state employee ombudsman  
14 created in section 3.

15           (e) "Ombudsman" means the state employee ombudsman appointed  
16 under section 3.

17           (f) "Person" means an individual, partnership, corporation,  
18 association, governmental entity, or other legal entity.

19           (g) "State department or agency" means a state department or  
20 other agency within the executive branch.

21           (h) "State employee" means a full-time or part-time employee  
22 of a state department or agency.

23           Sec. 3. (1) The office of the state employee ombudsman is  
24 created within the legislative council.

25           (2) The principal executive officer of the office is the state  
26 employee ombudsman, who must be appointed by and serve at the  
27 pleasure of the council.

28           Sec. 4. The council shall establish procedures for approving  
29 the budget of the office, for expending funds of the office, and

1 for employing personnel for the office.

2       Sec. 5. (1) The ombudsman may commence an investigation on the  
3 ombudsman's own initiative or on receipt of a complaint from a  
4 state employee concerning an administrative act.

5       (2) Subject to approval of the council, the ombudsman shall  
6 establish procedures for receiving and processing complaints,  
7 conducting investigations, holding hearings, and reporting the  
8 findings resulting from investigations.

9       Sec. 6. (1) On request of the ombudsman, a state department or  
10 agency shall give the ombudsman access to all information, records,  
11 and documents in the possession of the state department or agency  
12 that the ombudsman considers necessary in an investigation,  
13 including, but not limited to, all of the following:

14       (a) Violations or suspected violations of law.

15       (b) Conduct by a state department or agency that will, or is  
16 substantially likely to, endanger public health or safety.

17       (c) Gross mismanagement or waste of public funds.

18       (2) The ombudsman may hold informal hearings and may request  
19 that any individual appear before the ombudsman or at a hearing and  
20 give testimony or produce documentary or other evidence that the  
21 ombudsman considers relevant to an investigation.

22       Sec. 7. (1) The ombudsman shall advise a complainant to pursue  
23 all administrative remedies open to the complainant. On request of  
24 the ombudsman, a state department or agency shall provide a  
25 progress report concerning the administrative processing of a  
26 complaint submitted to the state department or agency. After the  
27 state department or agency takes administrative action on a  
28 complaint, the ombudsman may conduct further investigation at the  
29 request of a complainant or on the ombudsman's own initiative.

1           (2) The ombudsman is not required to conduct an investigation  
2 on a complaint brought before the ombudsman. A complainant is not  
3 entitled to have an investigation conducted by the ombudsman.

4           Sec. 8. On receiving a complaint under this act and deciding  
5 to investigate the complaint, the ombudsman shall notify the  
6 complainant and the state department or agency. If the ombudsman  
7 declines to investigate, the ombudsman shall notify the  
8 complainant, in writing, of the reasons for the ombudsman's  
9 decision.

10           Sec. 9. On request of the ombudsman, the council may hold a  
11 hearing. The council may administer oaths, subpoena witnesses, and  
12 examine the books and records of the state department or agency  
13 that is or was a proper subject of investigation by the ombudsman.

14           Sec. 10. (1) Subject to subsection (2), correspondence between  
15 the office and a complainant is confidential, is privileged  
16 communication, and is exempt from disclosure under the freedom of  
17 information act, 1976 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246.

18           (2) The office shall maintain confidentiality regarding all  
19 matters under investigation and the identities of the complainants  
20 or persons from whom information is acquired, unless disclosure is  
21 necessary to enable the ombudsman to perform the duties of the  
22 office or to support any recommendations resulting from an  
23 investigation.

24           Sec. 11. (1) Within 30 days after completing the  
25 investigation, the ombudsman shall prepare and provide to the  
26 complainant a resolution report that details the findings of the  
27 investigation, the recommendations of the ombudsman, and any  
28 actions that have been taken to address the complainant's concerns.  
29 The ombudsman may request that a state department or agency notify

1 the ombudsman within a specified time of any action taken on any  
2 recommendation presented. The ombudsman shall notify the  
3 complainant of the actions a state department or agency takes to  
4 address the complaint.

5 (2) In addition to the report prepared under subsection (1),  
6 within 30 days after completing an investigation, the ombudsman  
7 shall prepare and submit a report of the ombudsman's findings to  
8 the council. The report must include recommendations if the  
9 ombudsman finds any of the following:

10 (a) Conduct that will or is substantially likely to endanger  
11 public health or safety.

12 (b) A violation or a suspected violation of law.

13 (c) The gross mismanagement or waste of public funds.

14 (d) A matter that the state department or agency should  
15 consider.

16 (e) An administrative act that should be modified or canceled.

17 (f) A statute or rule that should be altered.

18 (g) An administrative act for which justification is  
19 necessary.

20 (h) Any other significant concern as determined by the  
21 ombudsman.

22 (3) Subject to section 12, the council may forward the report  
23 prepared and submitted under subsection (2) to the state department  
24 or agency and the complainant who requested the report.

25 (4) A report prepared and recommendations made by the  
26 ombudsman and submitted to the council under subsection (2) are  
27 exempt from disclosure under the freedom of information act, 1976  
28 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246.

29 Sec. 12. Before announcing to the general public a conclusion

1 or recommendation that expressly or by implication criticizes a  
2 state department or agency, the ombudsman shall consult with the  
3 state department or agency. If the ombudsman publishes an opinion  
4 adverse to a state department or agency, the ombudsman shall  
5 include in that publication a statement of reasonable length made  
6 to the ombudsman by the state department or agency in defense or  
7 mitigation of the finding if that statement is provided within a  
8 reasonable time as determined by the council.

9       Sec. 13. (1) The ombudsman shall submit to the council and the  
10 legislature an annual report on the conduct of the office that  
11 contains information required by the council.

12       (2) The ombudsman shall annually post on the ombudsman's  
13 website a report that contains all of the following:

14       (a) The number of complaints that are each of the following:

15       (i) Received.

16       (ii) Investigated.

17       (iii) Resolved.

18       (b) The nature of each incident that was the basis for the  
19 complaint. However, personal identifying information must not be  
20 included.

21       (c) The average time from the receipt of a complaint until a  
22 resolution report is provided under section 11(1).

23       (d) The percentage of repeat complaints.

24       (e) Satisfaction feedback.

25       (f) Any additional information the council requests to be  
26 included in the annual report or the ombudsman considers relevant.

27       Sec. 14. (1) A state department or agency shall not penalize  
28 in any way a complainant for filing a complaint, providing  
29 information to the council or a legislator, or cooperating with the

1 ombudsman in investigating a complaint.

2 (2) A state department or agency or any person shall not  
3 hinder the lawful actions of the ombudsman or employees of the  
4 office or willfully refuse to comply with any lawful demand of the  
5 office.

6 Sec. 15. The authority granted to the ombudsman under this act  
7 is in addition to other authority granted by law to any other  
8 office or agency relative to a remedy or right of appeal or  
9 objection for a complainant, or any procedure provided for the  
10 inquiry into, or investigation of, any matter. The authority  
11 granted to the ombudsman under this act does not limit or affect  
12 any other remedy or right of appeal or objection provided by law  
13 and must not be considered to be exclusionary.

14 Sec. 16. A person that violates this act is guilty of a  
15 misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for not more than 1 year or  
16 a fine of not more than \$1,000.00, or both.

17 Enacting section 1. This act takes effect 90 days after the  
18 date it is enacted into law.