



MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: August 12, 2020, 1:30 pm – 2:57 pm (EDT)

Location: Teleconference

Agenda:

1. Checking in and Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO)
2. COFO Annual Conference update
3. COFO Charter and Governance Workgroup
4. Past Chair Advisory Council Meeting
5. Ombuds Day reminder – Ombuds Day is October 8th
6. Discussion Topics:
 - a. Returning to in-person practice – a review and discussion of the IOA COVID-19 guidance document and considering establishment of guidelines/best practices for return to in-person practice, whenever that might be
 - b. General Questions: Space for newer ombuds and programs (and people looking to set up programs) to ask questions and get feedback. No issue is too big or small so ask away!
7. Announcements – Training opportunities, job postings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to announce.

Highlights:

1. **Checking in and OSO**
 - a. Space for discussion and supporting ombuds dealing with the challenges of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and whatever is on your mind.
 - b. How are reasonable accommodations for workers over age 65 and those with underlying medical conditions being handled in the Federal government and what legal issues are related?
 - c. Accommodations made include flexible schedules, additional cleaning requirements, separate spaces for mask wearers, and changes in work assignments.
 - d. Accommodations could be for those who want to wear a mask, for those who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons, or those who not want to wear a mask.

- e. EEOC's Office of Federal Operations (OFO) [issued instructions](#) on April 6, 2020, regarding the processing of federal sector EEO complaints and have pages with consolidated relevant coronavirus and COVID-19 information and to answer questions from the public about the [EEO laws and COVID-19](#).
- f. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) call on Wednesday, August 26, 2020, from 2 – 3 pm EDT.
- g. Next month, Wednesday, September 23, 2020, from 2 – 3 pm EDT the OSO call will have a guest speaker, a clinical social worker/therapist.

2. COFO Annual Conference Update

- a. The COFO Annual Conference will be 100% virtual.
- b. The newly formed COFO annual conference committee had its first meeting, July 28, 2020.
- c. Committee is working to decide the platform and any presentation or topics people would like to present.
- d. Speakers or presenters within the COFO membership who are available to present can send an email to Paul Sotoudeh or anyone on the executive committee.
- e. Next annual conference committee meeting is Friday, August 14, 2020. Send Paul Sotoudeh an email if you would like to join.

- **Added topic: COFO Mentoring Program update**

- a. Mentoring cohort in progress with 12 mentors/mentees.
- b. Announcement of sign-up for round four (4) of the COFO mentoring cohort is coming soon in mid-September.
- c. Mentors should have a minimum of 3 years of experience as a practicing ombuds.
- d. Mentees should be a practicing federal ombuds at any level of experience or years of service.
- e. The decision timeframe will be 4 – 6 weeks and mentor/mentee matches are made using a detailed process based on experience and skill level.
- f. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the next round of mentoring as a mentor or mentee.

3. COFO Charter and Governance Workgroup

- a. Email sent on Wednesday, August 05, 2020, announcing the COFO Charter and Governance Workgroup.
- b. This workgroup will be tasked with reviewing COFO's Charter, other governance documents, and recommending amendments, if necessary.
- c. Bill Maurer, a former COFO Chair, has agreed to chair the Charter and Governance Workgroup.
- d. All who are interested in serving on this workgroup can contact Paul Sotoudeh: Paul.Sotoudeh@USPTO.GOV or William Maurer: william.maurer@census.gov . People with a variety of experiences and backgrounds are welcomed to respond.

- e. Everyone is also encouraged to review COFO governance documents and provide feedback to this group.

- **Added topic: New Ombuds Training**

- a. Eight power hours of basic ombudsman training will be provided to new internal ombudsmen to be provided August 31 – September 03, 2020, Mon – Thurs. from 11 am - 1pm EDT each day.
- b. A basic training was developed by Scott Deyo at DOE along with other COFO colleagues for a new internal ombudsman program.
- c. Training also will be open to any new COFO ombuds.
- d. Topics to be covered are overview of the role of federal ombudsman, independence and developing relationships with resource partners, confidentiality and records, remaining neutral, practical strategies, building rapport, and tracking/records maintenance.
- e. Anyone interested in attending this training should send an email to Scott.Deyo@hg.doe.gov.

4. Past Chair Advisory Council Meeting

- a. This informal group formed two years ago and is comprised of previous COFO chairs.
- b. The past chair council discussed the current state administratively of COFO and current topics related to the ombudsman professional.
- c. Group typically meets once a year and last met August 08, 2020.
- d. Primary discussion was centered on the IOA article: “An Initial Enquiry Towards a Model of Supervision and Support for Organisational Ombudsmen” and growth of the ombudsman profession in the federal space and broadly as a whole.
- e. Discussion continues, as the group will meet again within the next few weeks.
- f. Readout from the discussion will happen if concrete ideas are developed for consideration by the COFO community.

5. Ombuds Day reminder

- a. Thursday, October 8, 2020, is Ombuds day.
- b. The website with additional information and the toolkit can be found at <https://abaombudsdays.wordpress.com/2018/09/07/ombuds-day-tool-kit/>.
- c. Ken Skodacek is a COFO member and the chair for the ABA Ombuds Day committee.

6. Discussion Topics

- a. Returning to in-person practice – a review and discussion of the IOA COVID-19 guidance document and considering establishment of guidelines/best practices for return to in-person practice, whenever that might be.
 - i. Guidance was sent as PDF to members to allow for an informed discussion of the article.
 - ii. Brief synopsis of IOA guidance document – guidance recommends basic practice considerations relative to the physical setting of ombudsman offices, use of technology, continue to social distance, continuing to have PPE and

having those items available for visitors, maintaining cleanliness of workspace, having visitor guidelines accessible online, return to work protocols, how to handle exposures to COVID-19, and potential exceptions to confidentiality for unreported exposures or contact tracing activities.

- iii. Physical spacing is of issue as visitors may not have private space to virtually have a discussion.
 - iv. Masked in-person conversations with visitors or inquirers seem to have a loss of connection as viewed from previous non-masked interactions.
 - v. Consider how to maintain the connection with visitors with the new normal instead of attempting to get back to the old normal.
 - vi. Agencies are using a combination of in-person practice, as requested and allowed; flexible meeting spaces in accordance with agency protocols; and teleworking using video platforms for visits.
 - vii. For certain agencies, unclassified telephone booths are a potential resource for visitors to have private virtual visits with an ombudsman.
 - viii. Is COVID-19 an imminent risk of serious harm? Does what is currently known about the virus support this conclusion? Thoughts?
 - ix. Thoughts on a whole were yes, COVID-19 falls under the ombudsman practice exceptions to confidentiality based on the imminent risk of serious harm and this should be disclosed to visitors during the initial visit/discussion.
 - x. Disclosures of exceptions to confidentiality relating to COVID-19 are suggested to be made during in-person and virtual visits as the visitor may disclose COVID-19 status during a virtual discussion.
- b. General Questions: Space for newer ombuds and programs (and people looking to set up programs) to ask questions and get feedback. No issue is too big or small so ask away!
- i. Due to time constraints, this topic was tabled until the September monthly meeting.

7. Announcements

- a. Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) call on Wednesday, August 26, 2020, from 2 – 3 pm EDT.

Attendance 08/12/2020

Last	First	Agency	Call -In
Balick	Howard	FDA	1
Bedlivy	Dawn	NSA	1
Behr	Virginia	FDA	1
Berg	Mollie	DOD / National Geospatial- Intelligence Agency (NGA)	1
Bloch	Brian	DOI	1
Cameron	Bob	CFPB?	1
Deyo	Scott	DOE	1
Epps	Ayanna	FDIC	1
Feliciano	Ramon	DOD / DIA	1
Frazier	Veronica	DOD / DIA	1
Garmon	Felisa	CFPB	1
Gordon	Laurel	US Marshals Service	1
Gnatt	Sheldon	NSA	1
Hartman	Jessie	NARA/ Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)	1
Hurley	Nathan	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kelly	John	SBA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	Broadcasting Board of Governors	1
Kith	Sarah	Library of Congress	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Lewis	Mark D.	FDA as of August 21	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McNeil	Tracey	SEC	1
Megee	Christine	DOD Education Activity	1
Mesbahi	Mohammad	IRS	1

UNCLASSIFIED

Last	First	Agency	Call -In
Michael	David	NIH	1
Mills	Laurel	DOJ / USMS	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Morey	Chauncett e	FBI	1
Patel	Bina	FEMA	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1
Robinson	Dale		1
Reed	Janay	DOD / DIA	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Simpson	Melissa	HHS / ACL	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs / DOL	1
Trujillo	Sarah	USDA	1
Vermillion	Chris	TSA	1
Weber	Guy	DOD / NGA	1
Whittington	Fred (Whitt)	DOL OIG	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
		Total	45