



November 3, 2022

## An Open Letter to Members of the Louisiana Senate Health and Welfare Committee

Re: *Louisiana Requires an Office of Children's Ombuds*

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

Thank you for your recent work to begin stabilizing Louisiana's Department of Children and Family Services. As you know from headlines, all Louisiana child-serving state agencies and offices require oversight. Our children require that Louisiana's public services for children – *designed for their well-being* – are sound.

Children, parents, family members, and foster caregivers are the first to know when care is lacking. But unfortunately, Louisiana has no Office of Children's Ombuds to hear their complaints, resolve their grievances, protect them from retaliation, and produce public reports about the opportunities Louisiana has to improve public services for our children.

Recent news reports of the conditions and well-being of Louisiana's children who depend on state agencies for their care and protection are dismaying. With its struggling child services agencies and ranked next-to-last among all the states for child well-being, Louisiana has something in common with the four states ranked worst for children: Louisiana lacks an Office of Children's Ombuds.

When our children do not receive good services from state agencies and offices, they nor their parents, kinship caregivers, and foster caregivers have an objective office where they trust their voices are heard and believed.

No aspect of Louisiana's state government is responsible for gathering information about grievances related to children's services, resolving complaints, and reporting to the public, the Legislature, and the Governor. To the point, Louisiana lacks a fundamental element of infrastructure necessary to improve child well-being: an Office of Children's Ombuds.

As public systems fail to protect children or even passively allow harm, Louisiana must find a way to hear the complaints, resolve the grievances, and transparently report on the findings of a Louisiana Office of Children's Ombudsman.

The accompanying paper, *Louisiana Requires an Office of Children's Ombuds* provides information about Children's Ombuds for you to consider. We cannot allow our state's past to be its future.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Rick Wheat  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services