Candidate Name

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Candidate Title

Employee Ombuds

Organization

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Candidate Statement

After more than five years as an organizational ombuds practitioner and the opportunity to connect with colleagues across sectors and around the world, I feel both prepared and inspired to contribute to the IOA Board of Directors. My experiences have given me a unique perspective on the profession, and I believe I bring the creativity, work ethic, strategic thinking, and willingness to challenge conventional approaches that can contribute meaningfully to the association's continued growth.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my journey has been the generosity of the ombuds community. I have had the privilege of being mentored by seasoned practitioners, along with many other thoughtful and experienced colleagues across the globe. Their guidance, encouragement, and willingness to share their knowledge have profoundly shaped my development as a practitioner. I have learned that one of the greatest strengths of this profession is not simply the work we do within our organizations, but the community of practitioners who support and challenge one another to grow.

Serving on the Board feels like a meaningful opportunity to give back to a profession that has given me so much. I am excited by the possibility of contributing fresh perspectives, asking thoughtful questions, and working collaboratively with others who care deeply about the future of organizational ombuds practice. I recognize that board service requires commitment, accountability, humility, and a willingness to engage with perspectives different from one's own. These are responsibilities I would approach with intention and dedication.

Above all, I am motivated by a genuine belief in the value of this profession and the people who practice it. I would be honored to contribute my time, energy, and experience to helping IOA continue building a strong, inclusive, and sustainable future for its members and the communities they serve.

Pathway to the Profession

One of the most important opportunities I see for IOA over the next five years is developing clearer career pathways into, through, and beyond the organizational ombuds profession. As we consider the sustainability and growth of our field, I believe we need to think intentionally about how individuals discover the profession, prepare to enter it, and continue developing throughout their careers.

I recently earned my PhD in Workforce Education, a field focused on how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to enter, advance, and thrive in their careers. This includes career and technical education, professional development, workforce pipelines, and the relationship

between education and employment. My doctoral studies provided me with a deeper understanding of how professions develop structured pathways that support both individual career growth and the long-term needs of the workforce.

One of the greatest strengths of the ombuds profession is the diversity of backgrounds practitioners bring to the work. I believe this interdisciplinary foundation should be preserved and celebrated. At the same time, while IOA's training and certification opportunities are valuable, there may be an opportunity to provide greater clarity around entry points and career progression.

I regularly hear from students and emerging professionals who are interested in becoming ombuds but are unsure where to begin. Unlike professions such as social work or nursing, where educational pathways and professional milestones are more clearly defined, organizational ombuds practice does not have a widely recognized career roadmap. I would be interested in exploring whether IOA could develop a flexible career map that identifies potential entry points, transferable skills, educational opportunities, professional development experiences, and pathways for advancement. Rather than prescribing a single route, such a framework could honor the diversity of our profession while making it more accessible to those interested in joining it.

My conversations with ombuds practitioners while researching my chapter for the IOA publication also highlighted the importance of considering career progression and transitions. Several mid-career practitioners shared that they felt ready for new leadership opportunities but struggled to envision how to advance without leaving the ombuds profession. Others described challenges communicating how their ombuds experience translated into qualifications for leadership positions, particularly when they had not supervised large teams or held traditional management responsibilities. Yet ombuds regularly engage in complex organizational problem-solving, strategic consultation, conflict navigation, systems thinking, and advising senior leaders. These are valuable leadership competencies, even when they are developed outside conventional management structures.

I believe IOA could help practitioners better articulate and demonstrate these transferable skills. This might include developing leadership competency frameworks, career development resources, mentorship opportunities, and guidance for those interested in transitioning into other organizational roles. Just as we should consider how individuals enter the profession, we should also recognize the value of helping practitioners navigate career transitions. Supporting these pathways does not diminish the profession. Rather, it demonstrates the breadth and value of the expertise ombuds develop.

I also see an opportunity to position organizational ombuds practice within the broader landscape of conflict resolution careers. Mapping the interconnected roles of mediators, restorative practitioners, conflict coaches, and ombuds could help individuals understand how their interests and existing skills might translate into different professional opportunities. This could also create opportunities to engage universities, graduate programs, and other educational institutions in introducing students to organizational ombuds practice as a viable career.

Beyond education and professional development, I am curious about how IOA might strengthen advocacy for the profession at institutional and governmental levels. Are there lessons we can learn from countries where ombuds roles have greater formal recognition or established professional pathways?

How might those experiences inform our efforts to expand awareness, encourage the creation of new offices, and support the long-term sustainability of existing ones?

I would bring a workforce education perspective to these conversations, combining an understanding of career development, professional learning, and workforce systems with my experience establishing and sustaining an ombuds office. I believe we have an opportunity to be more intentional about cultivating the next generation of practitioners while recognizing the leadership potential of those already serving in the field. For me, creating pathways into, through, and beyond the profession is not simply about individual career development. It is about strengthening the visibility, credibility, and long-term sustainability of organizational ombuds practice.

IOA Values

While writing my chapter, "Anticipating Changes in Organizational Ombuds Practice," for the IOA publication The Organizational Ombuds: Foundations, Fundamentals & The Future, I had the opportunity to interview 13 ombuds practitioners from across the globe, representing diverse identities, cultural backgrounds, career stages, and professional sectors, including higher education, corporate, private, and outsourced organizational settings. These conversations expanded my professional network beyond both my sector and the United States. More importantly, they allowed me to listen to diverse perspectives about what practitioners believe is necessary for the profession to remain viable and relevant over the next decade.

Through these conversations, I developed three considerations, represented by three visuals: the mirror, the table, and the binoculars. I believe these concepts offer a framework for how the IOA Board can engage its diverse membership, create meaningful opportunities for participation, and strengthen the value of membership.

The Mirror: Reflection and Inclusive Engagement

Ombuds practitioners must continually examine their own assumptions, perspectives, and approaches to practice. Similarly, I believe the IOA Board must continually reflect on whose voices are represented, whose perspectives may be missing, and how members experience belonging within the association. I am particularly interested in creating intentional opportunities for dialogue across geographic regions, sectors, identities, cultures, and career stages. Drawing on my research in decolonial methodologies, I believe culturally responsive approaches to learning and engagement can create space for different ways of knowing, practicing, and contributing. This could include facilitated listening sessions, international peer exchanges, mentorship opportunities, and alternative ways for members to share their experiences and expertise beyond traditional conference presentations. Meaningful engagement requires not only inviting diverse perspectives but also ensuring those perspectives help shape the direction and priorities of the association.

The Table: Equipping Practitioners to Influence Systems

Ombuds need the confidence, skills, and resources to engage organizational leaders at all levels and bring forward meaningful recommendations about systemic concerns. I believe the IOA can play a more intentional role in equipping practitioners with practical tools to communicate their value, navigate

organizational dynamics, and contribute to meaningful institutional change while maintaining the foundational principles of ombuds practice.

Drawing on my background in communications, training, and creative programming, I see opportunities to expand resources beyond traditional professional development. Leadership-focused videos, communication toolkits, case studies, peer consultation, and culturally responsive training could provide members with tangible strategies they can apply within their own organizations. These resources would be especially valuable for solo practitioners, newer ombuds, and those working in settings where the profession is still developing recognition and institutional support.

I also believe there is tremendous value in creating opportunities for practitioners from different sectors and career stages to learn from one another. Some of the most valuable insights from my research came from conversations with ombuds whose organizational structures, cultural contexts, and professional experiences differed significantly from my own.

The Binoculars: Looking Toward the Future and Strengthening Institutional Support

Ombuds must periodically look beyond their daily responsibilities to consider the long-term relevance, visibility, and sustainability of their offices. I believe the IOA Board has an important opportunity to take a more active role in this work, particularly by helping institutions understand the value, credibility, and reach of the organizational ombuds profession.

As someone who established an inaugural office, I understand the challenges of building institutional buy-in and sustaining leadership support while maintaining the independence of the role. I would like to see the IOA expand its direct engagement with organizational leaders, including university presidents, executives, and other senior decision-makers. This could include opportunities for IOA leadership to meet with institutional leaders, offer presentations or consultations, and develop strategic partnerships that demonstrate the value of ombuds services. These efforts could help organizational leaders better understand the profession, its standards of practice, and the ways ombuds contribute to organizational health and systemic improvement.

I believe this type of hands-on support is particularly important for solo practitioners and newer offices, where much of the responsibility for educating leadership and demonstrating value rests with one individual. By strengthening relationships not only among ombuds but also with the institutions we serve, the IOA can help advance the legitimacy, recognition, and long-term sustainability of the profession.

Volunteer or Leadership Experience

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to lead in a variety of settings, from nonprofit organizations and professional associations to higher education and organizational consulting. These experiences have shaped my approach to leadership as collaborative, strategic, creative, and grounded in the belief that meaningful change requires both strong relationships and a willingness to challenge conventional thinking.

I previously served on the Board of Directors for the College and University Work-Life-Family Association (CUWFA), including serving on its Strategic Planning Committee. Drawing on my clinical experience

developing treatment plans, where broad goals are translated into measurable objectives and indicators of progress, I helped develop a spectrum-based assessment tool to evaluate the association's success in achieving its strategic priorities. This experience demonstrated the value of bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to organizational leadership and reinforced my belief that strategic planning should move beyond identifying goals to creating tangible ways to measure progress, encourage accountability, and demonstrate value to members.

As the inaugural Employee Ombuds at Grand Valley State University, I have had the unique experience of building an office from the ground up. This has required strategic planning, developing operational structures and policies, navigating institutional relationships, and communicating the value of the profession to senior leadership. Reporting directly to the university president has provided opportunities to engage in high-level conversations about organizational climate, systemic concerns, and institutional effectiveness.

I have also led and collaborated on several initiatives designed to address organizational needs through creative and practical approaches. These include developing a Responding to Distressed Colleagues training to help employees support one another, collaborating with Human Resources on a podcast modeling restorative practices, and partnering with the university's art gallery to design a leadership retreat using Visual Thinking Strategies to strengthen communication and conflict resolution skills. I also contributed to the development of an employee conduct policy approved by senior leadership and conducted organizational assessments for departments, including the university's police department and Human Resources, translating findings into reports and recommendations to support organizational improvement. These experiences reflect my ability to work across institutional boundaries, engage stakeholders, and translate complex organizational challenges into actionable strategies while respecting the independence of the ombuds role.

My leadership experience also extends beyond higher education. As an Associate Director of Residential Services in the nonprofit sector, I oversaw three residential treatment programs and supervised 25 employees. This role strengthened my skills in organizational management, policy development, crisis response, and collaborative decision-making. Additionally, I have developed and delivered professional training and consulting services focused on leadership, interpersonal effectiveness, and organizational well-being.

Within the ombuds profession, I have contributed through scholarship, professional presentations, and collaboration with colleagues across sectors and geographic regions. My involvement with IOA and the broader ombuds community has reinforced the importance of mentorship, professional networks, and opportunities for practitioners to learn from one another.

I believe effective board leadership requires the ability to listen to diverse perspectives, think strategically about the future, and translate ideas into meaningful action. I bring experience in program development, creative communication, and building relationships across professional disciplines. Perhaps most importantly, I bring the perspective of someone who has experienced firsthand the challenges and opportunities of establishing and sustaining an ombuds office. I would welcome the opportunity to

contribute these experiences to the IOA Board while continuing to learn from the collective expertise of its members.

Professional Expertise

I believe my strengths in strategic partnerships, marketing and communications, and research complement one another and could contribute to IOA's continued growth, visibility, and relevance. I am particularly interested in how we can leverage these areas to expand our reach, create meaningful opportunities for members, and strengthen the profession.

Strategic Partnerships

I see tremendous potential to develop partnerships with organizations whose work intersects with the ombuds profession. For example, the College and University Work-Life-Family Association (CUWFA), where I previously served on the board, and the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) are two organizations where I see opportunities for collaborative programming, shared resources, and professional exchanges. I would also like to explore stronger relationships with international ombuds networks and sector-specific associations to ensure we are learning from and supporting colleagues beyond the United States.

I am particularly interested in how we can further develop IOA's affinity groups as opportunities not only for connection and belonging but also for leadership and career development. Creating pathways for members to lead initiatives, collaborate across sectors, and contribute their expertise could strengthen both membership engagement and the association's leadership pipeline.

Marketing and Communications

I believe creative, consistent branding is essential to increasing awareness and communicating the value of our profession. At GVSU, our lighthouse identity and messages such as "Protect Your Peace" and "It's Okay to Ask for Help" have helped establish a recognizable and approachable presence. Our branding and outreach strategies have also inspired visiting ombuds to consider new approaches within their own offices.

I would love to see IOA expand its marketing efforts in ways that directly benefit members. This could include adaptable communication toolkits, videos, branded materials, and campaigns that practitioners can use to introduce their services and demonstrate the reach and credibility of the profession. I also see opportunities for coordinated campaigns that help institutional leaders recognize the value of organizational ombuds and understand that their offices are part of a larger international professional community.

Research

My recent scholarship has reinforced my interest in expanding the ways we understand and approach workplace conflict. Through my dissertation, I introduced Chicana feminist and decolonial perspectives that consider cultural identity, spirituality, and relational experiences as important dimensions of conflict resolution. Presenting this work at the Michigan Ombuds Caucus and the 2026 IOA Virtual Conference generated meaningful conversations and interest in culturally relevant approaches to ombuds practice.

I would like to see IOA continue creating opportunities for emerging research, particularly scholarship that challenges traditional assumptions and introduces perspectives from different cultures, disciplines, and lived experiences. I also believe there is value in connecting researchers and practitioners to develop collaborative projects and translate findings into accessible training, practical resources, and new approaches to professional practice.

Ultimately, I see these three areas as interconnected. Strategic partnerships expand our relationships and opportunities, marketing helps communicate our collective value, and research ensures we continue evolving in thoughtful and relevant ways. My experience working across higher education, nonprofit organizations, clinical practice, and consulting allows me to bring a fresh, interdisciplinary perspective to the Board. I believe this breadth of experience helps me recognize opportunities for collaboration, challenge conventional thinking, and approach complex issues creatively. I bring both the imagination to envision new possibilities and the strategic mindset to help translate those ideas into meaningful initiatives that support IOA members and the future of the profession.

Candidate Bio

Since 2021, I have served as the inaugural Employee Ombuds at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), a public university in West Michigan. I established the university's first Employee Ombuds Office and have spent the past five and a half years developing its services, building institutional relationships, and expanding awareness of the ombuds role. Drawing on my background in communications and strategic thinking, I have introduced creative outreach initiatives, including videos, podcasts, and innovative programming to increase visibility, accessibility, and engagement across the university community.

Conflict resolution has been a consistent thread throughout my professional career. Prior to becoming an ombuds, I served as a Work-Life Consultant in Human Resources at GVSU, supporting employees navigating workplace challenges, interpersonal conflict, and organizational concerns. I am also a certified mediator and restorative justice practitioner with 15 years of experience as a therapist in community mental health and nonprofit settings, where I worked with individuals and families navigating complex interpersonal dynamics, trauma, communication challenges, and conflict. These experiences strengthened my ability to listen across differences, recognize underlying needs, facilitate difficult conversations, and help individuals develop strategies for navigating conflict constructively.

Throughout my career, I have developed and facilitated trainings on interpersonal communication, heart-centered leadership, and emotional strength, presenting internationally at conferences for educators, social workers, and other professionals. I have also presented alongside fellow International Ombuds Association (IOA) colleagues at an American Bar Association (ABA) conference, contributing to interdisciplinary conversations about conflict resolution and ombuds practice.

I previously served on the board of the College and University Work-Life-Family Association (CUWFA), contributing to professional collaboration and leadership within higher education. I have also contributed to the ombuds profession through scholarship, including authoring a chapter on the future of organizational ombuds practice in the IOA publication, The Organizational Ombuds: Foundations, Fundamentals & The Future.

In 2026, I completed my PhD in Workforce Education, where my dissertation examined conflict resolution through Chicana feminist perspectives and decolonial methodologies, exploring conflict as an opportunity for healing and personal, relational, and systemic transformation.

As a practitioner who established and continues to lead a solo ombuds office, I bring a combination of strategic thinking, creative communication, interdisciplinary experience, and recent scholarship. I am passionate about the continued professionalization of the field and strengthening the IOA's ability to support practitioners, cultivate institutional buy-in, and demonstrate the value of organizational ombuds.