Candidate Name

Johnny Armijo II

Candidate Title

Strategic Organizational Conflict Advisor-External Ombuds-Mediator-Facilitator

Organization

Loyola Marymount University

Candidate Statement

I am interested in serving on the IOA Board of Directors because I am entering a new chapter of service. As I prepare to retire from the United States Air Force, I have been reflecting on what service will mean in the next season of my life. Retirement may bring my military career to a close, but it does not diminish my desire to serve. I see Board service as an opportunity to continue contributing—this time by supporting the profession and professional community that have given me a new sense of purpose.

I love the organizational ombuds profession because it reflects the kind of person and leader I have worked to become. It calls us to listen without judgment, remain curious, create space for difficult conversations, and help people find a way forward when they feel unheard or uncertain. Whether I have served in a classroom, a military unit, a federal agency, or a university, I have always been drawn to work that brings people together and restores dignity, trust, and hope. Becoming an ombuds gave that calling a professional home.

IOA has played an essential role in shaping who I am as a practitioner. When I entered this profession, mentors within the ombuds community walked beside me, encouraged me, answered my questions, and helped me navigate unfamiliar territory. They shared their knowledge generously and reminded me that, although ombuds often work alone, none of us has to grow alone. Their investment in me is one of the primary reasons I am prepared to serve today. I believe it is now my time to give back—to extend a hand to others as so many people extended theirs to me.

I would bring to the Board my experience, energy, curiosity, and deep commitment to building relationships. I want to help ensure that new and experienced ombuds alike feel welcomed, supported, and connected to IOA. I also want to help the association thoughtfully navigate the profession's next chapter while preserving the principles that make our work trusted and distinctive.

For me, serving on the IOA Board would not simply be another professional accomplishment. It would be an act of gratitude and a continuation of a lifetime of service. The uniform may be coming off, but the responsibility I feel to support others remains. I am ready to carry that commitment forward by serving IOA, its members, and the future of the organizational ombuds profession.

Pathway to the Profession

Over the next five years, one of the most important opportunities—and challenges—for IOA will be guiding the organizational ombuds profession through a period of significant transition. Organizations,

workplaces, technology, and expectations about how conflict should be addressed are changing rapidly. The profession must remain responsive to these developments while preserving the core principles that make ombuds work distinctive and trusted.

IOA has an opportunity to bring members together to explore what the future of the profession should look like. This includes examining how ombuds serve increasingly diverse, global, virtual, and complex organizations; how emerging technologies affect confidentiality, access, and practice; and how we clearly communicate the value and purpose of the ombuds role. As the field evolves, IOA must create space for respectful dialogue among practitioners with different experiences and perspectives, including those who may have different views about change.

I would bring curiosity, openness, and a willingness to grow to the Board's consideration of these issues. My career has required me to adapt continually as I moved among education, military service, federal government, and organizational ombuds roles. I have established new programs in institutions where the ombuds function did not previously exist, learned from different organizational cultures, and adjusted my approach to meet the needs of each community. These experiences have taught me that change should not be feared, but approached thoughtfully, collaboratively, and with an open mind.

I do not believe the Board must enter every conversation with a predetermined answer. Sometimes its most important responsibility is to ask the right questions, listen carefully to the membership, remain open to perspectives that challenge existing assumptions, and help the association move forward without losing sight of its values. I would offer that mindset as IOA considers where we are going, how our profession can continue to grow, and how we can prepare the next generation of ombuds to meet needs we may not yet fully understand.

IOA Values

I believe meaningful engagement begins with relationships and a genuine sense of belonging. Ombuds work can be deeply rewarding, but it can also feel isolating. Many practitioners work alone, carry difficult organizational concerns, and have limited opportunities to consult with colleagues who understand the unique responsibilities of the role. IOA can help ensure that no member feels they must do this work alone.

The Board can strengthen connection by creating smaller, relationship-centered communities within the larger association. These could include peer-consultation circles, regional cohorts, affinity groups, sector-based communities of practice, and groups for members at similar career stages. Regular virtual gatherings across time zones would allow members to discuss challenges, exchange resources, celebrate successes, and build trusted relationships. A structured mentoring program could connect newer ombuds with experienced practitioners, while reciprocal mentoring could recognize that members at every career stage and from every background have knowledge to contribute.

IOA should also create more informal opportunities for connection. Virtual coffee conversations, small-group conference gatherings, regional meetups, and facilitated introductions could make it easier for members to form relationships without first joining a committee or assuming a formal leadership role. Intentional outreach is especially important for solo practitioners, international members, first-time

conference attendees, professionals transitioning into ombuds work, and members who may not yet see themselves reflected in the association's leadership.

Members feel valued when they are known, heard, invited, and connected. The Board should regularly listen to members, communicate how their input influences decisions, and personally encourage individuals with different identities, experiences, geographic perspectives, and professional backgrounds to participate. By building a culture in which members routinely reach out to one another for support, consultation, and encouragement, IOA can become more than a professional association—it can be a professional home where every ombuds knows they belong and never has to practice in isolation.

Volunteer or Leadership Experience

My leadership, governance, training, and volunteer experiences have prepared me to contribute to the IOA Board with a collaborative, service-oriented, and relationship-centered approach. As a Board member of the Cal Caucus College and University Ombuds Association, I gained experience supporting a professional association, listening to the needs of fellow ombuds, contributing to organizational priorities, and helping strengthen connections among practitioners across institutions.

As an IOA Foundations trainer, I help introduce practitioners to the principles, Standards of Practice, and ethical responsibilities that define organizational ombuds work. This role has deepened my appreciation for the diversity of experiences, organizational settings, and perspectives within our profession. It has also strengthened my ability to facilitate difficult conversations, make complex concepts accessible, and create learning environments in which participants feel welcomed and respected.

Mentorship is another important part of my service. I mentored a master's student as they prepared to enter the profession and have continued supporting them as a new ombuds. That experience reinforced my belief that professional associations must help practitioners develop not only technical competence, but also confidence, trusted relationships, and a sense of belonging—especially because ombuds work can often feel isolating.

I have also volunteered as a conflict-resolution professional with the U.S. Space Force and participated in a pilot course designed to assist new civilian Guardians. This opportunity required adaptability, collaboration, and a willingness to help build something new in response to an emerging organizational need.

Together, these experiences have taught me how to listen across differences, build relationships, support professional development, and translate ideas into meaningful programs. I would bring to the IOA Board a commitment to thoughtful governance, ethical practice, mentorship, inclusive engagement, and ensuring that members at every career stage feel connected to and supported by the association.

Professional Expertise

The areas in which I would bring the greatest value to the Board are strategic partnership development, cross-sector networking, and the creation of new programs and professional communities. Throughout my career, I have built relationships across higher education, government, and the military by identifying shared challenges and bringing people together around practical solutions.

Within Jesuit higher education, I have been developing relationships among universities to create a network of ombuds and conflict-resolution professionals. This group would give practitioners a trusted forum for consultation, shared learning, and collaboration while helping institutions address common challenges in ways that reflect both ombuds principles and the mission of Jesuit education. This experience could help IOA cultivate stronger relationships with university systems, professional associations, and institutional leaders while expanding awareness of the value organizational ombuds bring to higher education.

I recently met with representatives of the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C., to explore a networking initiative that would support higher-education leaders as they navigate conflict and other complex issues shared across institutions. I have also been building relationships with conflict-resolution professionals at the Center for Creative Conflict Resolution within New York City's Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. These efforts reflect my ability to recognize opportunities for collaboration, initiate conversations across organizational boundaries, and develop partnerships that can extend the reach and influence of the ombuds profession.

As I prepare to retire from the Air Force, I am also working to translate my military leadership experience into civilian programs and partnerships. I created Tech Sergeant University as a leadership-development series and have been cultivating relationships with Pentagon officials and other military leaders to explore how the program could continue and expand in a civilian capacity. This work has strengthened my experience in program development, stakeholder engagement, and communicating the value of an initiative to senior decision-makers.

I would bring this relationship-building mindset to IOA's strategic direction. I could help the Board identify and cultivate partnerships with universities, government agencies, professional associations, military and veteran communities, and conflict-resolution organizations. These relationships could expand IOA's visibility, create new learning and research opportunities, attract prospective members, and potentially support sponsorships or other sources of revenue. Most importantly, I would help build partnerships that advance IOA's mission while creating meaningful value and stronger professional connections for its members.

Candidate Bio

I currently serve as the inaugural University Ombudsperson at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California (2025–present), where I established the university's first Ombuds Office and provide independent, confidential, informal, and impartial services to faculty, staff, and students. I also serve as the outsourced Ombudsperson for both Monterey Peninsula College in Monterey, California (2023–present) and Cabrillo College in Aptos, California (July 2026–present). I created the inaugural ombuds programs at both colleges and provide conflict coaching, mediation, informal resolution, training, and systemic feedback to their campus communities.

Previously, I served as an Ombudsman and Conflict Resolution Specialist with the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. (2024–2025), supporting Foreign Service, Civil Service, and locally employed personnel throughout the global embassy community. I also served as the inaugural University Ombudsperson at California State University, Monterey Bay (2022–2024) and as the inaugural

Ombudsperson and Faculty and Staff Mediator at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado (2022–2023). In these roles, I established new ombuds offices, provided conflict coaching and mediation, identified systemic concerns, and advised institutional leaders.

My military experience includes serving as a deployed Senior Master Sergeant, Director of Equal Opportunity, and Ombudsperson with the U.S. Air Force Reserve's 379th Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar (September 2025–May 2026). There, I established an integrated Equal Opportunity and alternative dispute-resolution program supporting more than 6,000 military members, civilians, and contractors. Since 2019, I have also served as Director of Equal Opportunity, Senior Master Sergeant, and ombuds practitioner with the 302nd Airlift Wing at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado. My military leadership experience also includes service as a First Sergeant, supporting Airmen's readiness, welfare, morale, and professional development while advising commanders on personnel and organizational concerns.

Before entering full-time ombuds practice, I worked as a middle- and high-school teacher in Texas and Colorado public schools (2013–2022), teaching English, history and AVID. I integrated communication, empathy, ethical reasoning, restorative dialogue, and conflict resolution into my teaching and mediated concerns involving students, families, faculty, and administrators.