Candidate Name

Elizabeth (Liz) Hill JD (Juris Doctor), Certified Organizational Ombuds

Candidate Title

Director of Communications and Development

Organization

MWI

Candidate Statement

I have been part of the ombuds field since 2007, and nearly 20 years later, I am still excited about what we do and what this profession can become. Over the past several years, I've devoted much of my volunteer time and energy to leadership in the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution, culminating in my term as Chair. That commitment meant stepping back from some of my IOA involvement. Now that my term as Chair has ended and my ABA responsibilities are less demanding, I would love to devote more time and energy to IOA. I learned a great deal through that experience, and I'm excited to bring it back to an association that has been such an important part of my professional life.

I enjoy sharing ideas and figuring out how to make things happen. I tend to ask a lot of questions, especially when something isn't working as well as it could. I don't believe we need to change things simply for the sake of change, but I also don't think we should be afraid to try something different. Sometimes that means taking a chance on a new idea, and sometimes it means recognizing that something we've done for years may have run its course.

One of the things I treasure most about this profession is the people. Some of the colleagues I've met through ombuds work have become dear friends. We've supported one another through professional challenges, celebrated successes, and shared plenty of laughs along the way. I want others, especially those new to the field, to have the chance to build those same connections. And I think we should have some fun along the way! I've always enjoyed finding ways to bring people together, whether through social events, games, contests, or even a dance party here and there. We deal with serious issues in this profession, but that doesn't mean everything we do together has to be serious.

I also know that serving on a Board means listening to people who may see things differently than I do. I welcome that. Having worked in different ombuds settings, I've learned that we may approach our work differently, but we have a great deal to learn from one another. I appreciate colleagues who challenge my thinking, and I'm comfortable having difficult conversations, asking questions, and working toward decisions that serve the association as a whole. I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I'm willing to do the work, learn from others, and contribute wherever I can.

More than anything, I want to help ensure that IOA remains a strong, welcoming, and forward-thinking association that supports its members, advances our profession, and creates opportunities for the next generation of organizational ombuds.

Pathway to the Profession

I believe one of the most important challenges facing our profession over the next five years is creating more opportunities for organizational ombuds to practice. I regularly hear from people interested in entering the profession who struggle to find opportunities. If we want the profession to grow, we need to do more than prepare people to become ombuds. We need to help organizations understand why they should establish ombuds programs, what it takes to do so effectively, and how to sustain those programs over time.

That starts with how we communicate the value of our work. We sometimes use language that makes perfect sense to those of us in the profession but means little to organizational leaders or employees. I would like to see IOA continue developing clear, accessible messaging and practical resources that help leaders understand what an ombuds can contribute, how the role complements other organizational resources, and why investing in an ombuds program is worth it.

At the same time, growth must go hand in hand with a commitment to the IOA Standards of Practice. Establishing an ombuds program involves more than hiring someone and giving them the title. Organizations must understand and support the independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality that define the role. That includes establishing appropriate reporting relationships and avoiding responsibilities that conflict with the standards.

We also need to think about what happens after a program is established. What happens when an ombuds retires or leaves the organization? How do we ensure the program continues through leadership transitions or organizational change? I see an opportunity for IOA to help practitioners and organizational leaders think more intentionally about succession and continuity planning so that successful programs don't depend entirely on one individual.

I would bring nearly 20 years of experience in the ombuds field, including work in government, corporate, higher education, and external organizational ombuds settings. Having served as an internal ombuds and now helping organizations establish and support external programs through MWI, I understand both practitioners' practical needs and the questions organizational leaders ask when considering an ombuds program. Our work on the Organizational Ombuds Practices Act has also reinforced my belief that the legal protections we seek for the profession must go hand in hand with our commitment to the standards that justify those protections.

I would like to help IOA build on its strategic priorities by improving understanding of organizational ombuds, supporting the development of more standards-aligned programs, and helping ensure those programs are sustainable. Ultimately, I believe this is how we can create more opportunities for people to enter the profession and build lasting careers as organizational ombuds.

IOA Values

One of the things I value most about IOA is the opportunity to connect with people who bring different experiences and perspectives to organizational ombuds work. Our members represent different countries, cultures, sectors, organizational settings, and career stages. That diversity strengthens our association, but it also means members have different needs, interests, and opportunities to participate.

I'm glad IOA has made inclusion, belonging, and the member experience priorities in its new strategic plan. I believe the Board can help advance these priorities by listening to members, including those who may not regularly participate in conferences, committees, or other association activities. We should ask what members value, what they need, and what might make it easier for them to get more involved. We should also make sure we hear from people whose perspectives may not always be represented in association leadership.

One idea I would like to explore is making it easier for members to contribute without taking on a significant ongoing commitment. IOA already offers a variety of volunteer opportunities, and we could build on that work by creating more small, clearly defined projects that members could complete in a few simple steps. For example, a member might review a resource, contribute an example from their practice, or help with a short-term project. These opportunities could be especially valuable for newer members looking for ways to get involved, as well as experienced practitioners who want to contribute but have limited time.

My experience with IOA mentoring, OmbudsLinked, an independent professional networking group for all ombuds, and leadership in the American Bar Association has reinforced how valuable professional relationships and opportunities to contribute can be. It has also shown me the importance of closing the loop. When members volunteer their time or share their ideas, they should know how we used their contributions and what they helped accomplish.

I also think we need to regularly assess what members find valuable about their membership and where their needs may not be met. What matters to an aspiring ombuds may differ greatly from what matters to someone who has practiced for 20 years. Understanding those differences would help IOA decide where to focus its time and resources.

Ultimately, I want members to feel that IOA is an association where they belong, where their contributions matter, and where membership provides meaningful professional value.

Volunteer or Leadership Experience

I bring extensive experience in association governance, strategic planning, financial oversight, volunteer leadership, and collaboration across professional organizations. I recently completed my term as Chair of the American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Dispute Resolution, becoming the first ombuds to hold that position. I previously served as Chair-Elect, Vice Chair, Budget Officer, Marketing Officer, Council member, and Ombuds Committee Co-Chair. I currently serve as Immediate Past Chair, a Section Delegate to the ABA House of Delegates, and a member of the ABA Fund for Justice and Education Council.

As Chair-Elect and Chair, I led the Section's strategic planning efforts during a period of significant financial and operational change. The Section had lost nearly $500,000 in annual financial support from the larger ABA, and staffing had declined from seven to three. We needed to rethink how we operated, increase non-dues revenue, and use limited resources better while continuing to provide meaningful value to members.

That meant taking a hard look at what worked and what didn't. We reduced the number of committees from 18 to nine, merging some and sunsetting others to create a more manageable structure and

strengthen volunteer engagement. Our Section Director has since reported increased meeting attendance and a more cohesive group of committee co-chairs.

I also revamped our programming, discontinuing staff-supported monthly webinars in favor of committee-led programs. The goal was to reduce competing events and programming overload, strengthen committee participation, and free up staff capacity for revenue-generating efforts.

I also made the difficult decision to replace our traditional spring conference with a virtual Spring Skills Summit. The new format included a day of joint programming with IOA, which I helped coordinate with the IOA president. The Summit met our attendance and revenue goals while creating a new opportunity for collaboration between the associations. We also streamlined the process for members to share expertise and submit content ideas, making it easier for volunteers to contribute and for programming officers to identify the best opportunities for their involvement.

In addition, I led a revision of the Section's bylaws and a four-person team that developed accompanying governance standards. These efforts required working through different perspectives, building consensus, and making decisions with the Section's long-term interests in mind.

My service to IOA and its certification program spans more than a decade. I served on the IOA Conference Planning Committee (2012–2014) and have been an IOA mentor since 2019. I also served on the Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OPÂ®) Recertification Committee from 2018 to 2025, including nearly four years as chair, and chaired its Communications Committee from 2023 to 2025.

My efforts to advance the ombuds profession have also included helping launch the first Ombuds Day in 2018 while serving as Co-Chair of the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution's Ombuds Committee. More recently, I helped strengthen collaboration between the ABA and IOA through joint programming and our work on the Organizational Ombuds Practices Act. In February 2026, I presented the Act as Resolution 503 to the ABA House of Delegates, where it was unanimously adopted. I later helped convene an ABA–IOA task force to support implementation and state-level adoption of the model legislation.

My volunteer experience also includes service on nonprofit and community boards, including the Ahwatukee Foothills YMCA Board of Managers and parent-teacher organizations.

These experiences have taught me that effective governance requires listening, setting priorities, making difficult decisions, and being willing to change course when something isn't working. I would bring that experience, along with a collaborative approach and a strong commitment to the organizational ombuds profession, to the IOA Board.

Professional Expertise

I would bring experience in business development, revenue generation, fundraising, strategic partnerships, marketing, and research, along with a practical understanding of the challenges facing professional associations.

In my current role as Director of Communications and Development at MWI, a nonprofit dispute resolution organization, I lead our communications, marketing, and business development efforts. Much

of my work involves developing relationships with prospective ombuds clients and helping organizational leaders understand the value of organizational ombuds services. I also handle marketing for MWI's mediation and negotiation training programs and strategic planning.

From 2018 to 2025, I co-edited the Ombuzz blog, sharing practical tips and strategies for navigating workplace challenges. Although the blog was written for a general workplace audience, many of our ombuds colleagues contributed articles and shared the content with the people they served. Both experiences have reinforced the importance of understanding your audience and communicating in ways that resonate with them, something I believe is especially relevant as IOA works to increase awareness and understanding of organizational ombuds.

I also bring experience with financial sustainability and fundraising. As Budget Officer, Marketing Officer, and ultimately Chair of the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution, I helped the Section respond to the loss of financial support from the larger ABA. We placed greater emphasis on non-dues revenue, evaluated our programs' financial viability, and explored new ways to deliver value to members. My fundraising experience includes service on the Ahwatukee Foothills YMCA Board of Managers and my current role on the ABA Fund for Justice and Education Council. Serving as a trustee of a family foundation has also given me experience with philanthropy and grantmaking from the funder's perspective. I believe these perspectives would be valuable as IOA considers ways to diversify revenue and support its long-term financial health.

Strategic partnerships have also been central to my work. I helped coordinate the first joint programming between the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution and IOA and brought representatives of both organizations together to support implementation of the Organizational Ombuds Practices Act. I would welcome opportunities to help IOA identify and develop similar partnerships that advance our shared interests.

My research experience includes co-authoring a chapter on building collaborative relationships within organizations for IOA's first book. As part of that work, we reviewed relevant literature and surveyed ombuds practitioners to develop practical guidance grounded in both research and field experience. I also co-created the Coursera course Ombudsman: A Unique Role in Dispute Resolution, which introduces different ombuds models to a global audience. I value the role research plays in strengthening professional practice, informing organizational decisions, and demonstrating the value of ombuds programs.

These experiences align closely with IOA's strategic priorities, particularly financial sustainability, partnerships, increasing awareness of organizational ombuds, and research. I understand the challenges of working with limited resources, setting priorities, and making difficult decisions. I welcome the opportunity to bring that experience to the IOA Board and work with fellow Board members, staff, and volunteers to advance these priorities.

Candidate Bio

I have worked in the ombuds field since 2007, with experience spanning government, corporate, and higher education settings, as well as external organizational ombuds services.

I currently serve as Director of Communications and Development at MWI, a Boston-based nonprofit dispute resolution organization with a fully remote workforce (August 2025–present). In addition to leading communications and business development, I work closely with MWI's panel of organizational ombuds, serve as a primary client contact, and oversee two higher education ombuds programs.

Previously, I spent more than nine years at the University of Colorado Boulder in Boulder, Colorado (2016–2025), serving as Associate Ombuds (May 2016–October 2018) and Associate Director of the Ombuds Office (October 2018–August 2025). Before that, I served as Organizational Ombudsman for Apollo Education Group in Phoenix, Arizona (March 2011–January 2015), supporting employees and faculty across the organization.

I began my ombuds career in state government as Arizona's first Assistant Ombudsman for Public Access (February 2007–March 2011), helping establish the role and working with public agencies and citizens on matters involving open meeting and public records laws.

Since 2024, I have also served as a course co-curator and instructor at the University of Colorado Boulder, helping develop Ombudsman: A Unique Role in Dispute Resolution, a Coursera course introducing different ombuds models to a global audience.

My professional background also includes practicing law in government and private practice.