



RIPPLES OF IMPACT

ENHANCING THE OMBUDS ROLE FROM THE GREAT LAKES

Schedule at a Glance

United States Ombudsman Association 45th Annual Conference Schedule at a Glance

Monday, August 31, 2026

7:00am	Registration Open
7:00am-9:00am	Breakfast Location: Governors C
9:00am - 4:30pm	New Ombudsman Training Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman, Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman; Ryan Speidel, Child Advocate, Michigan Office of the Child Advocate Location: Tower A
9:00am - 4:30pm	Strategic Planning Session Instructor(s): Dr. Steven Goodwin - Turning West Location: Peninsula BC
12:00pm - 1:00pm	Lunch Location: Governors C
2:45pm – 3:00pm	Break - Afternoon and all-day registrants only

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

7:00am	Registration Open
7:00am - 9:00am	Breakfast- morning or full day registrants only Location: Governors C



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9:00am - 4:30pm	New Ombudsman Training Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman, Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman; Ryan Speidel, Child Advocate, Michigan Office of the Child Advocate Location: Tower A
9:00am - 4:30pm	Conflict Management & Mediator Techniques Session Instructor(s): Dispute Resolution Center – Ann Arbor, Michigan Location: Peninsula BC
9:00am - 12:00pm	Recentering Ombuds Principles Through Equine Assisted Learning Session Instructor(s): Jan Stump Location: Off Site: Peace Ranch (Off-site)
12:00pm - 1:30pm	Lunch: Afternoon or full day registrants only Location: Governors C
1:30pm – 4:30pm	Future Proofing Child and Family Advocacy: A Pre-conference Power Session Children & Families Chapter Pre-Conference Location: Peninsula A
2:45pm – 3:00pm	Break - Afternoon and all-day registrants only
5:30pm	Registration desk closes
6:00pm - 8:00pm	Beach Reception Location: Beach Club Deck

***Hors d'oeuvres are included in full conference registration fee.

Wednesday, September 2, 2026

MORNING SESSIONS

7:00am	Registration Open
7:50am - 9:50am	Breakfast Location: Governors C
8:30am – 9:00am	Conference Opening and Welcome



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Conference Co-Hosts, USOA President

Location: Governors C

9:00am -10:00am **Plenary Session 1- Billie Jo Garcia Staying in the Ombuds Lane: The Ombuds Paradox**
Location: Governors C

10:00am – 10:15am **Break**

10:15am - 12:00pm **Plenary Session 2 | Open Café Style Discussions about Critical & Emerging Issues**
Location: Governors C

12:00pm -1:00pm **Lunch**
Location: Governors C

1:00pm – 2:30pm **BLOCK ONE AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Learning Across States – Leveraging the Council of State Governments to Support Ombudsman Offices

Session Instructor(s): Heather Shaffer – The Council of State Governments

Location: Peninsula A

B) Building a Meaningful Trauma-Informed Culture

Session Instructor(s): Margaret Zadra - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections and Hilary Mueller, OTR/L, MSW, LICSW - Ouroboros Therapy

Location: Governors C

C) Teaching Foster Youth Their Rights Through Innovation

Session Instructor(s): Parker Terese – Speaking Through Parkers Purpose

Location: Peninsula C

2:30pm – 2:45pm **Break**

2:45pm – 4:30pm **BLOCK TWO AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the meetings hosted by the USOA chapters.

USOA Chapter Meetings

All are welcome. Chapter meetings include training, program updates and information sharing. Specialized chapters are organized within USOA to share experiences, resources and



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accomplishments. You do not need to be a member to attend. Please join us! Chapters include:
 Children and Families & Education – (Location: Governor C)
 Health and Wellness – (Location: Peninsula B)
 Public Safety – (Location: Peninsula A)
 Local Government – (Location: Peninsula C)
 Federal Government – (Location: Mackinac BC)

5:00pm - 8:00pm

Lake Michigan Discovery Cruise

Location: Shuttle bus pickup at resort entrance **4:35pm – 5:05pm**

See more on [Discovery Cruises website](#).

***Limited to 100 participants. Tickets sold separately on a first-come, first-served basis.

Thursday, September 3, 2026

7:50am – 9:50am

Breakfast

Location: Governors C

8:30am – 10:15am

BLOCK ONE MORNING SESSION

Plenary Session 3 – Be The Difference

Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC

Location: Governors C

10:15am – 10:30am

Break

10:30am – 12:00pm

BLOCK TWO MORNING SESSIONS

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Using Data to Drive Change

Session Instructor(s): Michelle Lucarelli-Beltran - Los Angeles County Ombudsperson for Youth

Location: Tower A

B) How to Deliver Trauma-Informed Ombuds Services to System-Impacted Youth

Session Instructor(s): Ahmed Nemr - Office of Youth & Community Restoration

Location: Tower B

C) Launching and Leading a New Oversight Body



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Session Instructor(s): DeVaughn Ward - Connecticut Office of Correction Ombuds;
Yvonne Briley-Wilson - Maryland Office of Correction Ombuds

Location: Tower C

12:00pm – 1:15pm **Lunch, USOA Annual Meeting & Member Awards**
Location: Governors C

1:15pm – 2:45pm **BLOCK ONE AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Writing for Change: A hands-on workshop for writing impactful ombuds reports and products. PART 1

Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen – Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman

Location: Tower A

B) The Belonging Need

Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC

Location: Tower B

C) Measuring the Invisible: Meaningful Metrics for Ombuds Programs

Session Instructor(s): Billie Jo Garcia - Monterey County Housing and Community Development

Location: Tower C

2:45pm – 3:00pm **Break**

3:00pm – 4:30pm **BLOCK TWO AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Writing for Change: A hands-on workshop for writing impactful ombuds reports and products. PART 2

Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen – Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman

Location: Tower A

B) The Belonging Need (Duplicate offering of the earlier session.)

Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC



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Location: Tower B

C) Core Social Media Skills for Busy Government Communicators

Session Instructor(s): Ariana Donley – Government Social Media

Location: Tower C

6:00pm - 9:00pm

Networking Dinner

Buffet dinner with DJ, DJ trivia, and 360-degree photobooth

Location: Plaza Tent

****Attendance is included in full conference registration fees. Guest tickets available for purchase*

Friday, September 4, 2026

7:50am – 9:50am

Breakfast

Location: Governors C

8:30am – 9:00am

Closing day remarks

Location: Governors C

9:00am – 10:30am

BLOCK ONE MORNING SESSIONS

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) What makes a Report a Good Ombuds Report?

Session Instructor(s): Larry Fluharty - California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson

Location: Tower A

B) Where Oversight Meets Impact: Creating Ripples to Address Criminalization of Mental Illness

Session Instructor(s): Margaret Zadra - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections, Keith Barber - Michigan Legislative Corrections Ombudsman, Lisa Harrison-Hadler - Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, and Yvonne Briley-Wilson - Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman

Location: Tower B

C) AI Topics for the Ombudsman



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Session Instructor(s): Billy Jo Garcia – Monterey County Housing and Community Development

Location: Governors EF

10:30am – 11:00am **Break for checkout & Boxed Lunch**

11:00am – 12:00pm **BLOCK TWO MORNING SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Best Practices for Sustainable Partnerships Between Ombudsman Offices and Community Organizations

Session Instructor(s): Lin Chao - Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Location: Tower A

B) Beyond Plain Language: Effective Communication for Impactful Ombuds Work

Session Instructor(s): Barb Damchik-Dykes - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections, and Andrea Domaskin - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections

Location: Tower B

12:00pm – 12:15pm **Conference Closing**
