

Confidentiality/ Reportable Issues

BACKGROUND

Although most of the information that is shared with an ombudsman may be kept confidential, confidentiality does not mean that the ombudsman keeps all information from the commanding officer or those who have a need to know (commanding officer determines who in the command has the need to know). There are issues that the ombudsman must report to the commanding officer, and/or Navy and state entities.

KEY MESSAGES

- Ombudsman must agree to adhere to the Ombudsman Code of Ethics including maintaining confidentiality.
- Navy instruction requires ombudsman to report:
 - All suspected/known child abuse/neglect.
 - Alleged spouse abuse.
 - Suspected/potential
 - Homicides, violence or life endangering situations.
 - All suspected/potential suicidal risks.
 - Other issues identified by the commander or commanding officer as reportable.
- Commanding officers may instruct their ombudsman to report other types of situations that may affect the well-being of Sailors and their families.
- If at any time the ombudsman believes that the life, health, or safety of an individual is in imminent danger, the ombudsman is required to report the situation immediately.
- All allegations of domestic abuse should be reported. Trained professionals will determine the validity of allegations, not the ombudsman or the command.

STATEMENT

Family members may contact the ombudsman regarding many types of sensitive concerns. They may ask for information, guidance, or they may just want to discuss their concerns with a caring person. Ombudsmen should be reminded to routinely inform family members of the types of information that cannot be kept confidential. (The ombudsman newsletter is often a good place to make this reminder.) In addition, whenever an individual contacts the ombudsman and discloses a reportable issue, the ombudsman should make every effort to get assistance for the individual and inform the caller that a report must be made. There are some exceptions (restrictive reporting options) for adults who have been physically abused or active duty Sailors who have been sexually assaulted. Ombudsmen should inform a caller of this option and refer them to the FFSC Family Advocacy counselor or victim advocate.

Ombudsmen should not share information from family members with anyone including their spouse, members of the Command Support Team, or helping agencies without the commanding officers and family member's approval. However, if the issue or concern falls under the "reportables" umbrella, then the ombudsman should explain this to the family member and report as directed.

In addition to those issues reportable by instruction, commanding officers may instruct their ombudsman to report other types of situations to them out of a concern and responsibility for the welfare of their Sailors and families. The issues to be reported should include those that have an impact on a Sailor's ability to do his or her job. These issues may include:

- Financial problems.
- Serious health concerns.
- Severe marital or family discord.
- Housing or other installation problems.

The ombudsman should provide immediate action when reportable issues or life-endangering situations come to his/her attention. The ombudsman should report to the CO or designee, and to the respective agency or law enforcement.

ACTION

The commanding officer should determine the additional issues to be reported. A process for reporting should also be put into place including which issues the ombudsman should report directly to the commanding officer and which may be reported to the command POC.

RESOURCES

- OPNAVINST 1750.1G CH-1, Navy Family Ombudsman Program Instruction.
- Fleet and Family Support Program Web site: www.ffsp.navy.mil.
- Ombudsman Basic Training provides detailed information on confidentiality and handling crisis calls.

CHECKLIST

- Define additional reportables.
- Determine process for ombudsman reporting issues to command.
- Meet with ombudsman to ensure understanding of the process.