



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**State of Iowa  
Office of Ombudsman**

**April 2, 2018**

Office of Ombudsman  
Ola Babcock Miller Building  
1112 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0231

### **Complaints to Ombudsman Continue to Rise**

**Contact:** Kristie Hirschman at (515) 281-3592 or (888) 426-6283 (toll free)

**DES MOINES** – Complaints to the Iowa Office of Ombudsman rose for the fourth straight year in 2017, due in part to a 157 percent increase in problems relating to managed Medicaid. Corrections-related cases also contributed to the increase, and now represent 44 percent of the Ombudsman’s entire caseload. All told, the Ombudsman fielded 4,855 complaints and information requests last year, 22 percent more than it received in 2013.

The Ombudsman accepts complaints from citizens who believe a local or state government agency has acted unfairly, unreasonably, or inefficiently. The Ombudsman attempts to resolve complaints or misunderstandings if a review of pertinent facts proves the complaints to be legitimate.

Ombudsman Kristie Hirschman said in the report that her office has substantiated complaints about insufficient staffing levels at several jails and at least one prison. But the problems with inadequate resources are not limited to institutions.

“Last year, we received complaints about delays in autopsies, egregious hold times on the telephone, prolonged decisions on applications, lack of road repairs, a discontinuation of nursing-home visits, and antiquated computer systems,” Hirschman wrote. “It is difficult for us to publicly criticize agencies for making mistakes ... when they lack the staff or resources to perform their jobs well. But the reality is, the mission of some of these agencies requires their staffs to make vital, life-changing decisions.”

The Ombudsman’s annual report highlights 15 specific cases its staff investigated in 2017. One of those cases resulted in a rare public report on the state boards that license doctors, real-estate agents, and other professionals. The Ombudsman found that the boards operate in almost total secrecy, which has fostered weak investigations and has frustrated citizens who were not told why their complaints were dismissed. The Ombudsman has asked the Legislature to consider measures that would make the boards’ decision-making more transparent.

The Ombudsman’s annual report can be found online at [www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman).