



PRESS RELEASE

State of Iowa
Office of Ombudsman

February 27, 2017

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

**“A System Unaccountable,” a Special Report on Iowa’s
Professional Licensing Boards**

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

DES MOINES – A culture of secrecy among several state boards that regulate licensed professionals has fostered weak investigations, unprofessional conduct, and frustration for citizens who were never told why their complaints were dismissed.

A 17-page report issued today by the Iowa Office of Ombudsman calls for Iowa’s licensing boards to commit to greater transparency in order to improve public confidence in their work.

“It has been easy for these boards to do less than their best because, for years, no one has been in a position to evaluate their work,” the report reads. “Regardless of how it is done, we believe it is imperative that the state’s licensing boards be more accountable to the public they serve.”

The Ombudsman received almost a dozen contacts from citizens in recent years whose complaints about licensees were closed by the boards without explanation. The Ombudsman’s investigation focused on four of those boards, each of which discussed and decided their cases in meetings closed to the public. All four boards, with the support of the Iowa Attorney General, resisted the Ombudsman’s requests to obtain recordings and minutes from closed-session meetings that would shed light on their work.

Eventually, through a law change in 2015, the Ombudsman obtained the boards’ closed-session records, which often showed that complaints were not fully investigated or vetted. In some cases, the Ombudsman found that board members friendly to licensees under investigation participated in board decisions, despite their conflicts of interest. One of those board members falsely told the Ombudsman under oath that she had recused herself from those meetings.

The Ombudsman also found that one board had made several disparaging remarks about complainants and licensees during meetings. Those remarks raised questions about the board’s commitment to deciding its cases fairly and impartially.

Acting Ombudsman Kristie Hirschman made 20 recommendations to the four boards, many of which were accepted. A member of one board said the report’s findings spurred immediate improvements. “This was THE best meeting I attended in three years,” the board member said.

The Ombudsman’s report does not identify specific licensing boards or their members due to state laws that consider boards’ investigative files and their closed-session meetings confidential.

The report can be viewed at: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman/>