



United States Ombudsman Association

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Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA), we are writing to express our support for HB 152, the Public Advocate Act of 2022. Public advocates, like ombuds, are an independent voice for accountable and ethical governance, serving to increase public trust and preserve the integrity of civic institutions. A statewide Public Advocate would provide a unique and necessary service to Marylanders. We would like to highlight three key components of the proposed legislation:

- **Independence.** Establishing the Office of the Public Advocate in the Maryland Constitution as an independent agency is a best practice, as it allows the Public Advocate to scrutinize the actions of government officials without fear of retribution.
- **Ability to speak directly to the public.** The Public Advocate's ability to issue reports and hold press conferences to apprise the public of the Office's findings, recommendations, and concerns is essential to a Public Advocate's ability to be a trusted and effective agent of good government
- **Perform investigations.** The ability to impartially investigate complaints will allow the Public Advocate to be responsive to the public's concerns, as well as provide the basis to advocate for system-wide solutions.

We appreciate Delegate Vaughn Stewart for recognizing the importance of having independent government watchdogs, like public advocates, to safeguard the public's interest and our democratic institutions. We are available to provide any information or assistance that the Health & Government Committee may require, as it considers this legislation.

Sincerely,

Robin K. Matsunaga
President, USOA
Ombudsman, State of Hawaii

Margie Sollinger
Director, Outreach & Development, USOA
Ombudsman, City of Portland, Oregon