

# Delaware Public Education Ombudsperson Program

*Expanding and Sustaining Student Support*



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## Background

In 2020, education and community advocates successfully negotiated a historic education funding lawsuit settlement. This settlement required the creation of an independent entity that would assist students and families in working with schools to resolve various issues, conflicts, and disputes.

The Delaware Ombudspersons' Program is an independent advocacy agency that assists families and other community members with educational needs and concerns. This program focuses on:

- Dispute and complaint resolution;
- Equitable access to programs, services and rigorous coursework;
- Addressing issues of racism, ableism, and other sources of marginalization and inequality impacting students;
- Support districts and Delaware Department of Education in developing and revising policies and regulations;
- Provide research-based best practices in discipline, academics, teacher diversity, effective instruction, curriculum, social emotional learning, and extra-time supports.

The program will be managed by the Education Equity Council, which includes parents, special education advocates, English-learner advocates, educators, civil rights organizations and nonprofit agencies.

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### What will this legislation change?

- Codifies the Equity Ombudsperson Program to ensure its sustainability
- Moves oversight to Delaware Statewide Parent Advisory Council, under the Education Equity Council (see HC87)
- Removes the Delaware Department of Education from the request for proposal development and grant award decision making process
- Increases the Ombudspersons annual budget to \$2.5 million annually

### Why does it matter?

The Equity Ombudsperson Program is the only statewide program solely focused on supporting students. Further, it is community and parent-driven, with parents and education advocates overseeing the program itself.

The legislative changes will ensure the program's sustainability by fully funding it at the amount agreed to in the lawsuit settlement. More importantly, the legislation will eliminate any conflict of interest by ensuring the Delaware Department of Education is not overseeing the decision-making process of choosing and funding the entity that houses the Ombudsperson Program.