



News Release

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Office of the National Ombudsman Releases Annual Report

WASHINGTON – The Office of the National Ombudsman at the U.S. Small Business Administration recently released its annual report to the 110th Congress, rating federal agencies’ responsiveness to the regulatory enforcement and compliance issues faced by small businesses during fiscal year 2007.

The National Ombudsman provides a voice for small businesses in the federal regulatory enforcement process. Created by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act (SBREFA), the Office of the National Ombudsman works with small businesses and federal agencies to ensure that regulatory or compliance issues are handled and enforced fairly.

“It is essential that regulatory enforcement be effective, and not excessive,” said National Ombudsman and Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Nicholas N. Owens. “Our focus will continue to enhance transparency for small businesses served, while strengthening the relationship between the small business community and the government.”

In 2007, the ONO significantly increased its responsiveness to small businesses, handling over 500 cases involving regulatory or compliance issues. Federal agencies decreased its response time to these cases from 52 days in 2006 to 27 days in 2007.

Each agency receives a “grade” from the National Ombudsman, rating its responsiveness to small business regulatory enforcement concerns. The annual report summarizes these ratings (which can be found in table II-1 of the report), based on five categories which include:

- The agency’s timeliness and quality of response to small business comments;
- Presence of a non-retaliation policy;
- The degree of regulatory enforcement compliance assistance to small businesses;
- The agency’s participation in Regulatory Fairness hearings; and
- How the agency informs small businesses about the SBREFA, as well as their rights to contact the Office of the National Ombudsman to discuss the enforcement and compliance process.

In 2007, federal agencies across the board improved their compliance efforts. This year, the National Ombudsman recognized six federal agencies for their extraordinary efforts in responding to small businesses’ regulatory enforcement cases. “Although agencies are obligated to provide responses under SBREFA, it is my belief that the quality of our work is enhanced when it is met with positive compliance assistance efforts, rather than going straight to a penalty stage,” said Owens. The six agencies acknowledged with the “National Ombudsman’s Special Recognition for Regulatory Enforcement and Compliance Assistance” are listed in the report.

The National Ombudsman’s 2007 and additional information about the Office of the National Ombudsman is available at www.sba.gov/ombudsman.