

## Navy Ombudsmen Connect Commands, Families

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WASHINGTON – For spouses and families of active duty and reserve Sailors, adjusting to a military routine requires a support network.

The Navy Family Ombudsmen Program, a Navywide initiative to improve mission readiness through family readiness, fulfills that role and helps to connect commanding officers with family members of Sailors in their units.

"Ombudsmen are trained to assist Navy families to successfully navigate the unique challenges of the Navy lifestyle," said Paul Grossman of the Naval District Washington (NDW) Fleet and Family Support Program (FFSP). "The service provided by an ombudsman in support of Navy families enables service members to focus on mission readiness, knowing that their families have a reliable safety net."



The Navy Family Ombudsman Program trains volunteer military spouses to act as liaisons between commanding officers and families of Sailors. Ombudsmen communicate and distribute information to and from commands and families on a variety of issues, such as health, morale and welfare. (U.S. Navy photo)

Ombudsmen are command volunteers who are spouses of active duty or selected reserve members, Grossman explained. Once appointed, they serve as a liaison between the command and other families, and regularly distribute information to and from commanding officers and family members regarding health, morale and welfare.

Each ombudsman also has an appointed point of contact, which is generally the command master chief. The ombudsman should meet monthly with their point of contact and commanding officer, Grossman added.

"This allows the commanding officer to be informed of any potential issues within the command so they can be corrected quickly," he said. "This is also an opportunity for the commanding officer to inform the ombudsman of any events coming up that may impact the families, including exercises or command family gatherings."

Beyond serving as an information hub, ombudsmen also offer referrals for families and other spouses, act as spokespersons and often facilitate smoother transitions for Sailors and families during permanent change of station (PCS) moves.

"A spouse may call the ombudsman looking for a job, needing an emergency babysitter, or wondering where they can board a pet for the weekend," said Grossman about some of the everyday issues ombudsmen help solve. "The ombudsmen have a strong network among themselves. If there is a question or a need that an ombudsman can't answer, they look to other ombudsmen or the ombudsman coordinator for assistance."

Ombudsmen are also trained in dealing with issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and suicide, Grossman said. "It is rare an ombudsman has to answer these calls, but they are prepared if the time ever comes," he added.

Ombudsman coordinators are located at each Fleet and Family Support Center, and provide oversight of the program for each installation. If a military spouse is interested in becoming an ombudsman, he or she should contact the local

command master chief.

The Navy Family Ombudsman Program was introduced in 1970 by then-Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, who adapted the program from a 19th century Scandinavian custom designed to give private citizens an outlet to express concerns to government officials.

To learn more about the ombudsman program, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1w0XQ0m>. For more news and information from around NDW, visit [www.NavDistWash.org](http://www.NavDistWash.org).