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**Title:** Organizer  
**Organization or Agency:** Brothers & Sisters United  
**Topic:** Meeting Date Not Listed  
NA

### **Testimony:**

To the Correction Advisory Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my thoughts about the performance to date of the office of the correction ombuds and of its incumbent, Attorney Ward.

About four years ago I started writing to a few women incarcerated at York CI. Now, thanks to word of mouth and free e-messaging, my penpal list of women and men is nearing 300. I try to do what I can to lighten their load, so that has caused these friends to reach out whenever they have an issue they need help with. This has caused me to know a lot about what goes on behind those impenetrable walls and locked doors.

Since Attorney Ward started in the ombuds position nine months ago, I've routinely been referring many of these friends' issues to him. Prior to the startup of the position, I had high hopes that my own burden and that of my colleague Barbara Fair would be eased somewhat, but has that happened? I think not. I don't know how to judge to what degree he's fulfilled the expectations or mandates of the office. So instead, to make my point, I'm highlighting key aspects of what some correspondents have written me about it, all of which are posted elsewhere on this site, with their names:

### QUOTES

On the plus side:

"He contacted this facility on my behalf about mistreatment by a certain CO and it is being followed up on.... the CO who has been tormenting everyone has been stopped from coming to this unit. ... Everyone in this unit is relieved. 2 units wrote on him but he wasn't stopped until Mr Ward and yourself stepped in."

And "During my first interaction with Mr. Ward, ... he prioritized assisting me in resolving my overall health concerns as he immediately requested all my records from the records department at York right after our communication ended over the phone."

And on the other side:

"In my opinion and respectfully the man don't do nothing. People should present all the inmates grievances together, sent or told to him, and question him on what he did and when about them all. I don't think he did anything..... the man ain't deserving of the office and you and Barbara Fair have done his work and more for the inmates."

"The main thing I'm hearing is "what did the ombudsman do so far??" No one knows or can see what changes happened since he was hired. ... he did send a memo out to our tablets a few months ago saying that he would hold town halls and listening tours which I've not seen yet ...."

"In my experience with the D.O.C. ombudsman, I had one phone call with him concerning a serious medical need in which my complaint was a delay in medical treatment at Cheshire CI. After the one call, two months went by and no follow up was ever given."

“As far as the ombudsman, most men are not particularly happy with him. They feel as he is doing whatever he needs to do to stay in office. Meaning, he is not going to make any waves. Several men have written him and he basically told them he is too busy and cannot take requests.”

“Mr. Ward, I was here when you walked through to do your inspection of Osborn, it was so many things going on before you got here, I'm surprise you didn't smell the new paint that they had on the walls everywhere. smh you would hear and get the truth from inmates if you didn't walk around with the people that oversee us and that control the system that we live in. That's like you asking a Kid has he been mistreated or abused in front of his or her parents.”

“I've asked around and besides myself, the only other person that has reached out to the ombudsman has actually received some help whereas I have yet to hear anything... I wrote a two page letter detailing everything that I have gone through ... and that was almost 3 weeks ago I believe.” (And this is re: a serious medical issue over the last several years.)

“... I know and am very aware of the lack of help he has to bring such change and with that being said he shouldn't have proceeded in his placed position by the Governor without the proper personnel to perform his duties appropriately.... Every day there is some kind of issue with outside rec which is our protected right under the state ... yet is the Ombudsman aware as well because he should be if he is doing his job and it should have been stopped, addressed, and corrected immediately.... this is a fight for the dedicated, passionate for what they do fighting for the incarcerated....not the Controlled or Puppet.”

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## ISSUES

What are some of the issues that rise to the top from among my daily messages from my friends?

**\*\*The failure of DOC officers to respond at even a minimum acceptable level to people's serious medical and mental health needs**

**\*\*Retaliation/excessive use of force/sexual harassment by COs and above to people's speaking out through the grievance process and lawsuits**

**\*\*The flagrant ongoing violations of the PROTECT ACT, especially re: people getting their five hours out of cell time, and their one hour outside**

**\*\*Routinely placing people together whom the authorities are well aware should not be together and which will likely lead to violence**

**\*\*Mistreatment and disrespect from officers**

**\*\*The absence of anywhere near adequate, legally mandated access to legal resources for people to use in dealing with their cases**

**\*\*Officers violating people's protected right to privacy and confidentiality**

## MY TAKE-AWAYS

Even though not all of these individual incidents may rise to the level of an emergency in the ombuds' judgment, collectively they constitute a true crisis.

The Ombuds' quarterly (and first) report, as encapsulating his performance so far, is disappointing for a number of reasons. While I see a catalog of activities, types of complaints and resource limitations, I don't see an analysis of what the issues are, any sense of how the ombuds office will address these

issues, or what he will attempt to accomplish during his tenure. I also don't find a blueprint of how Attorney Ward will organize the office or a plan for how he will optimize the resources at hand to accomplish the highest priority goals, or even what the highest priority goals are. I am especially disappointed not to read about what the ombuds did or plans to do to learn from his clientele—incarcerated people—what their biggest issues and highest priorities are, or about how he will collaborate with them in accomplishing mutually agreed upon goals. And while Attorney Ward has written that he met with representatives of both local and national organizations, he doesn't say what he learned from these encounters or how he will apply what he learned to his work.

Similarly, while he states that he visited most or all of the prisons, he doesn't say what he took away from those visits. As such, we don't really learn anything about where he intends to take this ship that he will be commandeering for the next four years.

Finally, I must say that I find the entire saga of the ombuds situation to date to be deeply troubling, disappointing, and shameful in the way virtually all parties involved have failed to take seriously and act on the urgency of the legitimate needs that our incarcerated brothers and sisters face every day, and of which all parties are well aware. And that includes the Governor, DOC commissioner, this Correction Advisory Committee, and the state legislature. I especially fault all involved--except for the ombuds, who strenuously advocated for it--for failing to ensure that the funds are provided to even begin to address the profound injustices our people experience every day. When will this state begin to step up and do what's right by the thousands of people we've locked away—which in itself represents a shameful failure to deal with the profound societal inequities which led to their incarceration in the first place?