

All About Ombudsmen

Recently we have received questions from some of our base tenants about the ombudsman program. I'd like to take this opportunity to reprint an updated version of some information we ran a few years ago and provide some updates on funding issues concerning ombudsmen.

An ombudsman is a volunteer who supports the command mission by providing communications, outreach, resource referral, information, and advocacy to and for command families. Created by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt in 1970, the program is modeled on a 19th century Scandinavian custom that gave ordinary citizens an avenue to express their grievances to government officials. Per [OPNAVINST 1750.1G Ch. 1](#), CNIC is responsible to maintain policy, establish procedures and implement the Navy Ombudsman Program. Comprehensive information on the ombudsmen program is available on the [CNIC Fleet and Family Support Home Page](#). Please familiarize yourself with these materials if you are involved with command ombudsmen in any way. It is very important to recognize that ombudsmen are volunteers performing under specific legal authorization, and payment of their expenses are treated differently from those of government employees. Following are a few highlights.

Commanding Officers who appoint an ombudsman are responsible for establishing a funding line for the support of the Command's Family Ombudsman Program, providing for materials and expenses for their ombudsmen's day-to-day operations. Remember that just because something is listed in the instruction as being 'allowable' does not mean the command has the resources to fund it at the full performance level. The instruction specifies that the CO and ombudsman should discuss the budget and determine what support can be provided and what will be reimbursed.

While the ombudsman is acting in an official role, reimbursable items include: childcare, mileage, parking and tolls, computer, cell phone, pager or other electronic device, telephone line, administrative support/supplies, use of government facilities, and newsletter costs. Travel expenses for authorized training, conferences and meetings will be paid by the command. Invitational Travel Orders are authorized for this purpose. The ombudsmen must document and submit expenses for reimbursement to the command using an SF 1164 Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business.

While in most cases the government does not pay childcare expenses, for ombudsmen, the instruction authorizes payment for this expense. Ombudsmen are encouraged to utilize Navy operated child care programs at no cost. However, when Navy-operated care is unavailable, reimbursement for childcare or babysitting will be paid with available command funds. Commanders and commanding officers are encouraged to establish caps of reimbursement based on local commercial child care market rates.

Additionally, the CO may use NAF for individual ombudsman appreciation dinners and ombudsman plaques and awards. The NAF limitation is \$50 per ombudsman per year, with a limit of \$500 (for multiple ombudsmen) per year. Cash awards are not authorized.

These are just a few of the financial rules applicable to ombudsmen. For further details see [OPNAVINST 1750.1G Ch. 1](#) and the CNIC [Fleet and Family Support Home Page](#).