



# children's defense fund ohio

\*\*\*For Immediate Release \*\*\*

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## **Children's Defense Fund-Ohio applauds Governor DeWine's appointment of Jenny Stotts as its first Youth Ombudsman, a role dedicated to ensuring that the concerns of youth in foster care are listened to and resolved**

**COLUMBUS** — Today's announcement of Ohio's first Youth Ombudsman by Governor DeWine is good news for youth in foster care across the state of Ohio.

Earlier this year, Governor DeWine signed H.B. 4, which established the role of the Youth Ombudsman, who is charged with investigating complaints made by youth in foster care and advocating for their best interest. The [OHIO YAB \(Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board\)](#), the statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care, [Children's Defense Fund-Ohio \(CDF-Ohio\)](#), and [ACTION Ohio \(Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now Ohio\)](#), were partners in the Youth Ombudsman advocacy campaign and are especially thankful for today's announcement as the culmination of work by both groups and the fulfillment of a commitment by Governor DeWine, a longtime advocate for children in foster care.

"Stotts is a leader who demonstrates a sense of urgency when a young person's concerns have not been addressed by those entrusted with their care. This role is critical, especially in instances where youth find themselves in an unsafe placement. We urge her to prioritize protecting youth from retaliation," said Kim Eckhart of CDF-Ohio.

H.B. 4 requires that the OHIO YAB have input into the selection of the Youth Ombudsman. The OHIO YAB submitted this input during the selection process and welcomes the appointment of Stotts, who embodies their recommendations. They recommended that the leader be proactive in informing youth about the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and how this office can help to enforce those rights. At a minimum, they will have experience in advocating for youth who have experienced foster care, such as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). Also, they should have experience in investigations and understand the rules and laws of the child welfare system in Ohio, as well as the different processes among counties. The key recommendation is that youth can trust this person and recommend the office to their peers who are experiencing a situation of abuse or rights violations.

"Stotts served as a county CASA director and is someone who understands trauma and how it affects behavior. She is an adoptee who grew up with foster siblings. She has made it possible for foster youth

to share their voice and insights on numerous occasions, and we trust and know that she will welcome their ongoing insights in the future,” said Lisa Dickson, co-facilitator of the OHIO YAB.

“Stotts moves with intentionality and consideration that will greatly benefit the youth this office will serve. We are excited to hear of her announcement and have faith she will bring that to the role,” said Deanna Jones, MPA, BSSW, LSW, Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio Consultant and former foster youth and caseworker.

The OHIO YAB and CDF-Ohio are hopeful that the Youth Ombudsman will serve to enforce the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and play a key role in educating youth about their rights. They urge the Youth Ombudsman to identify and advocate for system-level reforms to protect youth. They see this role as a key part of holding the system accountable and making the system more responsive to youth needs from the youth’s perspective.

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