

Overview of the Office of the Child Advocate

What is the Office of the Child Advocate?

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is an independent executive branch agency with oversight and ombudsperson responsibilities, established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2008.

The OCA's mission is to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely and quality state services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth's most vulnerable and at-risk children have the opportunity to thrive. Through collaboration with public and private stakeholders, the OCA identifies gaps in state services and recommends improvements in policy, practice, regulation, and/or law. The OCA also serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or are eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.

The child advocate shall serve for a term of 5 years. In case of a vacancy in the position of the child advocate, a successor shall be appointed in the same manner for the remainder of the unexpired term. No person shall be appointed as child advocate for more than 2 full terms.

Who is the Child Advocate?

Since 2015, the Child Advocate is Maria Mossaides: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mariamossaides/>

In 2015, a nominating committee for the Child Advocate was coordinated by EOHHHS, which recommended three names to the Governor. Maria was interviewed and then appointed by Governor Baker.

Through a statutory change in 2016, The Child Advocate is now appointed in the same manner as the Veteran Advocate, by majority vote of the Governor, Attorney General, and State Auditor from a list of 3 nominees submitted by the nominating committee.

What are the responsibilities of the Child Advocate?

- Promoting child and family well-being
- Overseeing and monitoring the services delivered by child-serving state agencies
- Improving the collection, use, and transparency of state agency data
- Identifying gaps in and concerns with how state agencies and systems serve at-risk children, and recommending and advocating for solutions including changes to improve coordination across agencies
- Advising on and leading efforts for systemic change in policies programs, and practices affecting vulnerable and at-risk children
- Serving as an ombudsperson, including providing information for families who are receiving or eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth

What does the work of the OCA consist of?

- Operating a complaint line
- Reviewing critical incident reports & receiving reports of abuse and neglect in out-of-home settings

- The OCA has two paths for initiating an investigation, (1) complaint filed through the ombudsperson, (2) determined through analysis of records and critical incident reports
- If an investigation is initiated, the OCA team works with the agency liaison before talking with employees
- Chairing and/or participating in State commissions related to child and youth safety and well-being
- Making recommendations to state government leaders on needed improvements in services for children and their families, partnering with state agencies to improve service quality

Additionally, the Child Advocate has both monthly and quarterly meetings with the Commissioner for the Department of Children and Families

What is the structure of the Office of the Child Advocate?

The OCA structure is modeled after Connecticut's OCA: <https://portal.ct.gov/OCA/Common-Elements/Common-Elements/About-Us>

The structure is as follows. The staff list can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/oca-staff-list>

- Agency Head: Maria Mossaides, Child Advocate
- 2 Registered Nurse/Attorney Advocates
- 2 Ombudspersons
- 2 special investigation teams
- Policy and communications teams

What is the current salary of the Child Advocate?

Currently, the Child Advocate's salary is determined by the nominating committee. At the start of her term in 2015, Maria earned \$140,000 annually. Her current annual compensation is ~\$157,000.

The OCA is awaiting a change in the salary for the agency head. The OCA will follow **M** structure salary plan in place for the Commonwealth vs following comp as determined by the committee

For more information on the Office of the Child Advocate, please visit <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-child-advocate>