

Conference Ombuds Charter

Society for Research in Child Development 2027 Biennial Meeting

I. INTRODUCTION

To support the Society for Research in Child Development's (SRCD) commitment to ensuring that the 2027 Biennial Meeting is safe and welcoming for all, consistent with the principles outlined in the Society for Research in Child Development Code of Conduct and Compliance Agreement, SRCD will provide organizational conference ombuds services in connection with its 2027 Biennial conference, taking place in Atlanta, GA, during April 8-10, 2027. ("Conference Ombuds Program"). SRCD's goal is to host a Meeting that is as inclusive and accessible as possible for attendees, staff, exhibitors, and all other participants in the 2027 Biennial Meeting, regardless of gender, sexual orientation/identity, race/ethnicity, religion, employment status, or field status. In addition, SRCD desires to improve the quality of events and organizational participation; the ombuds will prepare and present a written summary on or before May 10, 2027. This summary shall include aggregate data, insights, and observations of the ombuds on the types of issues and concerns raised during the conference.

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE CONFERENCE OMBUDS

The Conference Ombuds Program is designed to provide an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential channel for conference attendees, staff, exhibitors, and all participants in the 2027 Biennial Meeting to discuss any issues related to conference activities. The ombuds selected to provide these services ("Conference Ombuds" or "Ombuds") will be available to provide information confidentially. They will provide a safe space for people to discuss issues such as safety, actions ranging from overly-friendliness to harassment and microaggressions, free speech, integrity, privacy, conflicts of interest (including accessibility, lodging, and food), alcohol consumption, and conference cliques. The Ombuds is a resource for informally discussing any of these or other conference-related concerns, helping visitors develop options, problem-solve, create paths for self-advocacy, and make informed choices about the best path forward.

This Charter sets forth the operating principles under which the Conference Ombuds Program will operate and reflects SRCD's commitment to the Conference Ombuds and the role of this position.

III. STANDARDS OF OPERATION

The Society for Research in Child Development’s Conference Ombuds is a member of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and shall adhere to IOA's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in performing ombuds services during the 2027 Biennial Meeting. See www.ombudsassociation.org/standards-of-practice-code-of-ethics. These tenets require organizational ombuds programs to be independent, neutral, informal, and confidential:

1. Independence

The Conference Ombuds is an independent contractor and not a member of the Society for Research in Child Development staff. The Ombuds functions outside existing administrative structures pursuant to a Contract between MWI and the Society for Research in Child Development.

2. Impartiality

The Conference Ombuds provides impartial assessments of concerns. As a neutral third party, the Ombuds is a resource for an equitable and fair process, as well as the fair administration of that process. The Ombuds does not, however, provide legal or other kinds of advocacy or enforce the Society for Research in Child Development’s policies. The Conference Ombuds does not render services or become involved in any matter that would be a conflict of interest for the Conference Ombuds to do so.

3. Informality

The Conference Ombuds provides a means for off-the-record discussions of concerns. The Ombuds is empowered to provide only informal assistance and does not conduct investigations, make or override decisions, determine policy, testify or participate in formal or administrative proceedings concerning confidential communications, provide legal advice, or accept legal notice of claims against SRCDC or any other organization, entity, or person. For those wishing to assert claims or engage in on-the-record communications, the Conference Ombuds can identify resources and appropriate formal channels, enabling individuals to make informed choices about which process is best for them to pursue.

4. Confidentiality

Communications with the Conference Ombuds are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. This principle of confidentiality enables the Conference Ombuds to provide a safe space for conference attendees, staff, exhibitors, and all participants in the 2027 Biennial Meeting to voice concerns, evaluate issues, and

explore options for potential further action. The Conference Ombuds is a purely voluntary resource. No one is required to use it, but those who do will be deemed to have agreed to respect and abide by the above principles on which it was created and not to call the Ombuds to testify or produce documents related to confidential communications in any administrative or legal proceeding. SRCD has also agreed not to call upon, or attempt to have, the Conference Ombuds disclose confidential communications, or to testify or produce documents relating to them, in any administrative or legal proceeding.

Consistent with the International Ombudsman Association Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the only exceptions to this confidentiality principle are: (a) when, during the course of communications with the Conference Ombuds, an inquirer gives the Ombuds permission to make a disclosure, and the Ombuds agrees it is appropriate to do so, or (b) when the Conference Ombuds determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

The Conference Ombuds will be available to consult with conference attendees, staff, exhibitors, and anyone else participating in the 2027 Biennial Meeting concerning any conference-related issues identified above. The Conference Ombuds will be available on-site from April 8, 2027, to the conclusion of the conference on April 10, 2027, and after the meeting as needed. Conference attendees, staff, exhibitors, and all other participants in the 2027 Biennial Meeting will be informed of how to contact the Ombuds and the times and locations where the Ombuds can be found.

As a neutral third party, the Ombuds is an advocate for a fair and equitable process. The Ombuds, however, does not provide legal or other forms of advocacy or enforce the policies of the Society for Research in Child Development.

IV. ACCOUNTING AND REPORTING

The Conference Ombuds reports to the Executive Director and to the Director of Member Engagement and Events. The ombuds may also meet with and alert other executive team members to any systemic issues or trends the Ombuds believes may help the organization address identified or potential issues, improve the climate for membership or future conferences, or improve its policies and practices. Even when reporting issues to the executive team, the Conference Ombuds will do their best to protect the confidentiality of those using the Ombuds' services.

V. RECORD-KEEPING

The Ombuds provides only informal assistance. Although informal notes may be created temporarily as needed, the Ombuds does not retain permanent records containing personally identifiable information or confidential communications. Any post-conference summaries to senior leadership will only have aggregate data, ombuds insights, and observations on the types of issues raised.

VII. INQUIRY ABOUT THE USE OF THE CONFERENCE OMBUDS IS INAPPROPRIATE; RETALIATION FOR DOING SO IS PROHIBITED

SRCD supports efforts to manage and resolve conflicts informally, thereby preserving collegial and effective working relationships and avoiding the time and expense required for formal proceedings or litigation. Because the Conference Ombuds Program is intended to be a confidential resource, it is not appropriate for anyone at SRCD to inquire about an individual's use of it or any communication that may have occurred there. Furthermore, discouraging or preventing eligible visitors from using the conference ombuds is inappropriate because it is contrary to the organization's intent to provide a resource for early and informal management and resolution of conflicts.

While the organization supports and encourages the use of the Conference Ombuds Program for conflict management, an individual's use of the resources must always be entirely voluntary. Reminding individuals that the Conference Ombuds Program is available as an option or a resource is acceptable. However, no one may be ordered or required to visit the Ombuds, nor may an individual be punished for not seeing the ombuds.

All attendees, staff, exhibitors, and anyone participating in the 2027 Biennial Meeting shall have the right to consult the Conference Ombuds without fear of retaliation or reprisal. Retaliation against any attendee or staff for consulting with the Conference Ombuds or against the Ombuds for actions within the legitimate scope of her duties as described in the Charter is prohibited.

VIII. PROCEDURE FOR REVISION OR REVOCATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Charter remains in effect unless otherwise revoked by the Society for Research in Child Development, and such revocation shall be provided in writing to MWI's Director of Ombuds Services. Any revision to this Charter shall be jointly agreed to in writing by both SRCD and the Ombuds representatives from MWI and shall be appended to this document.

SRCD

Signed: 

Name: Suzanne Le Menestrel, Ph.D., CAE

Title: Executive Director

Date: **March 15, 2026**

Duly Authorized Hereunto

MWI

Signed: 

Name: Charles P. Doran

Title: Executive Director

Date: March 18, 2026

Duly Authorized Hereunto