

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney Signs Executive Order Creating the Office of the Youth Ombudsperson**

*The move comes after powerful testimony, advocacy from Advocates Transforming Youth Systems and Advocates for Youth Justice*

**Philadelphia, PA** (December 1, 2022) – Yesterday Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney signed an executive order officially creating the Philadelphia Office for the Youth Ombudsperson. Housed under the Office of the Inspector General, the OYO will provide additional oversight over the City of Philadelphia’s child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems with respect to youth who are residing in Residential Treatment Facilities (RTFs) with a goal of continuing to improve the safety and quality of services. It will exist under the Office of the Inspector General.

“I think the ombudsperson office is important because there are too many things that go on within these facilities that need to be investigated and aren’t,” said Advocates for Youth Justice Youth Advocate Bree. “But with the office, now they can thoroughly investigate and see what’s going on within these facilities to ensure that the youth are being taken care of and that their needs are met. I also feel that this will be a good, safe space for the youth to talk to somebody about what is going on and to see what they can do to help them.”

[Juvenile Law Center’s Advocates Transforming Youth Systems and Advocates for Youth Justice testified last year before City Council calling on councilmembers to create this urgently needed office](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqoEUJTVDiI&t=4813s). Through a hearing convened by former Councilmember Helen Gym, youth shared stories of poor treatment in facilities under DHS jurisdiction and the need for system accountability through the creation of this office. [The youth have continued to apply needed pressure to create this office and win this victory for children.](https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia-youth-ombudsperson-office-dhs-20210902.html)

"This is an important step for Philadelphia to hold systems accountable for the harm and unsafe environments they’ve placed children in,” said Juvenile Law Center’s Director of Youth Advocacy Marcía Hopkins. “It’s a new day to be accountable for the children in their care and for Philadelphia to say we will do something about it."

While other states have statewide ombuds positions, the structure of the Philadelphia position under the Office of the Inspector General is new and innovative. Advocates hope that this extra level of protection and oversight contributes to greater safety and well-being for youth in state care.

"I was humbled to lead this effort alongside remarkable, courageous young people, whose willingness to share their experiences showed the tremendous need for independent oversight at the City level — over youth placement facilities that far too often cause trauma instead of giving support — and made this landmark reform possible. I am so grateful for their bravery," said former Councilmember Helen Gym.

“Every young person deserves the best opportunities and care, and the new Office of the Youth Ombudsperson will create valuable new avenues for oversight, quality assurance, and individual support for youth in residential placement,” said **Mayor Jim Kenney**. “We hold ourselves to the highest standard when it comes to the wellbeing of children in the City’s care, and look forward to the OYO’s contributions to this ongoing work.”

Next steps in the process will involve publicizing the position or positions and recruiting for them. [A link to the job is found here](https://jobs.smartrecruiters.com/CityofPhiladelphia/743999868401074-youth-ombudsperson). Youth advocates at Juvenile Law Center hope to be able to play a role in that process – and also hope that the hiring team considers looking to put someone with lived experience in residential placements or the child welfare system into place.

Bree and Marcía are available for comment and interview.