

## **Office of National Traffic Safety Ombudsman Charter**

1. **OFFICE'S OFFICIAL DESIGNATION:** The office's official designation is the Office of National Traffic Safety Ombudsman (NTSO).
2. **AUTHORITY:** The Office is established as an office under the authority of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). The formation and use of the Office are determined to be in the public interest.
3. **OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES:** The Office of The Secretary, or his or her designee, shall present the NTSO with tasks on matters relating to traffic safety. The Office will provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation (the Secretary) through the Administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) about needs, objectives, plans, approaches, content, and accomplishments of the programs and rulemaking carried out by the Department specifically related to traffic safety.
4. **DESCRIPTION OF PURPOSE & RESPONSIBILITIES:** NTSO responsibilities include the following:

### **Purpose:**

The U.S DOT has a long-standing traffic safety mission. The US DOT's National Traffic Safety Ombudsman is dedicated to helping consumers understand agency activities so they may meaningfully contribute to the agency's mission to the fullest extent allowed by law and agency policy, and to providing a pragmatic resource to assist consumers, traffic safety advocacy organizations, victims, victim-advocates, and other non-regulated stakeholders as they interact with the agency.

### **The National Traffic Safety Ombudsman's mission is to:**

1. Provide an agency perspective to traffic safety consumers and a consumer perspective on traffic safety to the agency;
2. Explain agency processes, procedures, scientific principles, and technical information to consumers in plain language;
3. Ensure that traffic safety consumer voices are represented within agency processes;
4. Serve as an educator and advisor for individual traffic safety victims, victim family advocates, and traffic safety advocacy organizations;
5. Build relationships with individual traffic safety victim and victim family advocates to enhance consumer engagement and the agency's mission.

### **In accordance with all applicable DOT statutes and regulations, the National Traffic Safety**

### **Ombudsman may:**

- Analyze issues currently before the DOT, or likely to arise, and develop views and interpretations on those traffic safety issues from a uniquely consumer perspective;
- Build partnerships with external stakeholders to help the Agency identify potential emerging traffic safety hazards;
- Synthesize and provide feedback from traffic safety consumer advocates and regulated stakeholders on the Department's regulatory agenda and priorities to the relevant internal stakeholders;

- Publish educational materials for enhancing consumer understanding of DOT activities and procedures in accessible formats and venues, with clear and easy to understand language, consistent with agency policy;
- Assist consumers in identifying the appropriate DOT staff, offices, resources, or procedures for posing questions, submitting comments and recommendations, or resolving complaints;
- Meet with traffic safety victims and family advocates on an ongoing basis and ensure that the Office of the Secretary of Transportation and the DOT are informed of concerns raised by that constituency regarding agency actions on traffic safety issues;
- Assist the Deputy Assistant for Safety Policy in identifying traffic safety advocates who may be appropriate for roles in advisory traffic safety committees;
- Track and answer public inquiries regarding agency rules, policies, and activities in an organized, responsive, timely, and accurate manner;
- Enable and maximize solution-oriented dialogue between traffic safety victims, advocates and other stakeholders;
- Promote effective agency communication with consumers;
- Serve as an advisor and provide non-binding recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation and DOT staff to resolve issues regarding DOT's regulatory activities directly and substantially affecting consumers;
- Maintain relationships with inter-agency liaisons (federal, state, and local government agencies) to facilitate engagement with consumers;
- Identify new, relevant organizations to increase information distribution and drive greater consumer response;
- Facilitate contact between traffic safety victims and advocates with similar regulatory interests;
- Consult with traffic safety consumer advocates and other stakeholders to ensure their educational needs are being satisfied by the agency;
- Organize and host outreach events and activities to engage and educate diverse traffic safety consumer interests;
- Provide training, advice, and assistance to relevant CPSC staff on interactions with consumers;
- Upon request, review staff work products with traffic safety consumer-related content, or advise staff on the development of consumer-related content;
- Establish cooperative relationships with a broad network to help explore and resolve controversial matters;
- Enhance the agency's ability to interact when engaging with victims and victim-advocates;
- Refer questions to the Office of the General Counsel or the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy as appropriate.

### **Oversight:**

The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** is based in the Office of the Secretary reporting to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy, with access to the Secretary of Transportation. The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** serves as a resource to the entire department and to consumers and consumer stakeholders. The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will meet regularly with, and report directly to, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy. The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will meet periodically with the Secretary of Transportation to highlight issues, make recommendations for resolving problems and alleviating consumer traffic safety concerns, and summarize input from consumers on proposed traffic safety initiatives. The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** reports

directly to the Secretary of Transportation in order to maintain the freedom to respectfully express consumer critique, dissent, or frustration without a risk of offending or otherwise hindering the teamwork of those involved. In providing guidance, the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** must seek the advice of senior executives, managers, and subject matter experts, over whom the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** does not have formal authority, to ensure through proper vetting, that work products are harmonized, consistent, and appropriate.

**The National Traffic Safety Ombudsman does not:**

- provide legal notice, counsel, or determinations of any kind;
- set or delay any agency deadlines;
- make agency decisions;
- create or authorize agency policies, priorities, or activities;
- modify or interfere with any laws, regulations, related policies, practices, or procedures followed or enforced by the DOT;
- disclose or discuss any enforcement matters that are under investigation, in litigation, the subject of civil penalty investigation, or any other pre-litigation or litigation proceedings;
- disclose or discuss any human resource matters.

**Contacting the National Traffic Safety Ombudsman:**

Contact with the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman**'s Office is entirely voluntary and free of charge.

The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** serves as a resource for consumer assistance above and beyond the regular avenues of communication available for informational needs or if any consumer wishes to express a concern.

**Two-Way Communication:**

The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will engage regularly with the public and DOT employees to share information about the role and how the agency may provide assistance, as well as to learn about new initiatives and developments.

**Access to People and Information:**

In conducting his/her work, the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will meet with DOT employees at all levels and may obtain information and data, as needed, in accordance with existing directives. To the extent available, and subject to discretion of the Secretary of Transportation, the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will receive data and other reports from various agency Offices such as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy, NHTSA, FMCSA, and FHWA to inform the **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman**'s work.

**Regular Reporting:**

The **National Traffic Safety Ombudsman** will issue an annual report to the Secretary of Transportation no later than November 15 and may issue periodic reports to highlight systemic issues and make

recommendations for systemic change. Each report will be reviewed by the Office of the Secretary for a period of 15 business days. Such reports will be for official use only.

5. OFFICIAL TO WHOM THE OFFICE REPORTS: The Office shall report to the Secretary of Transportation

6. SUPPORT: The Office of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy will provide necessary funding, logistics, and administrative support for the office.

7. ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS AND STAFF YEARS: The annual operating costs associated with the Office's functions are estimated to be \$350,000, including all direct and indirect expenses. The cost estimate includes 1.3 full-time equivalent positions that are required to support the Office.

8. ESTIMATED NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS: Traffic Safety Committee meetings will be held at least twice a year. As necessary, the NTSO may call subcommittee meetings.

9. FILING DATE: This charter is effective \_\_\_\_\_, 2021, which is the filing date of this charter.