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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council Launches the Office of the Special Education Ombud**

SANTA FE – Today, the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council (NMDDC) launched the Office of the Special Education Ombud (OSEO), a new statewide office that provides personalized assistance to students and families navigating the special education system in New Mexico public schools. The Special Education Ombud Act, passed in the 2021 legislative regular session, authorizes the NMDDC to establish the OSEO and appoint a special education state ombud to act as a champion for families in a special education system that has too often frustrated and failed those it is charged to serve.

In June, NMDDC appointed Michelle Tregembo as New Mexico's first special education state ombud. Since joining the Council in August, the state ombud has worked diligently with advocates, families, and state agencies to stand up the ombud program.

"From the outset, this administration has made fixing the special education system in New Mexico a top priority," said Ms. Tregembo. "With the launch of this ombud program, families now have a staunch advocate working within the system to help their students access the educational supports they need to thrive."

The OSEO offers a broad range of services to students and families, such as answering questions about the special education process, providing support and resources to parents seeking special education services from schools, and attending individualized education program meetings. The OSEO will also problem solve systemic special education issues and report annually on special education data collected throughout the year.

"Many families in rural areas don't have anywhere to turn if their children are not getting what they need to succeed in school," said Valentin Anaya, a Socorro parent and the Council's secretary/treasurer. "Because our family had so little support, I had to make advocating for my son's education my full time job. New Mexico families deserve better. Having the special education ombud as a resource for rural families will be a game changer.

The OSEO will assist New Mexicans across the state who need help accessing special education services in public schools. To ensure the ombud program can meet the needs of the entire state, the OSEO is developing a special education ombud training and certification process to build and expand ombud services in every school district.

“If your child is in special education or has a disability, and you have questions or concerns about the education and services your child is receiving, I urge you to contact the special education ombud,” said Tarra Main, a Rio Rancho parent and vice president of Elevate the Spectrum, a nonprofit dedicated to serving New Mexico’s autism community. “I can tell you from personal experience that working with a special education ombud could be the missing link you need to help your child. The ombud program gives us another important tool in our parent toolbox—and we should use it.”

The OSEO can be reached at (505) 841-4565. More information about the ombud program can be found [here](#).

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