

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

Department of the Public Advocate  
Office of Citizen Relations  
P.O. Box 851  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0851



### Making A Difference

The Department of the Public Advocate has taken action to protect . . .

- Property owners from unlawful government seizure of their homes for private redevelopment
- Elderly people from abuse and neglect
- Children with special education needs
- People with developmental disabilities and mental illness from being denied appropriate services and supports
- Ratepayers from unfair rate increases
- Children from lead poisoning
- Voters from barriers that prevent them from exercising their right to vote
- Immigrant children from obstacles to enrolling in school
- The public from being denied access to beaches and other public waterways.

### The Public Advocate's Guiding Principle . . .



Ronald Chen is an accomplished attorney and law professor who has dedicated the past 18 years to public service. Prior to becoming the Public Advocate, Ron was the

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Rutgers University Law School, Newark. In addition to his work at the law school, Ron handled many cases for the American Civil Liberties Union aimed at protecting people's civil and constitutional rights.

Ron summed up his vision for the Department of the Public Advocate during his confirmation hearings:

"New Jersey is a great state. But too many New Jersey citizens continue to face economic hardships and other injustices. At some point in our lives, almost all of us may find ourselves in one of the groups who do not have access to effective advocacy—children, the elderly, ratepayers—so in giving a voice to those groups, we are in a sense giving a voice to the public at large."

*Ronald K. Chen  
March 2006*

*New Jersey Senate Judiciary  
Committee Hearing*

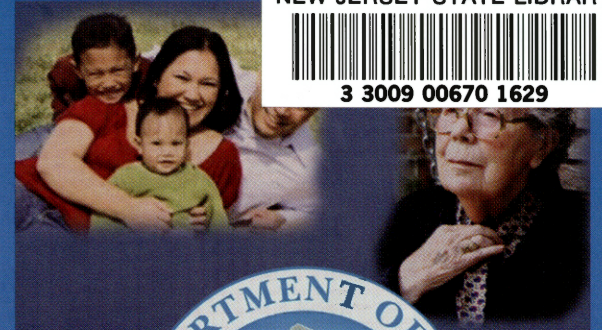


# Helping Citizens Navigate Government Agencies

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## Citizen Relations

NJ Department of  
the Public Advocate

## Citizen Relations is the Public Advocate's Front Line

The Public Advocate's mission is to act as a voice for the people on a range of critical issues. The department is charged with making government more accountable and responsive to the needs of New Jersey residents, especially our most vulnerable citizens.

The Public Advocate's Office of Citizen Relations serves a unique function in accomplishing this broad mission of making government more responsible.

This office acts as the Public Advocate's front lines. Responding to calls for help from people in every part of New Jersey, Citizen Relations works to resolve specific problems people are having with government agencies, as well as bringing widespread concerns and issues to the attention of the Public Advocate.

This gives the Public Advocate a front-line view of the difficulties affecting people across the state, helping to form a broader response to addressing the concerns of New Jersey citizens.

The Public Advocate encourages citizens to use this important resource when encountering difficulty in getting an appropriate response from a government agency.



## What does Citizen Relations do?



The Office of Citizen Relations investigates complaints regarding failures of state and local government agencies to appropriately respond to citizens. Citizen Relations staff also

refers citizens to the most effective government agency that will provide the assistance they need.

## What type of complaints does Citizen Relations handle?

The complaints cover a broad spectrum of issues, including problems with specific state agencies and more general concerns about state policy.

In order for our office to investigate a complaint, the following criteria should be met:

- You have exhausted other formal avenues of relief.
- You present facts that, upon investigation, demonstrate that an issue or case was mishandled, meaning relevant laws or agency policies and procedures were not followed or were inadequate.

## What should I do before filing a complaint?

Before contacting the Office of Citizen Relations, try to resolve the problem by contacting the relevant agency. Many times, an agency official can explain a confusing policy or correct a problem.

When you contact an agency, remember to:

- Have all relevant information in front of you. Consider writing down the problem and your questions ahead of time.
- Talk to the right people and ask questions. As necessary, follow the chain of command

until you understand what happened and why.

- Keep records of your contacts, including their positions, phone numbers, dates and times of the calls.
- Read the information sent to you. It may explain something you need to know.
- If you have followed these suggestions and still can't resolve your problem, contact the Office of Citizen Relations.

## How do I make a complaint?

Contact the Office of Citizen Relations at (609) 826-5070, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

You may also e-mail us at [PublicAdvocate@advocate.state.nj.us](mailto:PublicAdvocate@advocate.state.nj.us), file a complaint online at [www.njpublicadvocate.gov](http://www.njpublicadvocate.gov) or fill out the form attached to this brochure and mail to:

Citizen Relations  
New Jersey Department of the  
Public Advocate  
P.O. Box 851  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0851

In making your complaint, please provide the following information:

- Your name, address and phone number(s)
- Names of relevant agency personnel, including all people you have spoken with about the problem
- Brief description of the problem
- Step(s) you have taken to resolve the problem
- Action(s) you are requesting from the Office of Citizen Relations

## How are complaints handled?

The Office of Citizen Relations will evaluate the complaint to determine if it is within the office's jurisdiction and whether we have the authority to investigate the complaint.

You will receive a letter from the Office of Citizen Relations. We will either provide referral information to assist you in resolving your problem, or we will let you know that your case will be investigated.

## Complaint/Question Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Which government agency is your question and/or complaint about?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly summarize your question/complaint.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the result or outcome you are seeking.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mail to address on front of card or fax to (609) 984-4770.