A. **Policy**

In addition to the normal complaint procedures it is the policy of this department to establish and maintain an Ombudsman Program. The purpose of this program is to provide an alternative procedure for employees who do not feel comfortable airing complaints or other problems through the normal chain of command.

The person designated as Ombudsman will have direct and unhampered access to the Chief 24 hours per day. Consistent with the Chief's instructions, it is the Ombudsman's duty or mission to mediate, help settle or reconcile differences in disputes and if appropriate, refer employees to other outside sources of assistance.

This program is meant to assist employees with unique, unusual or personal problems. It is not meant as a means to routinely circumvent the normal chain of command when dealing with normal operational and administrative matters, shift schedules or assignments.

B. **Procedures**

1. The Ombudsman will be designated in writing by the Director. All departmental personnel will be advised of the Ombudsman's identity.

2. While performing duties according to this policy, the Ombudsman is responsible only to the Director. He/she does not have to coordinate with supervisors, or the Patrol Commander, unless the Director cannot be reached and time is essential to the resolution or the problem, in which case he/she will contact the Patrol Commander.
3. All personnel are strongly encouraged to resolve complaints, problems or other issues through the normal chain of command. However anyone who, for any reason, feels uncomfortable using the Chain of Command may contact the Ombudsman any time and discuss their problem. This contact may be done orally or in writing. Written complaints are encouraged.

4. The Ombudsman must listen carefully to the Complainant and gather as much information as possible. The complainant must be assured that, except for the Director, all information will be kept strictly confidential.

5. As soon as possible, the Ombudsman must brief the Director on the situation and be guided by his instructions.

6. Further action by the Ombudsman may include making an appointment for the complainant with the Director, additional investigation or referral of the complainant to another agency if necessary.

7. When possible complaints should be resolved at the lowest possible level. However, at no time will information be withheld from the Director.

8. Because of their nature, it may not be possible to resolve some complaints within the department. Referral to an outside agency may be necessary. Sources of outside assistance include but are not limited to the following:
   a. Human Resources
   b. Employee Assistance Program
   c. Employee Health Services
   d. MUSC Grievance Program
   e. Legal Aid

9. Employees who elect to use the Ombudsman Program are hereby guaranteed that retribution by supervisors or other personnel in the Chain of Command will not be tolerated by this office.

10. The Ombudsman will keep such records as may be necessary to follow a complaint to its conclusion. However, records must be kept under lock and key and will be destroyed when no longer needed. Only the Ombudsman and the Director will have access.