



STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OMBUDS

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2021- 2023 OFCO Strategic Plan

Mission

Independently and objectively investigate complaints about harmful actions by a state child welfare agency; protect children and families from harmful state child welfare agency action or inaction; promote continuous improvement efforts to enhance the safety and welfare of children; inform the Governor, Legislators, and policy makers of problems in the child protection and welfare system; and make recommendations to address the needs of children and families. (RCW 43.060A)

Vision

That the Washington State child welfare system protects all children from abuse or neglect and provides necessary resources to strengthen and preserve families.

What We Do

The Family and Children's Ombuds investigates complaints about state child welfare agency actions or inaction that involve:

- Any child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm.
- A child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.

We intervene when an agency's action or inaction is contrary to laws or policies or is unreasonable. Additionally, we work to identify system-wide issues and make recommendations to improve our child welfare system.

The ombuds prioritizes investigations involving the immediate safety of a child, or emergent situations where timely intervention by OFCO could avert harmful conduct by a state child welfare agency or alleviate a family's distress. OFCO also reviews critical incidents, such as child fatalities, near fatalities and cases of recurrent child maltreatment. This allows OFCO to take action to protect children and develop recommendations to protect our state's most vulnerable population.

Through the collection of data regarding the types of complaints we receive and how they are investigated and resolved, OFCO identifies systemic issues and recommends improvements to the child welfare system.

Values

Independence	Impartiality
Confidentiality	Credibility
Equity	Fairness
Respect	Integrity

Goals, Activities, Outcomes, Key Measures of Success

1. GOAL: Promote the health, welfare and safety of all children in state care, as well as the preservation of families, by investigating complaints in an impartial and timely manner.

Activity/Initiative

- Immediately investigate emergent complaints involving child safety.
- Contact complainant and begin emergent investigations within 24 hours non-emergent investigation within 15 days.
- Conduct staff review of emergent investigations within two weeks and non-emergent complaint investigations within 30 days, assessing whether state agency's action is reasonable and consistent with law and policy.

Performance Measure

Number of complaints received, investigations completed, and time needed to process each complaint.

2. GOAL: Intervene to protect children and families from harmful conduct of a state child welfare agency.

Activity/Initiative

- OFCO notifies DCYF regional administrator, area administrator and supervisor of its findings, and works with the agency to change the current course of action to one that is reasonable and consistent with state laws and agency policies.
- OFCO sends written investigation findings and concerns to agency's upper management when attempts to resolve complaint with caseworker and supervisor are not successful.

Performance Measure

- Number of complaints in which OFCO intervenes and the agency acknowledges harmful action and/or agrees to corrective action.

3. GOAL: Promote system-wide improvements to protect children and strengthen families

Activity/Initiative

- Conduct systemic investigations regarding child safety and family rights, and present findings and recommendations.
- Collaborate with stakeholder groups to develop recommendations to address systemic issues that leave children and families at risk.

- Communicate with the governor, legislators, agency officials, and community stakeholders regarding chronic and/or system-wide issues.
- Describe in OFCO's Annual Report and Child Fatality/Near Fatality Report chronic and/or system-wide issues that adversely impact children and families and highlight recommendations for improvements.

Performance Measure

- Published OFCO reports describing chronic and/or system-wide issues.
- Track legislative actions in response to systemic issues identified by OFCO.
- Track agency actions to improve policies and practices in response to systemic issues identified by OFCO.
- Document whether or not strategies to address systemic issues are successful.

4. GOAL: Increase public awareness of OFCO's mission, particularly to marginalized communities and enhance the ombuds' effective response to inquiries.

Activity /Initiative

- Increase OFCO participation in community outreach through meeting with stakeholder groups, and targeted engagement with marginalized communities.
- Improve OFCO's website to: better inform the public of our duties and responsibilities and OFCO's' complaint process; provide information and referrals for frequently asked questions; provide links to related websites; and establish links to OFCO from related websites.

Performance Measure

- Number of meetings/conferences attended with stakeholder groups.
- Track specific improvements made to OFCO's website.
- Number of contacts to OFCO either by phone, complaint forms received, and website visits.