



# **CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN**

**FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021  
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

**November 1, 2021**

**Stephanie Villafuerte  
Child Protection Ombudsman**

## Fiscal Year 2020-21 Strategic Policy Initiatives

Throughout Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-21, the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) worked on three Strategic Policy Initiatives (SPI), which are detailed goals intended to elevate the performance of the agency. Specifically, the SPI guided the CPO's work in the areas of communication and outreach, efficient and impactful practices, expanding expertise and promoting best practices.

Each SPI – comprised of *strategies*, *critical processes* and *key metrics* – helped guide the CPO toward its goals.<sup>1</sup> The CPO is pleased to share this Annual Performance Report that summarizes the agency's FY 2020-21 Performance Plan, achievements and opportunities.

### SPI 1: TARGET COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENTS TO BETTER EDUCATE AND SERVE CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS.

**Strategy:** *Provide consistent, timely and informative communications to citizens and stakeholders on issues facing the child protection system.*

**Critical Process:** Complete, publish and provide notices of CPO products in a timely fashion.<sup>2</sup>

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO published products and notices in accordance with internal timelines. Mailchimp was used to email newsletters eight times during the fiscal year.

**Critical Process:** Communicate issues the CPO has identified to legislators by providing consistent and timely notices of the CPO's findings and recommendations.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO developed and disseminated a survey for legislators. Twenty of Colorado's 100 legislators responded. After analyzing their responses, the CPO identified key issues that legislators are interested in and met with nine legislators to share information about the agency. Additionally, the CPO presented its annual report to the Joint Judiciary Committee and the Senate and House committees on health and human services. The presentation provided an opportunity for the agency to communicate the issues it identified through its work, its progress towards goals and its response to the pandemic directly to legislators.

**Critical Process:** Communicate issues the CPO has identified to stakeholders and/or ensure CPO representation in stakeholder meetings.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO attended stakeholder meetings and ensured issues identified by the CPO were communicated to relevant stakeholders. Meetings were held virtually due to the global pandemic. In total, the CPO staff virtually attended 345 stakeholder meetings. Additionally, the CPO developed a webinar that was sponsored by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and the American Bar Association to provide information to stakeholders about ombudsmen and their work.

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<sup>1</sup> FY 2020-21 strategies and critical processes are listed in this report. For a full list of key metrics, please see the [CPO's FY 2020-21 Performance Plan](#).

<sup>2</sup> CPO products include any written reports or other publications detailing issues reviewed by the CPO. These may include recommendations for system improvement.

*Strategy: Engage with communities to expand the CPO's statewide presence, to identify emerging issues in child protection and to develop community-specific services.*

**Critical Process: Engage directly with youth impacted by the child protection system to increase services provided directly to youth clients.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO received 62 calls from youth residing in Division of Youth Services (DYS) youth centers. This was likely a result of the CPO's work with DHS to ensure that "blue phones" located in centers allow youth to call the CPO, handbooks reflect how youth can contact the CPO, each youth receives a handbook after admission, the CPO's contact information is available on each youth center's website and that informational posters – written in Spanish and English – were disseminated physically and online. Additionally, the CPO created a youth-specific webpage for its website and engaged with youth organizations, such as project Foster Power and the Youth Partnership for Health.

**Critical Process: Identify and respond to the needs of youth populations throughout Colorado.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO analyzed data from the Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center and from the Division of Youth Services' Annual Report to identify youth populations that are overrepresented in Colorado's child protection system. The data reflected that Black and Latino populations are overrepresented and the CPO developed strategies to specifically engage with these populations. As a starting point, the CPO had Spanish informational posters distributed to DHS' youth centers to help inform youth of CPO services. Additionally, the CPO engaged with youth through its casework and learned about their experiences.

**Critical Process: Engage directly with parents – including foster parents, adoptive parents and parents of youth in DHS youth centers – to improve the services the CPO provides to parent clients.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Child Protection Ombudsman Villafuerte presented to the Colorado Department of Human Services' Family Voice Council to share information about the agency and to learn more about strategies for engaging families. She also completed an interview with the Colorado Trust to discuss COVID-19's impacts on parents.

**Critical Process: Identify and respond to the needs of parents – including foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship providers and parents of youth in DHS youth centers – throughout Colorado.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Not Completed**

This critical process was not completed during the fiscal year because the CPO identified the need to revise it. A revised version of this critical process is included in the agency's Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Performance Plan.

**Critical Process: Engage mandatory reporters, services providers, educators, medical providers, mental health professionals and the child protection legal community.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO held informational sessions with county child welfare departments, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Association of Family and Children's Agencies and the Court Appointment Special Advocates (CASA) of Adams and Broomfield Counties. Additionally, the CPO engaged members of the child protection legal community to share with them and their stakeholders information about the agency.

**Critical Process: Engage rural communities to improve and increase the services the CPO provides to clients in those areas.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Not Completed**

Prior to the pandemic, the CPO had planned on leveraging its out-of-town board meetings to complete in-person outreach to rural communities. However, due to the pandemic, the CPO cancelled all in-person meetings. The CPO is working to determine how best to engage rural communities during the next fiscal year.

**SPI 2: IMPLEMENT PRACTICES THAT ENSURE THE CPO MANAGES ITS CASELOAD EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY, ALLOTING STAFF THE NECESSARY TIME AND RESOURCES TO RESEARCH SYSTEMIC CONCERNS.**

*Strategy: Implement practices and procedures that will decrease the amount of Information/Resource Referrals and Assists are open and conversely increase the amount of time CPO staff dedicate to systemic issues affecting the child protection system.<sup>3</sup>*

**Critical Process: Streamline the process for identifying inquiries that result in Information/Resource Referrals or Assists and close such cases in a timely manner.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed**

The CPO successfully closed 100 percent of inquiries resulting in an Information/Resource Referral within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry and 100 percent of inquiries resulting in Assists within 60 business days of receiving the inquiry.

**Critical Process: Develop and execute a project management system to better allocate staff's time to ensure the timely completion of case management and Special Initiatives projects.<sup>4</sup>**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO developed and executed an online project management system to better allocate staff's time and track progress on projects. Though the system streamlined the way the CPO approached its work, caseload significantly increased during the same time period. During the FY 2021-22 budget cycle, the CPO submitted a request for staffing resources that was granted.

*Strategy: Ensure the CPO is continually analyzing pertinent data and demographic information to ensure its services are best serving children, youth and families in Colorado.*

**Critical Process: Ensure CPO staff are continually evaluating how they may better serve Colorado's diverse population.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

CPO staff attended a diversity, equity and inclusion presentation hosted by the University of Colorado's School of Public Health. Additionally, two staff members attended an educational series about how to

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about the CPO's practices and procedures, please refer to the [Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman Case Practices and Operating Procedures](#).

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the CPO's Special Initiatives, please refer to the [Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman Case Practices and Operating Procedures](#).

strengthen families using a racial equity lens and Child Protection Ombudsman Villafuerte attended a diversity, equity and inclusion discussion hosted by the USOA. Key takeaways from these sessions were discussed with staff. Staff also explored how to begin capturing demographic data from callers.

### **SPI 3: ESTABLISH THE CPO AS A LEADER IN INFORMATION GATHERING AND DISSEMINATION AS IT RELATES TO ISSUES FACING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM.**

*Strategy: Identify systemic issues that are pertinent to improving the child protection system.*

**Critical Process: Determine the potential impact of a proposed Special Initiative.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed**

As part of its project management system, the CPO published a template to help develop Special Initiatives. During the fiscal year, staff proposed one Special Initiative project, which the CPO plans to advance during the next fiscal year. These activities were completed in accordance with the CPO's internal timelines.

*Strategy: Allocate agency and staff resources appropriately to ensure Special Initiatives completion and timely impacts.*

**Critical Process: Develop and execute a project management system to better allocate staff's time to ensure the timely completion of case management and Special Initiatives projects.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO executed an online project management system to better allocate staff's time and track progress on projects. Through its casework, the CPO identified how COVID-19 impacted some of Colorado's children, youth and families.

*Strategy: Ensure the public and/or stakeholders receive notice of Special Initiatives launches and outcomes.*

**Critical Process: Complete, publish and provide notices of CPO products in a timely fashion.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO published one Special Initiative work product, "Strengthening Colorado's Foster Youth Protection Laws." The work product was placed on the CPO's website in a timely manner, and the agency's Mailchimp notification system provided listserv members information about the release of this publication. Additionally, the CPO identified how COVID-19 impacted some of Colorado's children, youth and families. The CPO published blog posts, hosted stakeholder meetings and presented to audiences about these issues.

*Strategy: Track and analyze recommendations to monitor CPO's impacts and progress.*

**Critical Process: Track the uptake and implementation of recommendations.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The Deputy Child Protection Ombudsman coordinated with partners to get updates on each of the recommendations the CPO issued since the 2017-18 fiscal year.

## Conclusion

The Ombudsman respectfully submits this report to the Joint Budget Committee and the General Assembly, as is required under C.R.S. § 2-7-205. The CPO will comply with its requirements under the statute and will submit the required reports and evaluations.