



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
**THE CHILD'S  
REPRESENTATIVE**

**General Assembly Report**

**Fiscal Year 2024**



## Mission

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OCR gives children and youth a voice in Colorado legal proceedings through high-quality legal representation that protects and promotes their safety, interests, and rights.

## Vision

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Justice, opportunity, and healthy families for all court-involved children and youth.

## Values

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### **Accountability**

Colorado's children, attorneys, families, and communities can count on OCR to ensure that each decision we make and action we take advances our mission in a fair, equitable, inclusive, and transparent manner.

### **Efficiency**

OCR strives to accomplish its mission and conserve resources by streamlining efforts, adhering to deadlines, resolving conflict constructively, and honoring well-defined projects, processes, and roles. We balance our drive to achieve with thoughtful planning and implementation.

### **Empowerment**

OCR cultivates an environment of respect, honesty, and equity. We value the diverse experiences and expertise of the children we serve, our attorneys, and our staff. We invest time to reflect and connect, focus on strengths, value feedback, and recognize success. We stand for justice and support each other in our mission to empower children.

## Highlights from Fiscal Year 2024

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Fiscal Year 2024 proved to be another pivotal year for youth rights in Colorado as OCR partnered with LEAP and other youth with lived experience to spearhead the Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care bill. [House Bill 24-1017](#) (“HB 1017”) was introduced in January of 2024, signed by the Lieutenant Governor on April 24, 2024, and went into effect August 7, 2024. The bill provides comprehensive rights for youth in foster care as well as robust notice provisions and an enforcement mechanism that allows the Court to enter case specific orders as necessary. OCR’s work and success on this important bill furthered its 2024 Wildly Important Goal of advancing youth rights in Colorado legal proceedings. OCR and its attorneys will have a key role in implementing this important legislation and making sure children and youth understand their rights and that those rights are being honored.

To further empower youth and professionals that work with them, OCR redesigned its Youth Section on the agency’s website in FY24. The new page is more accessible for youth and professionals, with updated youth resources, toolkits, and an interactive youth rights page. Additionally, the OCR Youth Survey was moved to a different platform and now includes a Spanish language version for greater accessibility. OCR also worked throughout the year to rewrite Colorado’s Guided Reference in Dependency (“GRID”) to include the many legislative changes that occurred over the past two years, including the change to Colorado’s model of representation for youth 12 and older in dependency proceedings. This resource will be available in early FY25.

Throughout FY24, OCR dedicated extensive time working on the newly revised Juvenile Discovery Rule 4.6, amended and adopted by the Court, En Banc, May 16, 2024 and effective July 1, 2024. The revised rule is the product of collaboration between vested partners and the courts. OCR advocated to include provisions that protect children and youth from unnecessary and potentially harmful discovery practices.

OCR welcomed two new staff members this fiscal year. Nathifa Miller, as the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice Attorney and Kimberly Casserino, as an Accounting Specialist. These additions to the Denver office enhance the work of the OCR and helps further its mission to serve children and youth in Colorado. OCR is also looking forward to the addition of a new training assistant in early FY25. In the Colorado Springs Office, OCR welcomed Rohaib Latif and Samantha Gatson as attorneys, Kailey Moore as a Case Consultant, and Ashley Hanson as an administrative assistant. With these additions the Colorado Springs Office is fully staffed for the first time in several years, enhancing its ability to provide high quality legal services to the children and youth in the 4<sup>th</sup> judicial district.

Unfortunately, all staff at the Denver OCR office must work remotely due to the damage to OCR’s office suite at the Ralph Carr Judicial Building that occurred in January 2024. OCR remains fully

functioning and can work effectively in a remote capacity through the dedication and hard work of the office as a whole. OCR hopes to reopen its physical office in the summer of 2025.

*“[My GAL] always had my back and would fight for me. She made me feel heard and that was something hard to find. She was great. I'm at a loss of word, she made me feel welcome. She was there for me.”*

*– Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney*

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## OCR Board of Directors

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The Colorado Supreme Court appoints OCR's nine-member board (Board) in accordance with C.R.S. § 13-91-104 (2), which requires Board membership to include:

- three attorneys admitted to practice law in this state who have experience representing children/youth as Guardians *ad Litem* (GALs) or legal representatives,
- three non-attorneys who have experience advocating for children in the court system, and
- three citizens who are not attorneys and who have not served as CASA volunteers or child and family investigators.

Each Colorado Congressional District must be represented on the Board and no more than five members may be of the same political party. Board members serve without compensation for terms of four years and work cooperatively with OCR's Executive Director to provide governance to the office, fiscal oversight of the general operating budget, and participate in funding decisions related to OCR services. OCR's current Board:

- **Jean White (Chair)**

Citizen, Second Congressional District, Republican, *former Colorado Senator*.

- **Gwen Schooley (Vice-Chair)**

Advocate, Eighth Congressional District, Unaffiliated, *Executive Director of A Kids Place/CASA Program and Child Advocacy Center. Ms. Schooley retired in FY24 and OCR is actively looking for a new member.*

- **Margaret Fix Seboldt**

Attorney, Fourth Congressional District, Democrat, *Solo-Practitioner*.

- **Don Moseley**

Advocate, Seventh Congressional District, Democrat, *Executive Director of Ralston House*.

- **Susan Ryan**

Attorney, Third Congressional District, Unaffiliated, *Holland and Hart (Aspen)*.

- **Maria Valdez**

Attorney, Sixth Congressional District, Unaffiliated, *retired GAL (Arapahoe County)*

- **Victoria Shuler**

Advocate, Sixth Congressional District, Democrat, *Denver Director of Fostering Great Ideas*.

- **Vacancies**

There are two vacancies on the Board, and filling these vacancies has been significantly more challenging in the last few years. OCR continues to search for members that meet statutory criteria.

## OCR LEAP Members

LEAP is [OCR's Lived Experts Action Panel](#), formed in 2021. LEAP's goals are to provide young adults with lived expertise in child welfare and juvenile justice systems opportunities to:

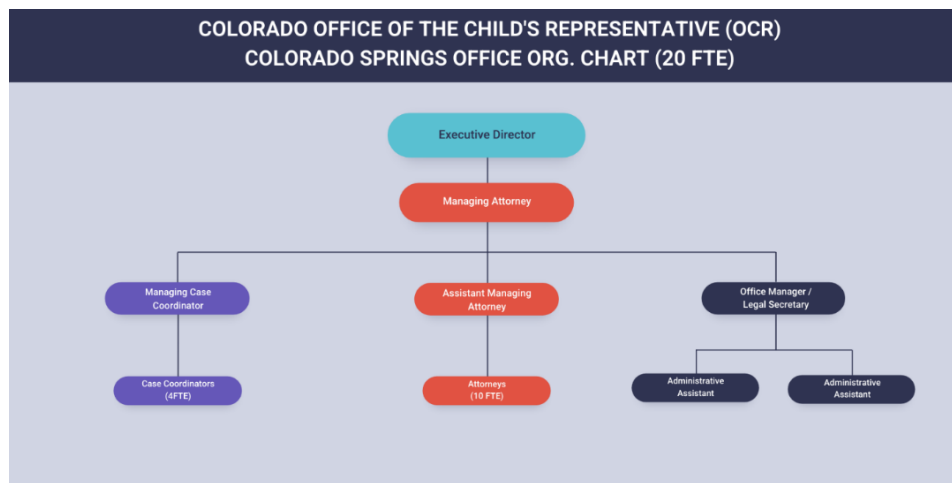
- Share experiences, feedback, and ideas about OCR attorneys and court with supportive peers and adults;
- Grow personal and professional networks;
- Learn about topics they want to learn about, as well as what OCR does and what OCR attorneys do;
- Gain skills and knowledge they can use in their everyday lives; and
- Participate in OCR's efforts to create and improve laws, policies, and OCR attorney practice in ways that serve the best interests of youth.

LEAP's current members<sup>1</sup> are:

- **Elizabeth Arrieta**
- **Maya Chandler**
- **Shelby Costello**
- **Nyomi Davis**
- **Alisiana Medina**
- **Maddie Noyce Lang**
- **Braeden (last name withheld at Braeden's request)**

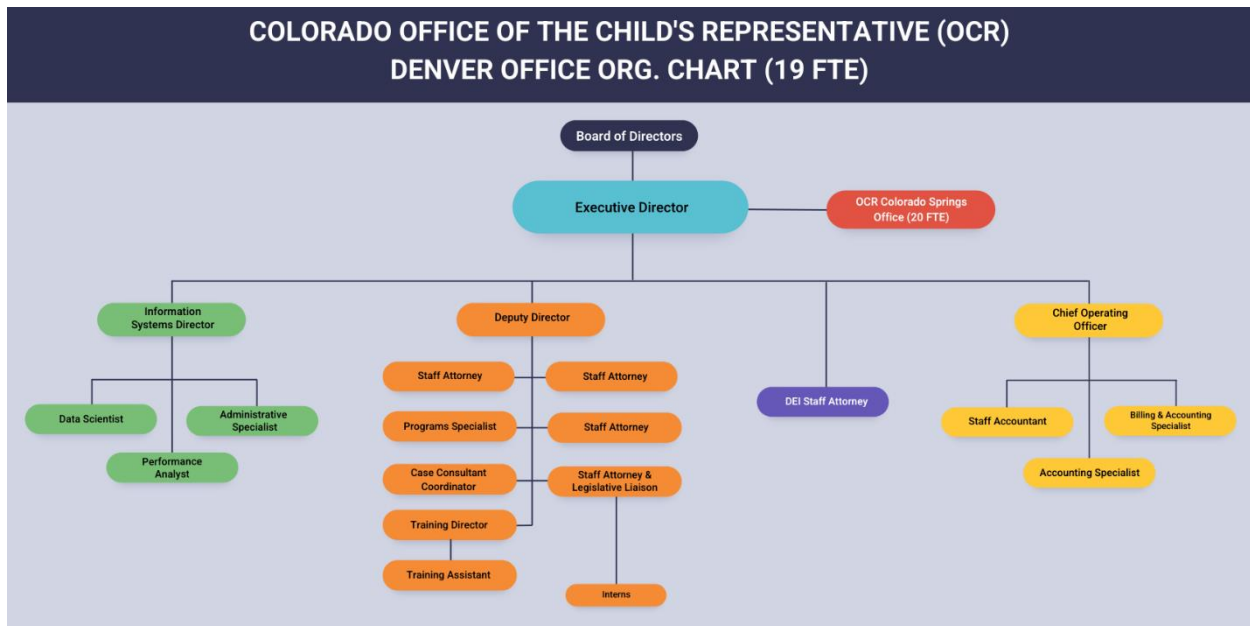
## OCR Staff

OCR comprises an Executive Office located in the Ralph Carr Judicial Center at 1300 Broadway, Suite 320, Denver, CO 80203, and the Colorado Springs office, a multidisciplinary law office that provides high-quality GAL and CFY representation to children and youth in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. The Colorado Springs Office is managed by Nicole Lyells and includes 11 additional case-carrying attorneys, 5 case consultants (CCs), and administrative support staff.



<sup>1</sup> Only members who have given permission are listed. LEAP consists of 12 members.

OCR's Executive Office is led by Executive Director, Chris Henderson, and his staff:



## Agency Overview

The Office of the Child's Representative ("OCR") was created by the Colorado General Assembly in 2000 through House Bill 00-1371 to improve representation for Colorado's most vulnerable children and youth. OCR's enabling legislation and mandates are found in Colorado Revised Statute §13-91-101 et seq. and require the OCR to:

- Ensure provision of uniform, high-quality legal representation to children involved in judicial proceedings in Colorado.
- Enhance the provision of guardian ad litem ("GAL") or Counsel for Youth ("CFY") services in Colorado.
- Provide high-quality, accessible training throughout the state.
- Make recommendations to the Colorado Chief Justice concerning practice standards.
- Provide oversight to ensure compliance with the established practice standards.
- Establish fair and realistic compensation for state-appointed GALs and CFY sufficient to attract and retain high-quality, experienced attorneys to serve as GALs or CFY.
- Work cooperatively and form partnerships with local judicial districts, attorneys, and children and youth impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice system.
- Develop measurement instruments to assess and document the effectiveness of various models of representation.

OCR began operating in 2001 and became a permanent independent state agency in 2010 when its legislative sunset clause was removed. In the last 23 years, OCR has worked diligently to fulfill



these mandates and improve the quality of legal services and representation of children and youth in Colorado.

OCR advocates on a state-wide basis regarding issues that impact children and youth and the various practice areas that OCR oversees, through extensive committee work, taskforce appointments, the Court Improvement Program, and legislative and administrative advocacy. OCR serves as a resource to legislators by providing subject matter expertise and nonpartisan legal research concerning children, youth, child welfare, and juvenile justice issues. OCR welcomes questions from legislators regarding this report or specific issues concerning children, youth, or attorneys in your community. OCR has a [staff attorney liaison](#) for every judicial district in the state, or the Staff Attorney and Legislative Liaison is available to assist you or your staff.

### Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Justice

OCR welcomed its new EDIJ Attorney, Nathifa Miller, in January of 2024. In FY24 the EDIJ attorney participated in every new attorney interview to better understand and improve OCR's recruitment efforts going forward, created office norms to encourage an inclusive and supportive environment, drafted a new factsheet for the GRID, participated in legislation, started running the OCR EDIJ committees (both internal and external), defined EDIJ competencies for OCR attorneys and CCs, trained new attorneys at OCR's Core Competencies I, engaged in outreach to national and state partners to further advance OCR's EDIJ efforts, and began developing a strategic plan to carry the work forward and further integrate equity in all aspects of OCR programming.

*"He really takes his job ...and puts his heart and soul into it. He sees the glass full instead of empty and is there for the family and children. He is one of the most amazing people I have ever met. He has never let me down. Always had faith in me when I didn't have faith in myself."*

*- Parent feedback about an OCR attorney*

### Attorney Services Provided by OCR

OCR oversees approximately 270 attorneys who serve as GALs, CFY, or Child's Legal Representatives ("CLR"). These attorneys span the entire state, representing children and youth (or their best interests) in all 22 judicial districts. In FY24, OCR attorneys had open appointments for 15,196 children and youth in Colorado across all case types.

The attorneys for each Judicial District can be found on the updated [Appointment lists](#) posted on the OCR's website. These public interest attorneys are predominately solo practitioners or small business owners who have dedicated some or all of their legal practice to serve children and youth in these cases. A GAL or CFY is appointed by the court for every child or youth who is a party in a dependency and neglect ("D&N") or Foster Youth Transition Program case ("FYTP") as mandated in C.R.S. §19-1-111, §19-3-203, and §19-7-308. OCR is responsible for oversight and payment for these appointments, including any applicable appeal. Mandatory appointments that are the responsibility of the OCR include:

<b>CASE TYPE</b>	<b>OCR RESPONSIBILITY</b>
<b>Dependency &amp; Neglect</b>	All GAL and CFY appointments.
<b>Foster Youth in Transition Program (FYTP)</b>	All CFY assignments or appointments.
<b>Underage Party seeking a Marriage License</b>	All GAL appointments (GAL appointed for all youth 16-17 seeking a marriage license).
<b>Juvenile Delinquency – detained youth only</b>	All GAL appointments for youth who are detained (this appointment is limited to the time of detention and further appointment is guided by §19-1-111)

The court has *discretion* to appoint an OCR attorney in the following proceedings and OCR is responsible for those appointments as follows:

<b>Case Type</b>	<b>OCR Responsibility</b>
<b>Delinquency &amp; Direct File</b>	All GAL appointments.
<b>Truancy</b>	All GAL appointments.
<b>Paternity &amp; Support</b>	GAL appointments where at least one party is indigent.
<b>Probate</b>	GAL appointments where at least one party is indigent.
<b>Adoption &amp; Relinquishment</b>	GAL appointments where at least one party is indigent. <i>(Note: some CFY appointments are mandated, when the CFY represents the youth in a companion D&amp;N case).</i>
<b>Mental Health</b>	All GAL appointments.
<b>Victim Witness</b>	All GAL appointments.
<b>Domestic Relations</b>	Child’s Legal Representative (“CLR”) appointments when one or both parties are indigent.
<b>D&amp;N GAL for a minor parent</b>	All GAL appointments.
<b>D&amp;N/FYTP GAL for a youth 12+</b>	All GAL appointments. A GAL may be appointed when necessary due to the youth’s diminished capacity.

In addition, OCR may be responsible for appointments in other proceedings deemed necessary by the court.

### Attorney Roles

Each proceeding has its own statutory roles and responsibilities. While the statutory responsibilities and practice requirements vary by appointment type, the overall role of the

attorney as the independent advocate for the child's interests remains consistent. GALs and CLR's represent the best interests of the child or youth they are appointed to represent, and their professional duties flow to the best interests of the child. GALs are appointed to independently investigate the best interests of the child and advocate for those best interests through all stages of the proceedings. CLR's have a similar role and are appointed only in Domestic Relations ("DR") cases. CFY represent the youth's stated position, and the attorney's professional duties flow to the youth client directly. CFY are appointed to independently investigate, counsel the youth, and advocate for the youth's position throughout all stages of the proceedings.

*"We just really liked her. Neither of us had dealt with a lawyer so we thought she would be intimidating but she was very approachable. She would explain things at our level and she was a big relief. We could talk freely. It was a bummer for her to go away after the adoption."*

*- Caregiver feedback about an OCR Attorney*

Attorneys that contract with OCR ("OCR Attorneys") are held to high practice standards, set forth in Chief Justice Directive 04-06 ("CJD 04-06"). These attorneys are well-trained, skilled litigators with specialized knowledge of child welfare and juvenile law. The legal advocacy provided by OCR attorneys plays a critical role in protecting children and youth rights, promoting the child's or youth's safety and well-being, and ensures these children and youth have a voice throughout their legal proceedings.

## OCR Performance Plan Goals for FY24

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### Wildly Important Goal (WIG)

OCR will further advance youth rights in Colorado legal proceedings and child welfare and juvenile justice related policy initiatives. *Youth encompasses the ages of 0 – 21 years old and it is important to engage in an intentional effort to recognize, define, protect, and advance their interests and rights on individual cases and in the law and policy attorneys rely on to advocate for those interests.*

### Other Performance Goals

- Provide children a voice in the Colorado legal system through effective and efficient attorney services and advocacy.
- Optimize efficiencies in OCR oversight and billing.
- Ensure attorneys and case consultants remain current in state and federal law and regulations, social science research, best practices in diversity and inclusion, and evidence-based services.

## Engaging and Empowering Youth

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OCR's Engaging and Empowering Youth programming continued throughout FY24, and OCR conducted 11 youth survey events and collected 107 youth surveys. Additionally, OCR gathered youth feedback through 57 youth reference interviews about GALs/CFY. OCR redesigned the [Youth section](#) of the OCR website for both professional and youth audiences, moved the [Youth Survey](#) to a new platform, which includes a Spanish language version.

### LEAP

In its third year, LEAP had 7 returning members and 5 new members. LEAP was significantly involved in advocating for the Rights for Youth in Foster Care, House Bill 24-1017, including reviewing bill language, providing powerful testimony at the state Capitol, engaging with legislators, and speaking to the press. In addition to their amazing work on HB24-1017, LEAP members:

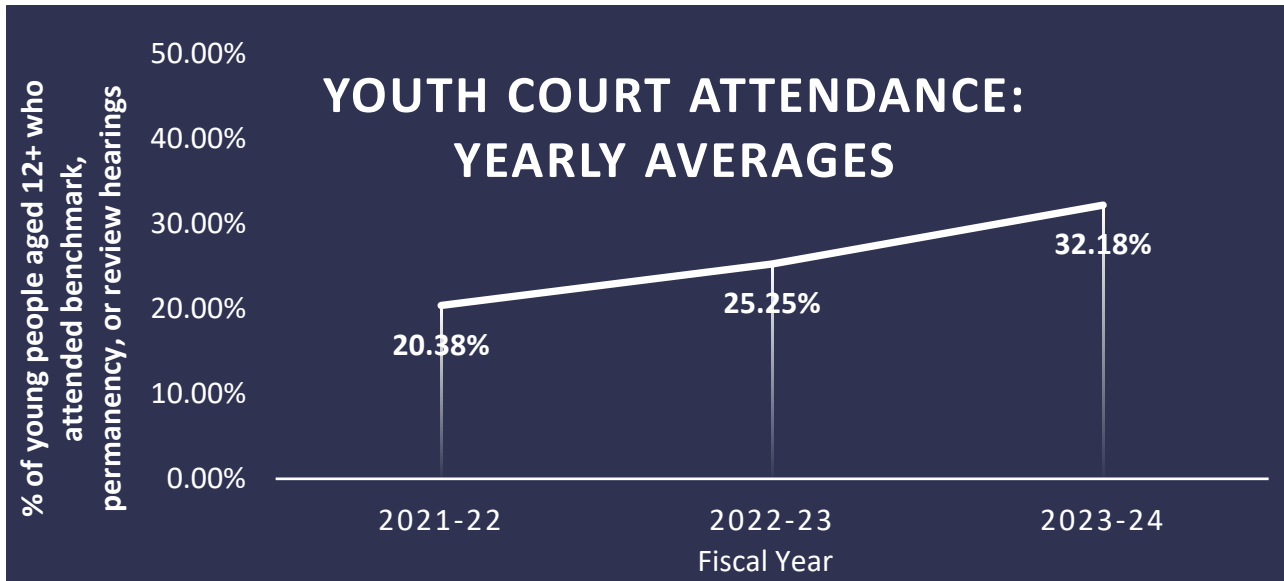
*"He listens and he does a really good job trying to build a connection so that we can trust him."*

- Youth feedback about an OCR attorney

- Planned and co-facilitated LEAP meetings along with OCR's Engaging and Empowering Youth Attorney.
- Trained GALs, CFY, and other stakeholders during OCR's Core Competencies I, statewide CASA meeting, National Council of State Legislators, the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) conference, National Permanent Connections Summit sponsored by the Selfless Love Foundation, and ABA Children's Lawyers Connect Group.
- Planned, facilitated, and participated in Colorado Youth Awareness Week leadership panel.
- Collected youth surveys and provided young people information about FosterEd and FYTP.
- Provided input about legislation, including a bill of rights for young people in foster care.
- Participated in the Colorado Child Welfare Codesign Steering Committee, Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Multidisciplinary and Cross-Jurisdictional Training Project, and Colorado High-Quality Family Time Task Group.
- Served as Colorado Ambassadors to this year's National Youth in Transition Database review in Colorado.
- Five members participated in a state workshop with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and two members traveled to MIT to participate in the national workshop.
- Partnered with project Foster Power to train GALs/CFY about the importance of activities for children/youth in foster care.
- Completed: "9 things LEAP Wants GALs, CFY, & Judicial Officers to Know about Juvenile Delinquency Adjudications & Sentences" and "Transition to Adulthood Checklist & Online Quizzes."

## Youth in Court

For years, OCR has worked to increase youth participation in court through training, resource creation, data sharing, and myth-busting. OCR's youth in court efforts were bolstered when all children and youth were given the right to attend and fully participate in their D&N proceedings through HB22-1038. OCR has seen an increase in youth involvement in court over the past several years:



OCR presented at the NACC online conference in September 2023 on Meaningful Child/Youth Participation in Child Welfare Hearings, and at the Colorado Court Improvement Program Best Practice Convening in April 2024. These presentations focused on policies, challenges, and strategies and featured various data sources regarding youth attendance and participation, including OCR's youth attendance data, the results of a state-wide survey OCR administered to judicial officers, attorneys, and other professionals, and youth surveys. Comparing youth survey results to professional's identification of perceived barriers to court attendance helped dispel some myths and identify concrete strategies to support court participation. OCR continues to run and disseminate reports for judicial districts and train attorneys, judicial officers, and other stakeholders on this topic.

*"She always asked what I want and what I want her to say during court or anything like that, what goals I want to achieve, personal things I want, all of it. She told me I was able to speak in court or whatever I wanted. I was very aware of what was going on."*

- Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney

## Oversight and Evaluation to Ensure Effective Attorney Services

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OCR attorneys must comply with the professional standards required of all attorneys and are also held to high practice standards specific to this area of practice. Each year, OCR attorneys are evaluated using data related to compliance with those standards. CJD 04-06 limits full-time GAL/CFY to 100 cases or less to ensure attorneys have the capacity to effectively represent their client. OCR's comprehensive evaluation strategy consists of:

- Annual verification process
- Tri-annual renewal process
- New attorney interviews
- Ongoing assessment, periodic reviews, and risk-based sampling of attorney activity

Each year, attorneys contracting with OCR must disclose disciplinary history, verify fulfillment of OCR training requirements, and verify malpractice insurance requirements. Every three years, the OCR requires attorneys to undergo a more involved contract renewal process that includes analysis of additional qualitative data sources. This three-year renewal process is staggered so that one-third of attorneys undergo renewal each year. The annual verification and tri-annual review process requires a review of the following data sources (those in bold only apply to the tri-annual renewal process):

- D&N Initial 30-day Visit Report
- Attorney Discipline Report
- Judicial Officer Stakeholder Survey Report
- Training Verification Form
- Malpractice Insurance Form
- Outstanding Issues Form
- **Court Observation Summary**
- **Case Reference Summary**
- **Writing Sample**
- **One-on-One Interview**
- **Activity in Timeframe Report**
- **Youth Contact Report**
- **Youth in Court Report**
- **Youth Surveys**

Each attorney is reviewed by an OCR staff attorney who assesses any discrepancies between the attorney's data and the established benchmarks. Attorneys who fall outside of the benchmarks are staffed by the OCR to determine what action is necessary. This process promotes consistency and transparency in OCR's contract decisions. In FY24, OCR processed 235 verification and renewal applications and received 42 additional new applications. Additionally, OCR received and reviewed 348 Judicial Officer Surveys, interviewed 184 case references, and conducted 202 court observations. OCR's Information Systems team continues to develop and refine reports to support efficient, standardized, and streamlined processes for reviewing the extensive data.

*"I don't know what I would do without her as my attorney. She would make sure to check how I was feeling about it, always thought about how I felt. One thing I like she said if something is overwhelming I will step out with you."*

*- Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney*

## Information Systems

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OCR's Information Systems (IS) team is focused on maximizing the effectiveness and productivity of the agency by building flexible, highly responsive data and technology solutions at minimal time and financial cost. In-house access to this support is a significant factor in OCR's ability to continually expand programming, provide attorney oversight, focus on contractor and stakeholder needs, and respond to unpredictable demands while remaining administratively lean.

The OCR IS team's expertise in systems design, data modeling, workflow efficiency, user experience, quality control, data analysis, and code languages, including Python, R, SQL/MySQL, VBA, JavaScript, and HTML/CSS, enables OCR to deploy flexible, custom, scalable solutions in-house. For large-scale projects, the team collaborates with external vendors for additional engineering support, leveraging mutual expertise and longstanding partnerships to accelerate OCR's core priorities. High-tech solutions allow OCR to:

- Automate repetitive tasks to increase accuracy and lighten staff and contractors' administrative workload.
- Connect huge volumes of data from a variety of sources to inform and streamline decision-making.
- Innovate new systems based on emergent needs and continually improve existing systems with OCR's exact needs and strategic objectives at the forefront.

## CARES Case Management and Billing System

OCR’s proprietary online case management and billing system (“CARES”) was designed to support OCR attorneys, provide up-to-date budget analyses and projections, and generate tailored data and reports necessary for OCR’s oversight and accountability. CARES queries and reports allow OCR to conduct quarterly reviews of child counts

for each attorney, 30-day initial visit reports, risk-based sampling of high-cost contractors/appointments for the quarter, and much more. An online CARES Help Center provides 24/7 user-friendly tutorials and a variety of detailed self-help articles, saving contractor and staff time. Help Center analytics tell the team which FAQs are consulted most, aiding decision-making about future improvements.

*“Yeah I trust her. I think she is a good soul. I think she is wonderful person. No but if she had a rating out of five, I would give her a ten!”*

- Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney

### CARES Year in Review (FY24):

Active Users	<b>~550</b>
Activities logged by attorneys, CCs, and their staff	<b>724,621</b>
Case management notes entered	<b>392,484</b>
Attachments uploaded	<b>22,984</b>
Invoices generated/exported for state payment	<b>2,825</b>
Line items automatically compiled for review in above invoices	<b>881,945</b>
Help Center views (# of times an article was read)	<b>5,956</b>

The OCR IS team developed a new CARES *Youth Contact Report* in FY24 to support OCR attorneys and legal teams in meeting the CJD requirement to maintain contact with youth on their cases. This report analyzes youth contact dates and hours through metrics such as the percentage of time attorneys spend with youth compared to their overall hours, average number of hours spent with each youth, and average frequency of contact. The data is further broken down by legal team roles, case types, and models of representation (GAL or CFY). The report was made possible due to collaborative innovation across internal teams, the sophisticated data model backing CARES, and deeply impactful youth contact and diligent data entry by legal teams on the ground. The new report prompted meaningful,

*“I trust [my attorney] because for as long as I've known him, he's kept mine and my brothers best interest before anyone else and was able to fight for us when it came down to the judge and if he didn't think the judge was taking into account what we wanted cause the opposite people were fighting back he would say a lot more of what we wanted and what he thought was best as well.”*

- Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney



data-driven discussions with attorneys during their renewal evaluations and allows OCR to access a statewide summary for further analysis.

The OCR IS team was instrumental in the redesigned Youth Section of the OCR website and continued its extensive work and training efforts to bring OCR to the latest statewide accessibility standards.

## Fair and Reasonable Compensation

OCR is statutorily mandated, in C.R.S. 13-91-105, to establish fair and realistic rates of compensation to enhance the legal representation of children. OCR is grateful to the Joint Budget Committee and the General Assembly for the \$5 rate increase pursuant to C.R.S. 21-2-105 (2)(b), effective July 1, 2024, which brings the OCR attorney rate to \$105/hour.

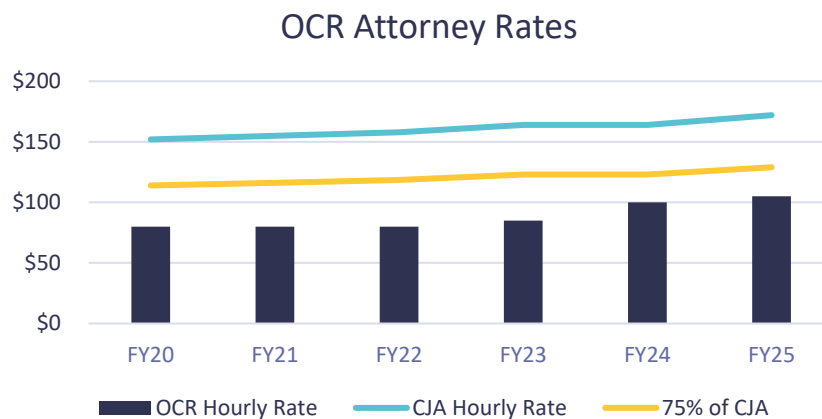
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*I want to thank you for working so hard to get the GALs an hourly rate raise. This raise, while not substantial in amounts, has allowed me to stop chasing other contracts and work and focus on GAL work only. Not having to deal with multiple schedules of multiple courts and different types of cases has allowed me to be more available to my kids and their families and the other professionals when they need me. It has let me be a better GAL. Thank you!*

- Contract Attorney after July 1, 2024 increase

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C.R.S. 21-2-105 requires annual increases until the attorney rate reaches at least 75% of the rate set pursuant to the Federal “Criminal Justice Act Revision of 1986” (“CJA”), which sets attorney rates for indigent representation in federal court. As of January 1, 2024, the CJA rate for non-capital cases is \$172/hour and OCR attorney rates are currently at 61% of the CJA rate:



## Recruitment and Retention

OCR's efforts to attain a more competitive compensation rate addressed above are a vital piece of the agency's recruitment and retention strategy. Outside of compensation, the OCR administers an Attorney Satisfaction Survey to all contract attorneys for the year. OCR strives to be responsive to the feedback from these surveys as part of its retention strategy. In FY24, OCR received 146 Attorney Satisfaction Surveys covering all 22 Judicial Districts. OCR acted in a variety of ways that were responsive to the results of the survey. For example, OCR:

- engaged in an attorney wellbeing program,
- launched a new policy to compensate attorneys for up to 10 CLEs of in-person OCR approved training,
- started a second chair litigation support program,
- expanded payment categories for the CC program,
- and supported HB24-1374, to give contract attorneys the opportunity under new federal guidance to apply for Public Service Loan Forgiveness from the federal government.

Attorneys have responded positively to these changes, one of OCR's new attorneys using second chair litigation support wrote, "[Second chair attorney] is already providing invaluable advice and mentorship on this case" and "Yesterday we had a contested hearing that [Second chair attorney] helped me on and we won. I definitely wouldn't have been as effective without [second chair attorney's] assistance. He has those little tricks of the trade that can only be learned through experience... I really appreciate the second chair support".

OCR's work to recruit and retain a diverse pool of attorneys includes outreach to specialty bar associations and networking, as well as updated applications, interview questions, and job postings. As previously mentioned, OCR welcomed a new staff attorney this year, who is focusing on EDIJ, including expansion of recruitment and retention efforts.

To further these efforts, OCR assigns staff attorneys to be liaisons with specific judicial districts each year. This ensures that each district has a contact who can provide support, training, and who is available to discuss issues specific to the district. The staff attorney liaison assesses the needs of each district by collaborating with judicial officers, meeting with attorneys, and reviewing judicial district filing statistics and OCR appointment data. These assessments ensure attorneys who contract with the OCR are not overwhelmed by their caseloads and can financially sustain a practice.

Additionally, OCR hosts student interns each semester to increase awareness and education about this specialized field of legal practice and to

*"He is a wonderful person. He definitely has the children's interest first and foremost. Reuniting families is something that is very important to him when it's possible to do so, he just really went above and beyond what I would have expected."*

*- Parent feedback about an OCR Attorney*

establish relationships with law schools in Colorado, as well as schools around the nation. Each year, OCR participates in the CU/DU School of Law Public Interest Career Fair and seeks additional opportunities to engage with local law schools.

### Attorney Supports

OCR provides a variety of litigation support to enhance attorney efficiency and keep attorneys and CCs current in relevant subject matter areas. Many of these supports require substantial staff time to create and maintain, and they include:

- **Guided Reference in Dependency (GRID)** – a comprehensive advocacy guide published by the OCR in 2012, rewritten in 2018, updated annually, and rewritten periodically to address comprehensive legal and practice developments. This impressive guide covers 8 hearing specific chapters and 36 factsheets. It also includes practice tips, supporting citations to rule and statute, and case law. OCR has worked diligently throughout FY24 to finalize a comprehensive rewrite of the GRID, incorporating the extensive legislative changes that have occurred over the past three years while infusing practice changes resulting from client-directed representation and elevation of youth voice in proceedings. This comprehensive rewrite requires collaboration with other agencies and provides an important resource for all legal professionals involved in child welfare proceedings.
- **Litigation Toolkit** – contains pleadings, social science resources, and practice tools maintained throughout the year and regularly updated to reflect legal and practice developments. Keeping this resource up to date and relevant requires year-round work and attention.
- **Litigation Support List** – attorneys with subject matter expertise who are approved to consult on cases and assist in high-quality legal representation.
- **Second Chair List** – litigation support through a list of experienced attorneys available to second chair specified hearings.
- **Mentoring Program** – each OCR contract attorney is assigned a district-specific mentor for the first year of their contract.
- **OCR Listserv** - membership is required for OCR contractors, and the listserv provides an excellent forum to disseminate and discuss difficult case issues, trends, case law or legislative updates, new case processes, and recent developments. In FY24, OCR attorneys sent over 900 emails via the listserv.
- **Quarterly Newsletters** - provides up-to-date information on case law updates, legislative updates, training announcements, attorney shout-outs, and more.
- **Westlaw** – OCR provides this comprehensive legal research tool to every OCR contract attorney.
- **Case Staffings** – an online opportunity for attorneys to develop community and seek feedback on case specific issues with other practitioners as well as OCR staff. Staffings are held on a regular basis for D&N, JD, and other case type practitioners.

## Appellate Certification Program

In addition to extensive trial court representation, OCR attorneys are also responsible for ensuring children and youth are represented on appeal. OCR launched the Appellate Certification Program in 2023 to support high quality appellate representation for children and youth. OCR now requires any attorney representing a child or youth in an appeal to have completed OCR's appellate certification program and in FY24 there are 42 Certified Level I appellate attorneys contracting with OCR. In addition, 7 select attorneys are qualified as Level II appellate attorneys with even deeper expertise. Level II attorneys are available to consult with case-carrying attorneys about potential appellate matters and handle cases on appeal for attorneys who are not certified or who request an appellate specialist. OCR's Appellate and Litigation Support Attorney supports the appellate team and hosts monthly meetings for Level II certified attorneys and quarterly meetings for Level I certified attorneys.

*[H]e seems trustworthy and pretty cool dude. He is interested in helping me. I think he does a good job, and is able to understand us, and he is able to put things at the table most people can't."*

- Youth feedback about an OCR attorney

## Case Consultant (CC) Program

Multidisciplinary law practice is a well-accepted best practice that OCR is working to infuse throughout the state. OCR billing policies support attorneys who want to hire their own social work professional, referred to as a case consultant (CC), or attorneys may engage the services of an OCR contract CC to work on specific cases and bill OCR directly. The use of CCs allows additional work on cases at a lower hourly rate, provides social science expertise to complement the attorney's expertise, and can enhance attorney contact with children/youth, independent investigation, and related legal positions. OCR allows for two levels of professionals to fulfill this role. Case Consultant I level professionals must have a license in a relevant field, a Master's in a relevant field, or a Bachelor's in a relevant field plus at least 2 years of relevant experience. Case Consultant II level professionals must be licensed as a Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Professional Counselor (LPC), or Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). OCR contracts directly with 20 CCs who are available state-wide.

To date, OCR CCs have provided expertise in over 750 cases, covering 18 judicial districts. OCR, in partnership with Colorado State University, conducted research regarding the CC program and found that among attorneys, there was a consensus as to the effectiveness of collaboration with social workers. 72.3% of attorneys agreed or

*"CCs have been amazing for keeping costs in check but more importantly for providing different perspectives and specialized knowledge. I do not believe that I would be as effective in my representation without using CCs*

- Attorney feedback about the CC program

strongly agreed that CC presence improved their ability to advocate for clients' interests and 68% agreed or strongly agreed that CC presence improves client engagement.

## OCR Allocation

OCR strives to be efficient and effective in utilizing its annual appropriation. OCR's budget is driven largely by attorney activity and caseloads. For example, the court-appointed counsel ("CAC") appropriation is driven strictly by the caseload and workload of contractor billing. OCR does not control the number of appointments, as these are made by courts. In contrast, OCR does control non-CAC expenditures and endeavors to ensure these stay within the annual appropriation. In FY24, OCR

used 91% of its expended funds for attorney services (including the CAC line item) and only 9% for administration. OCR expended \$200,000 (including grant funding received by OCR) to provide high-quality and accessible training. The general assembly passed \$1,750,000 through OCR's budget to Colorado CASA for distribution to local CASA programs. In total, OCR used 91% of its appropriation and reverted \$2.3 million to the general fund.

OCR's Operations Team continues to process invoices and pay contractors with great efficiency. In FY24, OCR staff processed 2,834 invoices through CARES and an additional 843 non-CARES payments while averaging 4.5 days from CARES invoice submission to upload in the state financial system for payment.

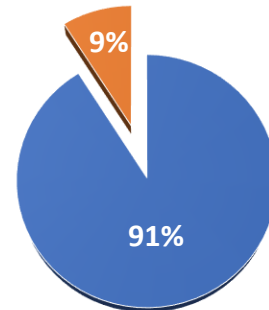
### Title IV-E Funding

OCR is authorized to use IV-E funding to enhance attorney services and utilized \$1,285,697 in FY24 to continue support of multidisciplinary law practice by contracting with additional CCs, reimbursing contract attorneys for their time completing OCR training requirements, and providing holistic legal representation on civil matters related to attorneys' appointed cases.

*"Yes. When it was time for court, she was on top of things and when things needed to be expressed and concerns needed to be addressed she would always step in and talk to the judge and inform the judge on what was going on."*

- Caregiver feedback about an OCR Attorney

FY 24 Administrative Expenditures  
(through 6/30/24)



■ Legal services for children/youth ■ Admin. costs

### Civil Legal Services

OCR began work with the Colorado Homeless Legal Project in FY24 to provide collateral legal services on civil matters, delivering holistic legal representation

to children and youth involved in D&N and JD cases. The fledgling program served children and youth in 8 counties, including both metro and rural areas, regarding housing security, family law, protection orders, financial conservatorship, expungement, social security, and name changes. The legal successes for these youth impacted the trajectory of their lives and removed barriers to employment, housing, and life success. Feedback from attorneys has been overwhelmingly positive and OCR looks forward to growing the program in future years.

## Accessible State-Wide Training

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The General Assembly charged OCR with providing high-quality and accessible training throughout the state, and OCR contract attorneys are required to complete at least 10 hours of OCR-sponsored or approved training, including at least 2 hours of EDIJ specific training. To meet this requirement, OCR has developed a learning and practice environment that infuses EDIJ principles throughout and focuses on four overarching core competencies as the foundation of high-quality representation:

- Ethics/Role of the GAL, CLR, or CFY
- Substantive Knowledge
  - Federal and state law
  - Social science and cultural competency
  - Systems context
- Skills
  - Out of court advocacy
  - In-court advocacy
  - Effective engagement with youth and professionals
  - Conducting a meaningful independent investigation
- Law Practice Management

To support this learning and practice environment, OCR offers periodic staffings by case type (e.g., FYTP, CFY, youth justice, appellate litigation support, CLR, probate) where attendees can assess needs and create a community of shared knowledge and information. In addition to the overarching competencies, OCR focuses on key priorities each fiscal year. These priorities are informed by:

- OCR's WIG and performance goals
- Contractor needs identified by the Attorney Satisfaction Survey and monthly case-type staffings
- LEAP input and recommendations
- New state and federal legal and practice developments

In FY24, the training priorities were:

- Disabilities: early intervention and intervention for children and youth; ADA
- Kinship and family connections
- Older youth: advocacy, services, supports, and client engagement

OCR often delivers training when requested by judicial districts, state and national organizations, and other professionals and not all of these qualify for CLE credits. In FY24, OCR provided 79 new CLEs:

- Core Competencies I: Orientation for New Attorneys and Case Consultants
- Core Competencies II: Advanced Training for New Attorneys and Case Consultants
- OCR Annual Fall Conference
- OCR Annual Spring Conference
- D&N Case Law & Legislative Update
- Youth Justice Legislative Update
- OCR Billing Update
- Increasing Access to Opportunities
- Trial Skills Training
- Educational Advocacy: Preparing for the School Year
- Educational Advocacy: Preparing for the End of the School Year
- COLAP Presents: Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence
- Excellence in Youth Defense Conference

*“He never made me feel like I was being rushed and he always wanted to be sure that we understood the next step of what he would be doing. I thought that was pretty awesome. He was positive. He even followed up after the court case to see how [the child] was doing.”*

*- Parent Feedback about an OCR Attorney*

Training in the areas of the law covered by OCR attorneys requires a nimble approach as the law is continually evolving and therefore the OCR training program must continually change to remain up-to-date and relevant. At the end of FY24, OCR has a total of 303 current and up-to-date hours of CLEs available online for easy accessibility across the state. Additionally, OCR offers scholarships to state and national conferences to support contractor learning and community building. OCR offered a total of 21 scholarships to attorneys in FY24.

To further enhance learning opportunities and state-wide accessibility, OCR has developed a curriculum for e-learning through on-demand courses. Currently, OCR offers:

- Indian Child Welfare Act: Quick Guide
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status: Quick Guide
- Appellate Certification Course
- Core Competencies training topics: sources of law in dependency & neglect cases; educational advocacy, stages of a dependency & neglect case, stages of a juvenile delinquency case

## CASA Overview and Update

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OCR works with Colorado CASA to support Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) as established in 19-1-213. While GALs and CFY are appointed on every case and serve as the child's legal advocate, CASAs are appointed for a portion of children by the Court to provide additional information and support. CASA is currently operating in 18 of the 22 judicial districts, and each program operates under a memorandum of understanding between the program and the chief judge of the district. The CASA role and expectations are set out in C.R.S. 19-1-201 et seq. Although each local program is unique, similarities do exist. CASA volunteers must meet minimum requirements, pass background checks, and successfully complete a mandatory 30- or 40-hour training program based on the curriculum created by the National CASA Association. Local CASA programs also require additional training for volunteers. Most CASA volunteers concentrate their service on one case at a time, and typically a volunteer must commit to 18 months of service (though many volunteers serve throughout the life of a case). CASA volunteers monitor and increase support to counter the effect of trauma and increase children's resilience, education success, health and overall well-being. They focus on permanency, safety, education, health, development, relationships, extracurricular activities, and transition to adulthood. While GALs and CASA volunteers generally work collaboratively and are each required to provide independent information to the court, their roles differ in significant ways. A GAL is a licensed attorney and is an active party in all litigation related to the best interests of the child; volunteers are non-attorney advocates who provide written reports to the court and parties, establish supportive relationships with children, youth, parents, kin, and placements. OCR supports Colorado CASA by serving as the pass-through agency for general fund dollars and providing technical support and consultation regarding IV-E reimbursement. In FY24, 1,834 citizens volunteered as CASAs in 2,042 D&N cases, serving 3,528 children and youth.

## Conclusion

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OCR is incredibly proud of its staff, the members of LEAP, and the hard-working attorneys who represent children and youth across the state in this meaningful and difficult area of the law. The strides made in FY24 to further the rights of children and youth in Colorado are an exciting step and OCR is committed to thoughtful implementation that ensures children and youth benefit from the enacted changes to law and policy.

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*“Majority of the time she would ask if there was anything I wanted her to say to the judge. She would advocate for me a lot which I like about her. Yes. I don't trust too many people and I trust her because we built that connection.”*

*– Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney*

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## Appendix A

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### OCR Committee Work

OCR's mission, vision, and values inform the work of staff as they participate in a wide variety of committees, taskforces, and working groups. This work is essential to successfully advocating for children and youth in state-level policy and administration. The following is the list of OCR committee involvement.

**Colorado Supreme Court Standing Committee on Family Issues:** This committee was established by the Supreme Court as a result of the recommendations of the Colorado Supreme Court Commission on Families. OCR's Executive Director serves on this committee.

**Child Focused Innovative Practices Subcommittee:** This subcommittee is charged with exploring innovative ways to serve Colorado's children in domestic relations and other court cases in Colorado. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

### Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

**Children's Justice Act Task Force:** Reviews and evaluates state investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities, and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal. The taskforce makes policy and training recommendations to child welfare agencies and the judiciary and makes recommendations regarding the distribution of federal CJA funds. OCR's Training Director serves on this task force.

**Colorado Youth Detention Continuum Advisory Board (CYDC):** CYDC is implemented locally within each of Colorado's 22 Judicial Districts. The Advisory Board is responsible for developing an allocation formula and allocating funds from the General Assembly for these programs. In addition, this group is examining the services and placements necessary to ensure ongoing implementation of SB71 and the detention bed cap. OCR's Youth Justice Attorney is a member.

**Colorado Youth Leadership Network (COYLN):** Leaders of groups who work with young people who have been through the child welfare and/or delinquency system(s), share and coordinate efforts of their groups, and plan each year's Youth Awareness Week, which emphasizes positive youth voice, celebrates the influence youth have in our state and local communities, and recognizes the organizations/advocates who collaborate with Colorado youth and help guide them toward positive life choices and stability. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**Kinship Foster Care Certification Task Group:** This group continues to draft recommended revisions to CDHS regulations related to the requirements for kinship caretakers of Colorado children/youth placed through child welfare cases. OCR's Deputy Director is participating.

**Training Steering Committee:** The Training Steering Committee is the decision-making body for the Division of Child Welfare Training System Academy. The Steering Committee provides continuous evaluation of the training program, reviews the training needs of the state, provides direction for standardized training, creates and integrates statutes, policies, and practices into state-wide training. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

**Permanency Task Group:** A subcommittee of the Child Welfare Sub-Pac working on various permanency related issues including identifying barriers to permanency, possible solutions and

financial needs, and focusing on disrupted/dissolving of adoptions. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney serves on this committee.

**DYS State Policy Review Committee:** A DYS-assembled committee that allows stakeholders to discuss pending DYS policies and changes. As a member, OCR's Youth Justice Attorney reviews these policies and provides input on how policies may impact the best interests of youth in facilities.

**Statutory/Rules Review Group:** A multi-agency group that looks at necessary statutory and rule changes in child welfare. OCR's Deputy Director participates in this group.

**CDHS Chafee Quarterly:** The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program, formerly the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program) was created after the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 (Public Law 106-169). The program provides assistance to youth currently and formerly in foster care to successfully transition to adulthood by providing activities and programs such as education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and connections to supportive adults. During the CDHS Chafee Quarterly Meetings, personnel from CDHS and county departments discuss the Chafee Program and other similar programs and resources available to older Colorado youth. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney attends.

**CDHS Training Steering Committee Subgroup:** This is a time-limited state-wide subgroup of the CDHS Training Steering Committee to assess and develop strategies and resources for working collaboratively with other professionals. OCR's Training Director serves on this subcommittee.

**SB23-039 Workgroup:** This is a time-limited workgroup that will work to develop regulations to facilitate contact and communication between children in D&N cases and parents who are incarcerated in Colorado facilities. OCR's Deputy Director serves as a member of this workgroup.

**Domestic Violence Flags Workgroup:** This workgroup is tasked with developing and implementing a consistent screening process for a county department to follow, when possible, in responding to a report or inquiry to the hotline system. The state department is required to develop and implement a disclosure procedure that notifies callers to the hotline system that calls are recorded. OCR's Case Consultant Coordinator is participating in this workgroup.

**Reimagining Child Welfare Steering Committee:** This committee brings people with lived experience, child welfare experts, legislators, state agencies, and community members together to transform the child welfare system into a valuable resource that families would choose to utilize. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member of the steering committee and participates in the recruitment and retention subcommittee.

**Colorado Child Fatality Prevention Review Team:** The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's state-wide multidisciplinary team examines every child death in Colorado. The committee is charged with compiling statistical analysis, trends, and recommendations to reduce child fatalities. OCR's Executive Director serves on this committee.

**Court Improvement Program (CIP):** The CIP focuses on improving the justice system for children, especially children in dependency and neglect cases. Specifically, the CIP oversees the federal grant given to each state that is to be utilized to improve the Dependency Court System and oversees the DANSR cross-

systems collaboration. **Best Practices CIP Taskforce** comprises 10 leaders in child welfare, including OCR's Executive Director, who serves as an executive member. OCR's Deputy Director serves as a non-executive member.

OCR staff also serve on the following CIP groups:

**Best Practice Court Team & Family Treatment Drug Court Convening Planning Committee:** A multidisciplinary committee convened by the State Court Administrator's Office for the purpose of planning the annual BPCT/FTDC Convening for judicial district teams. OCR's Training Director serves on this subcommittee.

**Best Practice Court Team Redesign Workgroup:** OCR's Training Director is a non-executive member.

**Colorado Dependency & Neglect Judicial Institute Planning Committee:** A multidisciplinary committee convened by the State Court Administrator's Office and Dean of the Institute for the purpose of planning the annual D&N Judicial Institute for judicial officers in dependency court. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

**Jefferson County Joint DANSR/FIT Court Advisory Committee:** Jefferson County has been selected as a grant recipient of a Prevention and Family Recovery grant, an initiative undertaken by Children and Families Futures to work with established family treatment courts to integrate and institutionalize evidence-based services into their larger systems of care. OCR's Youth Justice Attorney serves on the advisory committee.

**Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Council:** The Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Council is appointed by the Governor as the State Advisory Group pursuant to the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and is charged under the Act to advise and make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on juvenile justice issues. The Council reviews and approves applications for federal grant funding through the JJDP Act, monitors and evaluates projects funded, and oversees compliance with the core requirements of the JJDP Act. OCR's Youth Justice Attorney is appointed to the Council.

**Code Review Committee:** The committee is reviewing Article 2 of Title 19 to promote improvements to, increasing the ease of use and clarity of laws regarding juvenile justice, ensuring the Code complies, or is consistent, with current research and evidence-based policies and practices. OCR's Youth Justice Attorney serves on this committee.

**Colorado CASA Public Policy Committee:** OCR Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is a member of the CASA Public Policy Committee.

### **Colorado Bar Association**

**Juvenile Law Section (JLS):** The JLS "[p]rovides an organization available for all lawyers whose practice brings them in contact with matters affecting young people. Though a major focus concerns practice under the Children's Code, the committee is also concerned with relevant aspects of education law, domestic relations, agency/administrative law, and disability law." Various OCR staff are members and OCR Deputy Director is a co-editor for the Juvenile Law section of the Colorado Lawyer.

**Colorado Supreme Court Rules of Juvenile Procedure Committee:** The Committee's purpose is to periodically review, correct, update, and improve the Colorado Rules of Juvenile Procedure. The

Committee is chaired by the Honorable Craig R. Welling of the Colorado Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court Liaison to the Committee is Justice Richard L. Gabriel. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney is a member of this committee and serves on the following subcommittees: Drafting and Indian Child Welfare Act.

**Colorado Judicial Department Child Welfare Appeals Workgroup:** Established pursuant to 19-1-109(3), this committee considers necessary changes to practices, rules, and statutes in order to ensure that appeals in D&N cases are resolved within six months of filing. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney serves on this workgroup and participates in the following subcommittees: Practitioners, Timelines to Permanency, Records, and Rule 3.4.

**Legislative Committees:** Legislation passed by the General Assembly requires implementation by the Executive and Judicial Branches. OCR staff participate in multidisciplinary committees in order to affect the General Assembly's intent.

**Treatment of Persons with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal Justice System Taskforce (reauthorized pursuant to SB14-021):** Directed to examine the identification, diagnosis, and treatment of persons with mental illness who are involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, including the examination of liability, safety and cost as they related to those issues. OCR's Youth Justice Attorney serves as a member of the taskforce.

**Human Trafficking Council (HB 14-1273):** The purpose of the council is to bring together leadership across various levels of government and the community in a collaborative coalition to help combat human trafficking. The Council is expected to improve comprehensive services for victims and survivors of human trafficking, assist in the successful prosecution of human traffickers, and enhance human trafficking prevention efforts in Colorado. OCR's Executive Director is a member of the council.

**Substance Abuse Trend and Response Taskforce (SB 13-244):** In 2013, the General Assembly reauthorized the Colorado State Methamphetamine Taskforce under the name "Substance Abuse Trend and Response Taskforce" with representatives of state government, local governments, and the private sector, including legislators, child advocates, public health officials, drug treatment providers, child welfare workers, law enforcement officers, judges, and prosecutors. OCR's Case Consultant Coordinator is a member of the taskforce.

**High Quality Parenting Time Taskforce (HB21-1101):** The HQPTTF was created to research and review best practices in family time and make recommendations for family time improvement in Colorado. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is a member of the Steering Committee and a voting member of the taskforce.

**Timothy Montoya Taskforce to Prevent Youth from Running from Out-of-Home Placement (HB22-1375):** The taskforce will meet over two years to analyze the root causes of why children run away from out-of-home placement; develop a consistent, prompt, and effective response to recovering missing children and to address the safety and well-being of a child upon a child's return to out-of-home placement. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is an appointed member of the taskforce.

**Mandatory Reporting Taskforce (HB22-1240):** The taskforce will analyze the effectiveness of and issues with the law requiring individuals from specific professions to report suspected child abuse to authorities. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is an appointed member of the taskforce.

**Safe Babies State Advisory Group (SAG):** SAG helps guide the statewide expansion of Colorado's Safe Babies approach, supports Safe Babies implementation fidelity, and addresses disparities that impact both the Safe Babies approach and the population that it serves. OCR's Executive Director participates in the advisory group.

**Celebration of Educational Excellence (CEEX):** Recognizes young people involved in foster care or youth services who graduated from high school, received a GED, or obtained a college degree each year. Graduates can attend a resource fair to connect with organizations that can support their future success. OCR's Youth Empowerment attorney serves on the CEEX planning committee.

**Coalition for Reducing Racial & Ethnic Disparities (CRRED):** The mission of the CRRED is to ensure fair and equal justice for all juveniles by overseeing policies that address social, cultural, economic, and educational roots of the disproportionate representation of minorities in the juvenile justice system. OCR's Case Consultant Coordinator is a member.

**Advisory Council for Homeless Youth (ACHY):** This multidisciplinary council shares resources and information relevant to homeless youth and plans Colorado's Homeless Youth Awareness Month. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney attends meetings.

**Systemic Family Engagement/Steering Committee:** This multidisciplinary committee aims to re-imagine the child welfare system for the next seven generations, based largely on the input from children/youth and families who have experienced the system. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**American Bar Association Section of Litigation Children's Rights Litigation Committee – Children's Lawyers Connect:** This strategy group monitors developments impacting children's right to counsel and works to improve access to justice, engage pro bono lawyers, and improve outcomes for all children who have contact with the legal system. OCR's Deputy Director is a committee member.

**The Family Justice Initiative:** A national collaborative who share a common goal: to increase access to high-quality legal representation for children and parents in child welfare cases. It is led by the ABA Center on Children and the Law, the Children's Law Center of California, and the Washington State Office of Public Defense. OCR's Deputy Director is participating in the initiative.

**FJI Quality Workgroup:** This workgroup creates tools and provides expertise to improve the quality of legal representation for families across the country. Research of parent representation programs has shown that interdisciplinary legal teams that are well-trained, fairly compensated, and have reasonable caseloads help families reunify more quickly without compromising child safety. One of the tools this group is working on is an anti-racist toolkit. OCR's CC Coordinator participates in the subcommittee.

**National Association of Child Counsel (NACC) State Coordinator:** NACC established a state coordinator program to expand outreach and localized support efforts to a growing network of child welfare attorneys. OCR's Staff Attorney & Legislative Liaison serves as the Colorado state coordinator.

**Children's Law Office Project (CLOP):** Designed to improve the delivery of legal services to children in abuse and neglect cases through improved child law office operation and management. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison participates.