



# **CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN**

**FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021  
QUARTER FOUR PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

**July 16, 2021**

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## Fiscal Year 2020-21 Strategic Policy Initiatives

The CPO is pleased to share this Quarter Four Performance Evaluation that tracks the agency's performance on its Strategic Policy Initiatives (SPI). SPI help to ensure that the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) is effectively and efficiently implementing practices to address system-wide issues impacting the child protection system, while also providing a high quality of service for citizens seeking one-to-one assistance.<sup>1</sup> SPI are intended to guide the agency's work for multiple fiscal years. To create meaningful change, the CPO regularly updates SPI as the needs and resources of the agency expand, and as the field of child protection changes.

Though Quarter Four Performance Evaluations are intended to summarize agencies' performance on SPI from April 1<sup>st</sup> through June 31<sup>st</sup>, the CPO is sharing information from January 1<sup>st</sup> through June 31<sup>st</sup> – effectively covering both the third and fourth quarters of the Fiscal Year (FY). The CPO is overseen by the CPO Board and agency staff routinely provide public updates regarding the agency's performance during bi-monthly board meetings.<sup>2</sup> Due to the amount of reporting required of the agency, the CPO is meeting the requirements of C.R.S. §2-7-204 by publishing two quarterly evaluations per year; however, as indicated, each report will present performance information regarding two quarters.

In its FY 2020-21 Performance Plan, the CPO identified three SPI to help guide the agency's work in the areas of communication and outreach, efficient and impactful practices, expanding expertise and promoting best practices. They include:

- Targeting communications and engagements to better educate and serve citizens and stakeholders.
- Implementing practices that ensure the CPO manages its caseload efficiently and effectively, allotting staff the necessary time and resources to research systemic concerns.
- Establishing the CPO as a leader in information gathering and dissemination as it relates to issues facing the child protection system.

Each SPI has corresponding *strategies*, *critical processes* and *key metrics* that help demonstrate the CPO's performance towards achieving the SPI. These are detailed later in this document.

Key takeaways from quarters three and quarter four of FY 2020-21 include how the agency:

- Surveyed legislators to learn the key issues they and their constituents are currently interested in. These include foster parent issues, family services and funding/resources to support Colorado's child protection system. Upon request, the CPO engaged nine legislators before and throughout the First Regular Session of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to share information about the agency.
- Engaged youth from two organizations – project Foster Power and the Youth Partnership for Health – to learn about the key issues that currently matter to them. One key issue that both groups discussed was internet access. Youth from project Foster Power voiced concerns about not having the same access to internet as their peers who live at home, and youth from the Youth Partnership for Health voiced concerns about rural youths' access to internet. Both groups emphasized the heightened need for internet during the pandemic. Additionally, project Foster Power youth voiced that they would benefit from education regarding their rights while in an out-of-home placement, including who they may contact when their needs are not being met.

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<sup>1</sup> The CPO's enabling statutes can be found in C.R.S. §19-3.3-101 through §19-3.3-110.

<sup>2</sup> CPO Board meeting minutes can be accessed online at <https://coloradocpo.org/staff-board/>.

- Published an Issue Brief about foster youths’ rights while in foster care. The publication, “*Strengthening Colorado’s Foster Youth Protection Laws*,” echoes several of the concerns that youth from project Foster Power voiced and discusses how Colorado can improve its law to better serve youth in foster care.
- 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 during quarter four.

The CPO is committed to establishing and tracking performance metrics. Please reach out to the CPO with any questions or for additional information.

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

The CPO is statutorily required to educate citizens and stakeholders “concerning child maltreatment and the role of the community in strengthening families and keeping children safe.” See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(c). The CPO has identified the following strategies, critical processes, key metrics and outcomes as ways to become more accessible to the public and improve the consistency in which it shares its work with 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>3</sup>**

### **Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Ensure CPO products are placed on the CPO’s website in a timely manner.
- Develop a notification system to notify the public/stakeholders of new products released by the CPO (e.g., Mailchimp notification system).

### **Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of notifications sent to the public/stakeholders.
- The CPO will track that it is posting products to the website in a timely manner.

### **Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During quarters three and four, the CPO published blog posts, issue briefs and notices of public meetings in accordance with internal timelines. To notify the public and stakeholders of new CPO work product, Mailchimp was used to email newsletters four times over the course of both quarters.

Additionally, in Quarter Four, the CPO began collecting the information for county departments of human services’ individualized reports. The reports detail how many cases the CPO worked on within a county department’s jurisdiction over the course of the fiscal year and how each case was resolved. These reports are disseminated annually and ensure the CPO is continuously communicating its work to county departments.

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<sup>3</sup> CPO products include any written reports or other publications detailing issues reviewed by the CPO. These may include recommendations for system improvement.

The CPO is working to further complete, publish and provide notices of CPO products in a timely fashion and aims to continue working on key activities during the next 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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Send legislators a survey asking about their interest, and their constituents' interest, in child protection issues.
- Analyze data regarding interests to develop and target communications.
- Provide a CPO orientation presentation for new members of the General Assembly during Quarter Two.
- Provide all legislators with a presentation detailing the CPO's work, including issues identified by the CPO.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of engagements.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Three, the CPO disseminated a survey for legislators to capture which child-protection related issues they and their constituents are most interested in. The survey also identified legislators that were interested in meeting with the CPO to learn more about the agency's work. Twenty of Colorado's 100 legislators responded to the survey. After analyzing their responses, the CPO identified three key issues that legislators are interested in, including foster parent issues, family services and funding/resources to support Colorado's child protection system. Furthermore, the CPO engaged in nine follow-up meetings with legislators to share information about the agency.

During quarters three and four, the CPO presented its annual report to the Joint Judiciary Committee and the Senate and House committees on health and human services. These statutorily required presentations provide the CPO the platform to communicate issues the agency identified through its work, progress towards its goals and its response to the pandemic directly to legislators.

The CPO is working to further communicate issues the CPO has identified to legislators and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

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

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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Attend stakeholder meetings related to child protection issues.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of CPO stakeholder meetings per quarter.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During quarters three and four, 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. During quarter three, CPO staff virtually attended 107 stakeholder meetings, comprising of:

- 3 CPO facilitated meetings;
- 42 external committee meetings; and
- 62 general meetings.

CPO facilitated meetings give the agency the opportunity to guide stakeholder conversations and raise questions, when applicable. External committees provide CPO staff an opportunity to learn more from stakeholders about their work, resources and needs. General meetings often include engaging specific members of state agencies and community organizations to discuss collaborations, CPO work products and/or to learn more from stakeholders about their work, resources and needs.

At this time, data to calculate the total number of meetings attended during quarter four is not available; however, the data will be included in the agency's SMART Act Annual Performance Evaluation that is scheduled for publication on November 1, 2021.

The CPO is working to further communicate issues the CPO has identified to stakeholders and aims to continue working on key activities during the following fiscal year.

***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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Distribute youth-specific materials describing the CPO's services to all agencies, providers and communities serving youth in out-of-home placements.
- Distribute youth-specific materials describing the CPO's services to all DYS youth centers.
- Complete outreach campaigns to increase the CPO's direct contact with youth clients, including those in DYS youth centers and out-of-home placements.
- Meet with youth in DYS youth centers, foster homes, group homes and residential facilities to survey how to best communicate with youths.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of engagements (e.g., calls from youths, CPO visits, etc.).

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Three, the CPO engaged with project Foster Power to learn more about the issues facing youth in out-of-home placements and to share information about the CPO. Additionally, during Quarter Four, the CPO engaged with the Youth Partnership for Health to learn about issues facing youth more generally and to share information about the CPO. One key issue that both groups discussed was internet access. Youth from project Foster Power voiced concerns about not having the same access to internet as their peers who live at home, and youth from the Youth Partnership for Health voiced concerns about rural youths' access to internet. Both groups emphasized the heightened need for internet during the pandemic. Additionally, project Foster Power youth voiced that they would benefit from education regarding their rights while in an out-of-home placement, including who they may contact when their needs are not being met.

In quarters three and four, the CPO was unable to host one-to-one meetings with youth in DYS due to the global pandemic. However, the CPO continued to ensure youth in youth centers could access the agency unfettered. During Quarter Four, the CPO worked with the DYS to ensure handbooks are distributed to every

youth upon admission to a youth center. Handbooks provide youth with important information, including the contact information for youth advocates, such as the CPO.

During quarters three and four, the CPO received 42 complaints regarding the DYS, which represents a 110 percent increase from the previous two quarters.

The CPO is working to further engage directly with youth impacted by the child protection system and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

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

**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Analyze demographic data to identify youth populations that are overrepresented in all areas of the child protection system, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx and youth of color.
- Engage youth in DYS youth centers to discuss their experiences, needs and how the CPO may better serve them.
- Engage youth in out-of-home placements to discuss their experiences, needs and how the CPO may better serve them.
- Complete outreach campaigns to distribute the CPO's Spanish materials to Spanish-speaking youths.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of meetings hosted.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During both quarters, the CPO engaged with youth and the agency continues to engage youth to learn more about their experiences.

The CPO is working to further identify and respond to the needs of youth populations throughout Colorado and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

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

**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Complete outreach campaigns to increase the CPO's direct contact with parent clients.
- Update listserv of agencies, providers and organizations that may help the CPO connect with parent clients.
- Distribute parent-specific materials describing the CPO's services to all agencies, providers and communities serving parents, including parents of youth in DYS youth centers.
- Provide educational opportunities to parents, or entities serving parents, about the CPO's services.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of engagements (e.g., calls from parents, trainings, etc.).

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

Child Protection Ombudsman Villafuerte completed an interview during Quarter Three with the Colorado Trust to discuss how COVID-19 is impacting parents. The interview served as an opportunity for the CPO to share with parents how it can serve as a resource.

The CPO is working to further develop its parent-specific materials and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

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

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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Analyze demographic data to identify parent populations that are overrepresented in all areas of the child protection system, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx and parents of color.
- Engage with parents of youths in DYS youth centers to discuss their experiences, needs and how the CPO may better serve them.
- Engage with parents of youth in out-of-home placements to discuss their experiences, needs and how the CPO may better serve them.
- Engage with foster parents, adoptive parents and kinship providers to discuss their experiences, needs and how the CPO may better serve them.
- Complete outreach campaigns to distribute the CPO’s Spanish materials to Spanish-speaking parents.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of meetings hosted.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

The CPO has yet to begin this critical process and plans to revise this critical process during the next fiscal year.

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

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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Complete outreach campaigns with four organizations/agencies/providers.
- Update listserv of organizations/agencies/providers.
- Provide educational opportunities to interested entities about the CPO’s services.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of engagements (e.g., calls from organizations/agencies/providers, campaigns, etc.).

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Four, the CPO presented to the Court Appointment Special Advocates (CASA) of Adams and Broomfield Counties. The presentation shared how advocates and/or the youth they work with can contact the CPO and discussed the types of services the CPO provides. Additionally, the CPO engaged members of the child protection legal community – including county attorneys, the Office of the Child’s Representative, the Office of Respondent Parents’ Counsel and the Colorado Juvenile Defender Center – to share with them and their stakeholders information about the agency.

The CPO is working to further engage mandatory reporters, services providers, educators, medical providers, mental health professionals and the child protection legal community and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

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

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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Complete two outreach campaigns in different rural judicial districts. During those campaigns, engage with entities such as child welfare departments, court improvement programs, school districts, regional hospitals and law enforcement.
- Update listserv of agencies, providers and organizations.
- Provide educational opportunities to interested entities about the CPO’s services.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of engagements.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

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.**

The CPO is statutorily required “to receive complaints concerning child protection services” and “independently and impartially” investigate complaints. See C.R.S. §19-3.3- 103(1)(a)(I)(A). Additionally, the CPO must work to recommend systemic change “to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.” See C.R.S. §19-3.3-130(2)(e). The CPO has identified the following strategies, critical processes, key metrics and outcomes as ways to help manage caseloads and improve its processes for identifying and issuing recommendations.

*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>4</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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- 100 percent of inquiries resulting an Information/Resource Referrals will be closed within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry.
- 90 percent of inquiries resulting in Assists will be closed within 60 business days.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of Information/Resource Referrals closed within 30 business days.
- The number of Assists closed within 60 business days.

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<sup>4</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](#).

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Three, the CPO closed 96 percent of inquiries resulting in an Information/Resource Referral within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry and 95 percent of inquiries resulting in Assists within 60 business days of receiving the inquiry. During Quarter Four, 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. Considering this accomplishment, the CPO considers this critical process complete.

**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>5</sup>**

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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Assign staff to specific projects strategically to maximize work outputs.
- Ensure work products are produced on a consistent basis to mitigate backlog and overload.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- Backlog and/or overload will be measured and monitored.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During quarters three and four, the CPO executed an online project management system to better allocate staff's time and track progress on projects. Though the system has streamlined the way the CPO approaches its work, significant and sustained caseload increases have created a backlog in the CPO's workflow. The CPO submitted to the Joint Budget Committee a budget proposal for FY 2021-22 seeking additional resources to increase the CPO's staffing levels and the request was granted. The CPO is working to eliminate the backlog in its workflow and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

***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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Provide CPO staff with educational opportunities about ensuring equity in the delivery of CPO services to Colorado citizens.
- CPO staff will meet quarterly to analyze demographic information and CPO case data to identify issues disproportionality impacting communities of color.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The total number of educational opportunities attended.
- The total number of internal reviews.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Three, Child Protection Ombudsman Villafuerte attended a diversity, equity and inclusion discussion hosted by the United States Ombudsman Association and shared key takeaways with staff. Additionally, Claire Hooker and Tiffany Madrid attended a two-part educational series about how to strengthen families using a racial equity lens.

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<sup>5</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](#).

During Quarter Two, the CPO staff established an ongoing staff development series that was anticipated to begin during Quarter Three. The series will promote staff's cultural competency. These sessions were placed on hold during quarters three and four due to staff vacancies and increased caseloads. The CPO plans to continue discussing the principals of diversity, equity and inclusion and ways to promote them in the CPO's work on an ongoing basis.

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

The CPO is charged with recommending systemic changes "to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado." See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(e). To ensure the CPO is maintaining a quality of work that will drive change within the child protection system and sharing information in a timely manner, the agency must ensure its processes are streamlined and efficient, and that recommendations are being considered and/or implemented.

*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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will provide substantive educational content to help inform the public and/or stakeholders.
- Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will systemically change practice statewide.
- Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will systemically change systems statewide.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of Special Initiative projects proposed versus those completed.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Four, CPO staff proposed one Special Initiative project. The CPO will be using its project management template to advance this Special Initiative during the next fiscal year, which is 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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Assign staff to specific projects strategically to maximize work outputs.
- Ensure work products are produced on a consistent basis to mitigate backlog and overload.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- Backlog and/or overload will be measured and monitored.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During quarters three and four, the CPO executed an online project management system to better allocate staff's time and track progress on projects. Though the system has streamlined the way the CPO approaches its work, significant and sustained caseload increases have created a backlog in the CPO's workflow. The CPO submitted to the Joint Budget Committee a budget proposal for FY 2021-22 seeking additional resources to increase the CPO's staffing levels and the request was granted. The CPO is working to eliminate the backlog in its workflow and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

*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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Ensure CPO products are placed on the CPO's website in a timely manner.
- Develop a notification system to notify the public/stakeholders of new products released by the CPO (e.g., Mailchimp notification system).

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of notifications sent to the public/stakeholders.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During Quarter Four, 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.

The CPO is working to further complete, publish and provide notices of CPO products in a timely fashion and aims to continue working on key activities during the next fiscal year.

*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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**Key Activities for FY 2020-21:**

- Determine whether recommendations are being acknowledged and/or implemented.

**Key Metrics and Outcome(s):**

- The number of recommendations acknowledged and/or implemented.

**Quarter Three and Quarter Four Updates:**

During quarters three and four, 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. The Deputy Child Protection Ombudsman is working on ways to communicate this information with the public.

## Conclusion

The Child Protection Ombudsman respectfully submits this report to the Joint Budget Committee and the General Assembly, as is required under C.R.S. § 2-7-204. The CPO will comply with its requirements under the statute and will submit the required reports and evaluations.