



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman

Fiscal Year 2023-24 SMART Act Presentation
Joint Judiciary Committee

January 12, 2024

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How We Serve Colorado Citizens

- **WHO WE ARE**

The CPO is an independent state agency charged with helping youth, families and community members navigate complex child protection systems and educating stakeholders and the public.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- Provide free and confidential services
- Receive calls and online complaints
- Review more than 1,000 cases per year
- Neutrally review case records
- Answer questions and provide information
- Work to resolve concerns at ground level
- Connect people with services and resources

SYSTEMS CHANGE

- Identify and investigate systemic trends
- Illuminate issues within child protection
- Educate the public, legislators, stakeholders
- Collaborate on evidence-based solutions
- Make recommendations to the General Assembly and other policymakers to improve child protection systems and services



Increasing Caseloads

- Record 1,119 contacts in FY 2022-23, resulting in a 14% increase from previous fiscal year
- 80% increase in the number of cases initiated by youth
- Cases are increasingly complex and require more attention and time
- Average annual growth rate of 18%
- Currently, the CPO anticipates opening approximately 1,563 cases in FY 2024-25.

CPO Case History	Total # of Cases
Fiscal Year 2022-23	1,119
Fiscal Year 2021-22	982
Fiscal Year 2020-21	852
Fiscal Year 2019-20	725
Fiscal Year 2018-19	575



Strategic Policy Initiatives

- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Raise awareness of the CPO to ensure every youth and family across Colorado has equitable access to the agency's services
- **SERVICES AND PROGRAMS:** Continue to develop and strengthen efficient and effective CPO practices to better serve Colorado citizens.
- **SYSTEMIC CHANGE:** Collaborate with youth, caregivers, stakeholders and policy makers to advance improvements to child protection services, policies and laws for every community in Colorado.



Community Outreach

- Promote awareness of the CPO among children, youth and young people with lived experience in the child protection system.
- Promote awareness of the CPO among communities of color to increase equitable access to for youth and families disproportionately involved in Colorado's child protection systems.
- Promote awareness of the CPO among rural communities to increase equitable access to services for every community, county and region in Colorado.
- Promote awareness of the CPO among child protection professionals including but not limited to treatment and service providers, educators, medical providers, mental health professionals and the child protection legal community.



Services and Programs

- Provide CPO staff with ongoing education and training.
- Continue to develop efficient and impactful case practices.
- Develop and implement a unique, research-informed process for reviewing critical incidents in Colorado to improve and advance child protection system.



Systemic Change

- Communicate findings, trending data and systemic issues to stakeholders, policymakers and the public.
- Engage youth, caregivers, policymakers, stakeholders and communities in improving Colorado child protection systems through the CPO Policy Collaborative for Children & Families.
- Serve as an independent, neutral and objective resource for legislators on child protection issues.



An Act

HOUSE BILL 22-1240

BY REPRESENTATIVE(S) Froelich and Young, Amabile, Bernett, Boesenecker, Cutter, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Hooton, Jodeh, Kipp, Lindsay, Lontine, Michaelson Jenet, Ricks, Sullivan, Titone, Valdez A.; also SENATOR(S) Fields and Simpson, Buckner, Cooke, Danielson, Hansen, Lee, Pettersen, Rodriguez, Story, Fenberg.

CONCERNING ENHANCING MANDATORY REPORTING FOR PEOPLE REQUIRED TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MAKING AN APPROPRIATION

Be it enacted by the General Assembly that the following be enacted:

SECTION 1. In the following:

19-3-302. Legislator declares that the complex concern and that, in an assembly to protect the best protective services in the best from abuse. It is also the group of counties decides

Capital letters or bold & italic through words or numbers indicate the act.

Colorado's Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee
Hearing One: June 27, 2023

Introduction

Every year, the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) reviews more than 1,000 cases, each of which are brought to the agency by citizens with a concern, frustration or question regarding the state's child welfare system. By design, the CPO is charged with independently assessing these concerns and helping citizens gain clarity regarding these systems.¹ Unlike any other agency in Colorado, the CPO is uniquely positioned in state government to impartially study the child welfare system, through the perspective of the people it impacts.

Since its inception as an independent agency, the CPO has received thousands of cases from parents, youth, siblings, extended family and professionals connected to child welfare systems. Those cases have revealed systemic issues impacting the safety and well-being of children and families in Colorado. They have also highlighted a pervasive erosion of the public trust in child welfare systems in the state.

While the CPO is charged with looking at all entities that serve children and families in Colorado, this committee has specifically requested information regarding issues with how child welfare services are administered in the state.² During the past seven years, the CPO has identified, studied and reported on many of these issues. As such, the CPO is providing four issues currently impacting the child welfare system in Colorado. The CPO has provided a summary of each issue and possible legislative solutions for the committee's consideration.

ISSUE #1: Colorado must find more effective and creative methods to support county departments to ensure that parents involved in child welfare cases receive required monthly face-to-face contacts with caseworkers.

Every month, less than half of all parents involved in child welfare cases in Colorado receive the required monthly face-to-face contacts with child welfare services. Since its inception, one of the most consistent concerns the CPO hears from parents with open cases – including parents whose children have been removed from their care – is that they are not receiving regular contact with child welfare services. Current state data shows that difficulty maintaining such contact is a pervasive issue.

Why It's Important

Inconsistent or insufficient communications with parents or other caregivers can delay the administration of services for children and families, delay needed safety assessments for children and, in some cases, delay the proper return of a child to their parent's care.

After a child welfare case is opened, state regulations require child welfare services to make and document monthly efforts to meet with all parents face-to-face.³ Current data from the Colorado

¹ See C.R.S. 19-3-302-101 to 111.

² See C.R.S. 19-3-302(1)(a)(ii). The CPO does not have authority to review the actions of attorneys or judges. In pertinent part, the CPO's enabling statute states the CPO shall "refer any complaints relating to the judicial department and judicial proceedings, including but not limited to complaints concerning the conduct of judicial officers or attorneys of record, judicial determination, and court processes and procedures to the appropriate entity or agency within the judicial department."

³ See 12 CCR 2509-3, 7.204 – Case Contact Requirements

What factors lead to the increase in the percent of children reported by medical/mental health professionals?

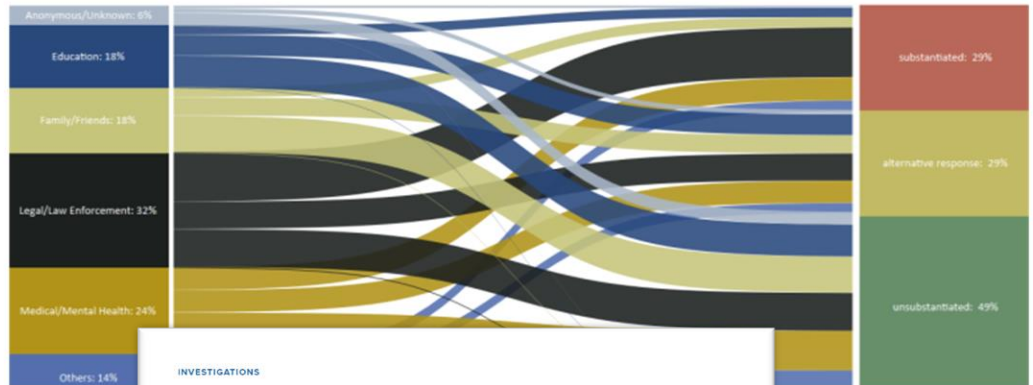
About 1 in 4 children reported by a medical/mental health provider result in a substantiation. Is there equity in dispositional outcomes?

Are different types of child maltreatment allegations called in equitably among reporters?

What might account for the types of maltreatment that medical/mental health professionals report?

Are medical/mental health professionals reporting the 'correct' children the child protection system?

Maltreatment Type



INVESTIGATIONS

State calls for review of years worth of child welfare cases in Washington County

Review suggests that staff at WCDHS held negative opinions of parents, which sparked a request by the State Ombudsman to review all cases between 2018-2022.



Highlights to Date



Where We Are Heading



QUESTIONS?

