

Office of the Child's Representative

Presentation to the Joint Judiciary

January 25, 2021



Office of the Child's Representative

Mission, Vision and Values

OCR Mission

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.

OCR Vision

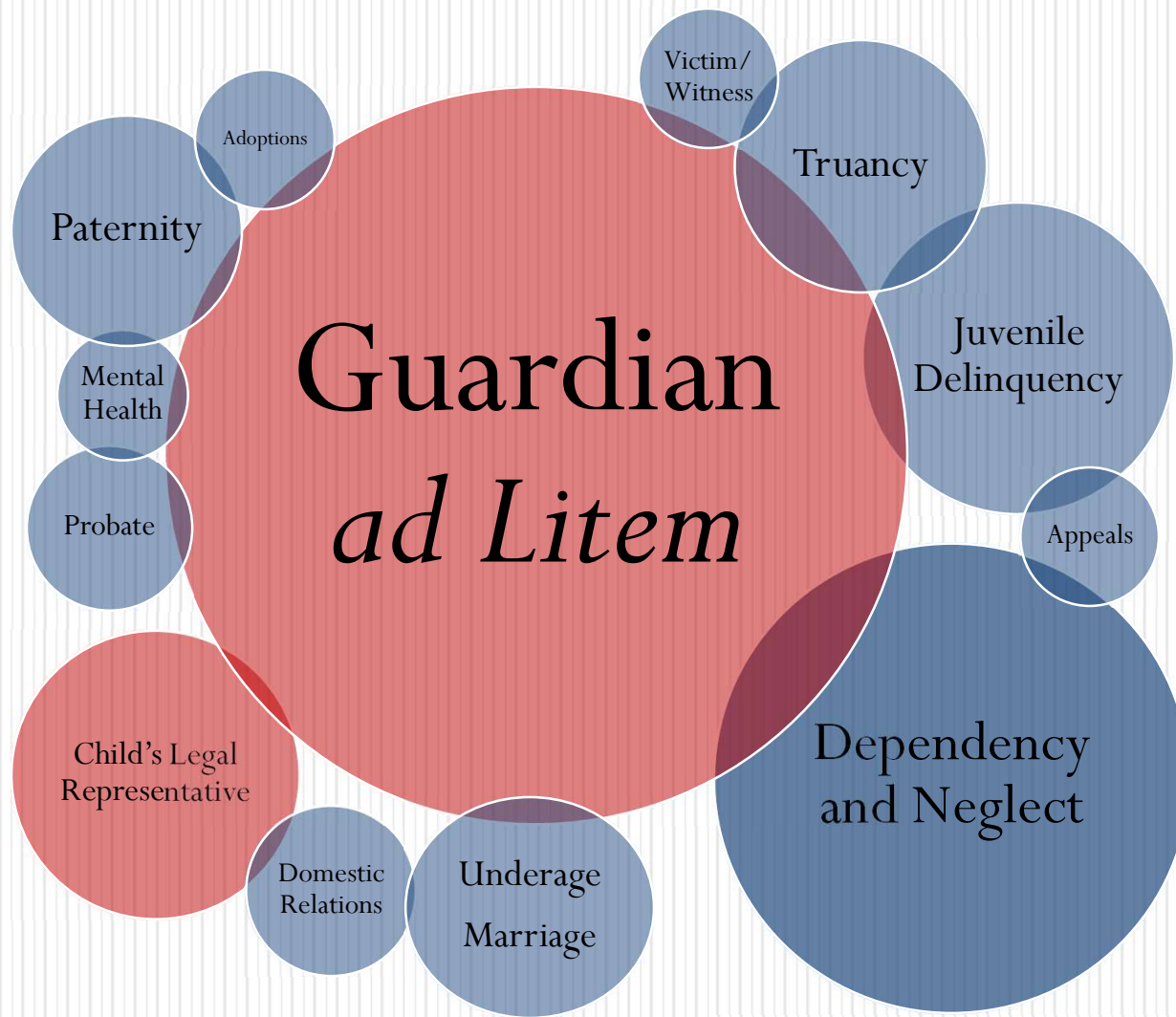
Justice, opportunity, and healthy families for all court-involved children and youth.

OCR Values

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, 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 and honesty. 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.



OCR contracts with approximately 275 attorneys, spanning all 22 judicial districts, who act as Guardians ad Litem (attorneys who advocate for the best interests of a child) for every child involved in a dependency and neglect case and each minor applying for a marriage application, as well as these other case types, at the discretion of the court.

Snapshot of 2020

- Staff working remotely since March 2020
- Developed nationally recognized COVID-19 Resource page
- Launched the Case Consultant Program September 2020
- Continued our work on FFPSA Implementation, Court Improvement Program, and providing high quality training
- Released the Engaging and Empowering Youth Paper and began implementing recommendations

SMART GOAL 1

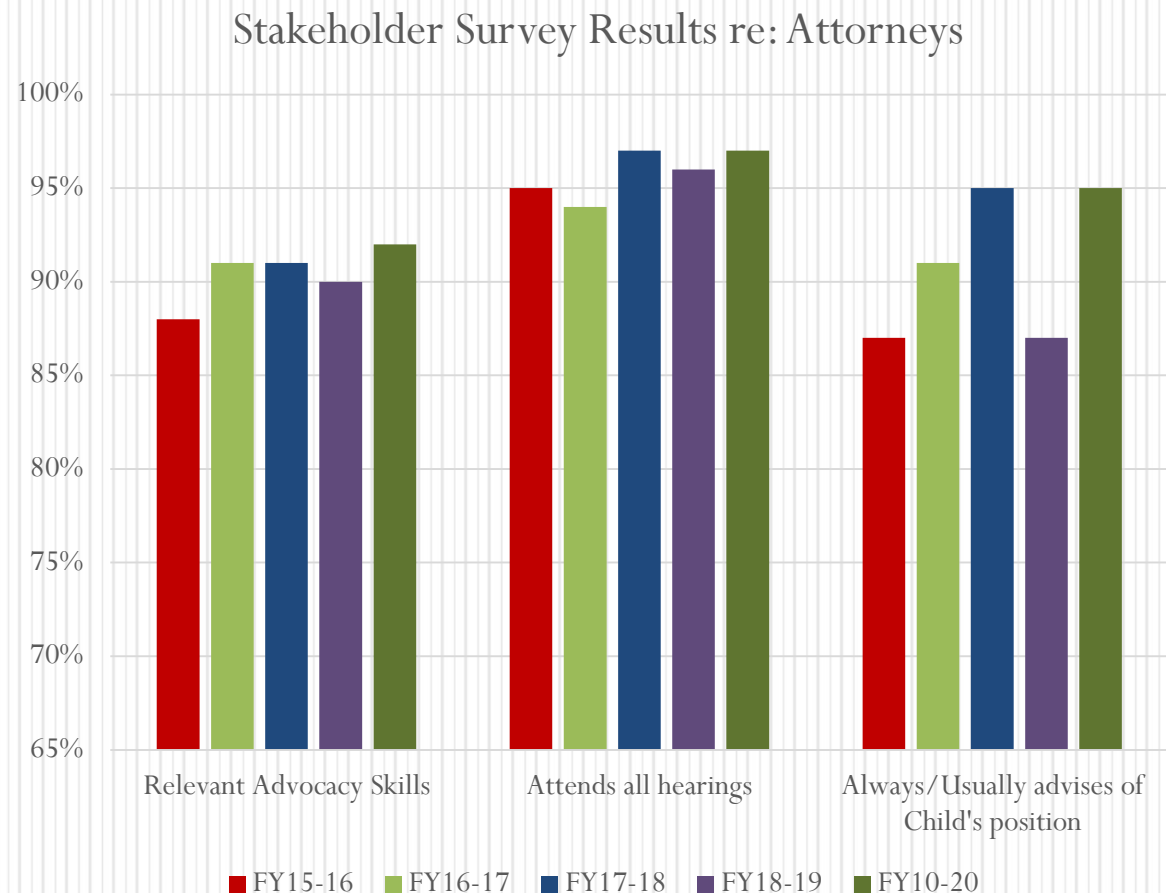
Provide children a voice in the Colorado legal system through effective attorney services and advocacy.

- *Ensure children's voice & interests are paramount throughout the proceedings and in the development of policy, law & practice*
- *Establish attorney qualifications & practice standards*
- *Provide oversight & evaluation of attorney practice*
- *Contract with attorneys based on data illustrating compliance with CJD and OCR practice standards*
- *Ensure attorneys stay within the established child cap*
- *Establish fair and reasonable compensation for OCR attorneys*
- *Investigate alternative models of providing legal representation, including multidisciplinary representation*

GOAL 1: Provide children a voice in the Colorado legal system through effective attorney services and advocacy.

For FY20 the OCR:

- Conducted **252** references interviews (**81** from youth)
- **396** court observations
- Investigated **26** complaints
- Received **1,844** Stakeholder surveys and **85** Youth Surveys
- Completed a comprehensive report on the OCR's **Engaging and Empowering Youth** Program and data collected over the past three years.



SMART Goal 2

The OCR will optimize efficiencies in attorney practice and billing.

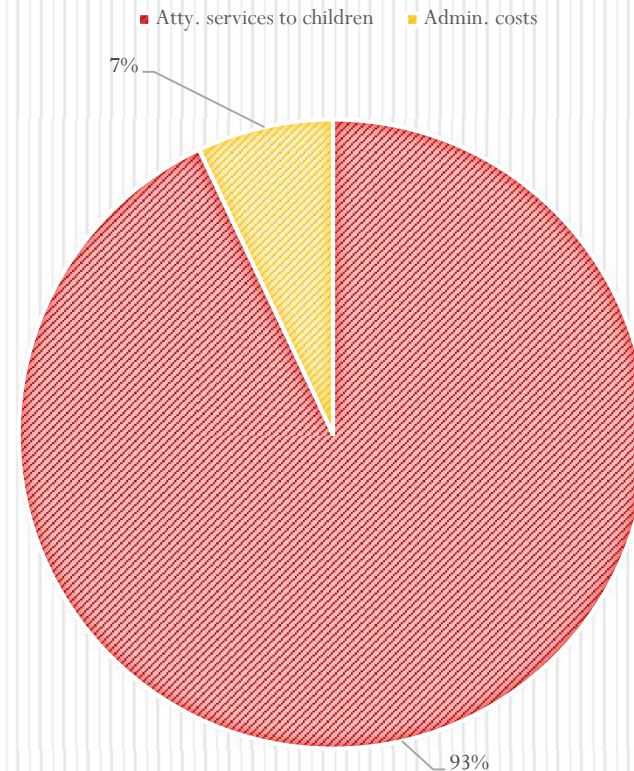
- *Manage appropriations & assess program needs*
- *Assess judicial district needs*
- *Maximize use and effectiveness of OCR CARES (OCR's on-line case management/billing system)*
- *Provide litigation support and facilitate practice innovations*
- *Provide case consultant (CC) support to attorneys*
- *Process, manage, and evaluate attorney billings*

GOAL 2: The OCR will optimize efficiencies in attorney practice and billing.

In FY2020 the OCR:

- Used 93% of expended funds for attorney services.
- Reverted approximately \$3.3 million.
- Periodic Review/Quarterly Reports

FY 20 ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENDITURES



SMART Goal 3

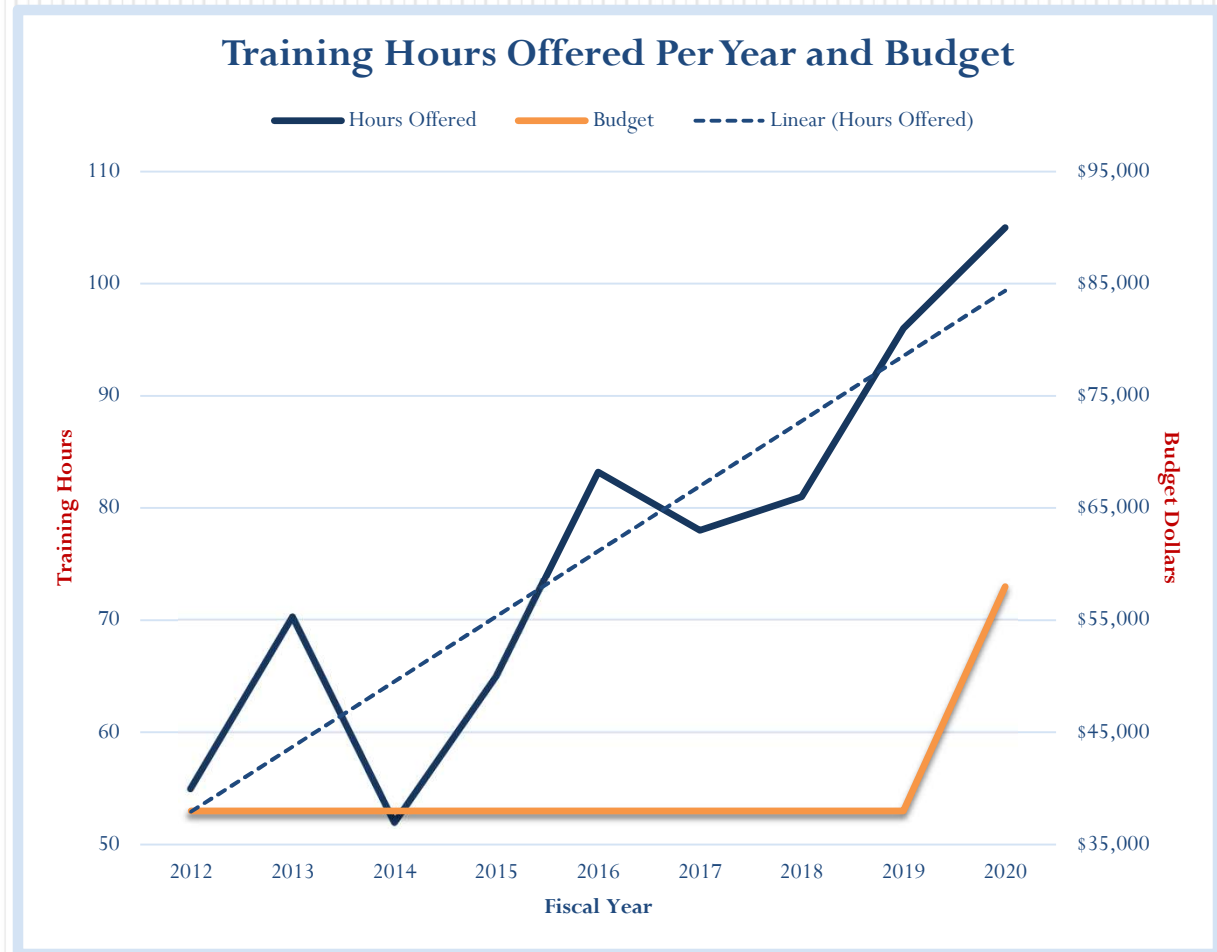
The OCR will ensure attorneys and case consultants remain current in state and federal law and regulations, social science research, best practices in diversity and inclusion and evidence-based services.

- *Cultivate a learning & practice environment that supports excellence in legal representation*
- *Review, update and implement OCR Core Competencies*
- *Assess attorney and case consultant education and support needs*
- *Require attorneys to meet minimum training requirements*
- *Disseminate updates on developments in law, social science and diversity and inclusion*
- *Maintain current and relevant resources for attorney and case consultant use*

GOAL 3: The OCR will ensure attorneys remain current in state and federal law and regulations, social science research and evidence-based services.

In FY2020 the OCR:

- Provided **105.4** new CLE hours of training
- Have a total of **319** CLE hours available online
- Successfully offered Core Competencies and Fall Conference virtually.
- Mentoring program paired **22 attorneys** in 11 different judicial districts



FY2022 Budget Request

Reduction of \$1,984,079 General Fund

Impact of COVID-19 on case filings

Projections and complications

Fulfillment of OCR's statutory mandates

COVID impacts

- Youth in facilities and placement issues
- Isolation of children, many not even in their own homes or with their siblings (increased mental health issues, running away, suicidal ideation, etc.) – GALs need to be more present than ever.
- GALs and COVID exposure
- Other professionals and COVID
- Visitation stopped by Courts/GALs fighting blanket orders
- Court delays and impact on permanency

Contact Us:

Our staff attorneys stay current on state and federal law and remain active in a wide variety of committees and workgroups. Our expertise in child welfare and juvenile law is expansive and we are active in committees and workgroups looking at the Children's Code, FFPSA, ICWA, Juvenile Justice, Human Trafficking, Foster Care, etc. We are always willing to share our knowledge and provide legal research and analysis in areas that impact the work our contract attorneys do or the children/youth they serve.

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"She was really good at finding the bright side in anything, especially with my case. She was great at joking around but still remaining serious. She was great at making sure we always had what we needed and that we were happy. I can't think of a specific instance right now, but looking back at the experience, having her there for me and my sister was probably the best thing that could have happened for us."

"He was the only one to take [what I wanted to see happen] in consideration."

"[My GAL is] one of the few stable things in my life that has stayed there."

- Quotes from youth about their GAL