



STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OMBUDS

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***OFCO Director, Mary Meinig, to Retire After 17 Years of Dedicated Service to
Washington's Children and Families***

Tukwila, WA - Mary Meinig, who has served with the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) since its inception—first as an Ombudsman, from 1997 through 2001, and later as Director, since 2002—will retire effective November 30, 2014.

“I will deeply miss my colleagues and the important work of this office,” said Ms. Meinig. “However, I also believe the time has come to pass the torch to a new leader to guide OFCO through its next phase of development.”

Ms. Meinig was appointed as OFCO Director in 2002 by Governor Gary Locke and was reappointed by two subsequent Governors—Governor Chris Gregoire and now-Governor Jay Inslee. As Director, Ms. Meinig has established OFCO's reputation throughout the state as an entity that is independent, fair, and effective. Under her leadership, OFCO has become recognized nationally as one of the country's leading child welfare ombudsman programs, providing consultation to several other states tasked with establishing a family and child welfare ombudsman.

OFCO investigations and findings during Ms. Meinig's tenure have led to significant changes in law and policy, improving Washington's child welfare system:

- Two major independent case reviews following the child fatalities of Justice and Raiden Robinson (2005) and Sirita Sotelo (2009) resulted in changes to state laws addressing situations of chronic child neglect, and how parents and caregivers are assessed before a dependent child is returned to a parent's home.
- A 2009 review of child welfare practice in Colville, WA—“Loss of Trust: A Crisis of Confidence in the Colville Child Welfare System”—led to positive changes in casework practice and partnerships with community professionals in this rural area of the State.
- A special 2012 report on “Severe Abuse of Adopted Children”, described in the press as “a call to arms on Washington's adoption system”, led to proposed changes to regulations

governing adoptions and ongoing efforts by both the public and private sector to improve the adoption process and safeguard children.

- Ms. Meinig also called attention to child endangerment related to drunk-driving where children were passengers in the vehicle, prompting changes in law requiring police officers to contact Child Protective Services when investigating such incidents.

Ms. Meinig's passionate involvement in statewide efforts to educate parents and caregivers about safe sleep environments for infants is only a small part of the legacy she leaves. Her work reflects a persistent goal of reducing child fatalities and an unwavering focus on the safety of children.

"Mary has been an integral part of the OFCO since its inception," said Gov. Jay Inslee. "I thank her for her thoughtful and visionary leadership, which helped solidify OFCO as a nationally-recognized child welfare ombudsman program."

In her retirement, Ms. Meinig is looking forward to spending more time with her one-year-old granddaughter.

OFCO investigates complaints in Washington state about agency actions or inaction that involve: any child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm; and/or a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.

OFCO intervenes in cases in which it has determined that an agency's action or inaction is unauthorized or unreasonable. In addition to addressing complaints, OFCO works to identify system-wide issues and recommend appropriate changes in public reports to the Governor, the Legislature, and agency officials.

Information about OFCO can be found at <http://ofco.wa.gov/>.