

# OFCO: 2016-2017 IN REVIEW

Independent. Impartial. Confidential. Taking action to help children and families.

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO):

- Promotes public awareness about the child protection and welfare system;
- Investigates complaints and intervenes to prevent harm; and
- Recommends and facilitates systemic improvements.



76% of Complaints Initiated by Parent or Other Relative

## TOP CONCERNS IDENTIFIED BY COMPLAINANTS

### Family Separation and Reunification

- Failure to ensure appropriate visitation
- Removal from parents
- Child not placed with relatives
- Failure to ensure contact between siblings

### Agency Conduct and Services

- Harassment, retaliation, discrimination by caseworker
- Unwarranted CPS investigation
- Unreasonable CPS findings
- Communication failures

## ADVERSE FINDINGS

OFCO makes a formal finding against the agency if the complaint issues are substantiated. Findings fall into 3 categories:

- The agency violated **law, policy, or procedure**;
- the agency's action or inaction was **clearly unreasonable**; and
- the agency's conduct resulted in **harm** to a child or family.

OFCO made **52** adverse findings against the agency in the 2016-2017 reporting year.

Findings include:

- **Child Safety** (37% of findings): Unsafe placement of dependent child and failure to conduct monthly health and safety visits.
- **Parent's Rights** (21% of findings): Delay in completing CPS investigation and failure to notify parents.
- **Foster Parent Issues** (15% of findings): Removal of child from foster placement.

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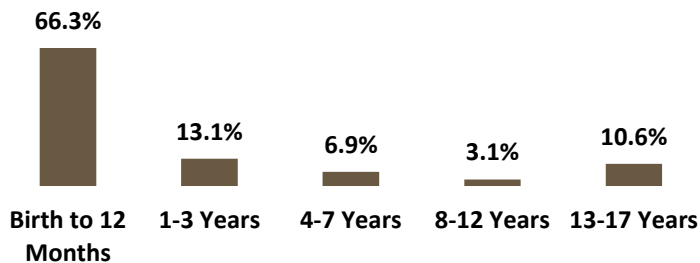
## CHILD FATALITIES AND NEAR FATALITIES

OFCO conducts administrative reviews of all child fatalities and near fatalities, both those involving abuse and neglect and those unrelated to maltreatment, whose family had contact with Children's Administration (CA) within one year prior to the incident.

- From January 1 – December 31, 2016 OFCO examined **35 maltreatment-related fatalities**.
- During this same period OFCO examined **16 maltreatment-related near fatalities**.

### Age at time of death, 2013-2016

\*Maltreatment related fatalities\*



### Risk Factors

- Infant Unsafe Sleep
- Parental Opiate Use
- Other Substance Abuse
- Mental Health Disorders
- Domestic Violence

CA conducts Executive Child Fatality Reviews when child abuse or neglect is suspected and the child was receiving CA services at time of death or within the past year. These reviews identify areas for increased education and training, as well as potential policy or legislative changes. OFCO participates in these reviews and issues an annual report to the Legislature on the implementation status of the recommendations. Between August 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016, OFCO attended **reviews in the deaths of 20 children** and the **near-deaths of 13 children**.

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### Other OFCO Highlights, 2016-2017:

- Discussions and outreach with foster parents to discuss placement and foster parent retaliation issues.
- Tracked the placement of children in state care in hotels and DCFS offices. Made recommendations for improving placement options.
- Commissioner on the Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission on the Delivery of Services to Children and Families.
- Planning for launch of new Department of Children, Youth, and Families.
- Advanced internal improvement projects for OFCO's complaint tracking database and telecommunications systems.

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