



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

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2016- 2017 OFCO Strategic Plan

Mission

Independently and objectively investigate complaints about harmful actions by a state child welfare agency; Promote continuous improvement efforts to enhance the safety and welfare of children; protect children and families from harmful state child welfare agency action or inaction; inform the Governor, Legislators, and policy makers of problems in the child protection and welfare system; and make recommendations to address the needs of children and families. (RCW 43.060A)

Vision

That the Washington State child welfare system protects all children from abuse or neglect, and provides resources to strengthen and preserve families.

Introduction

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCC) was established in 1996 by the Washington State Legislature to ensure that abused and neglected children and their parents are served reasonably and fairly by government agencies. The Legislature created the Ombuds to intervene when children or their parents are subjected to unauthorized or unreasonable agency decisions. The Legislature also empowered the Ombuds to recommend changes for improving the child protection and child welfare system.

What We Do

The Family and Children's Ombuds investigates complaints about state child welfare agency actions or inaction that involve:

- Any child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm.
- A child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.

We intervene in cases in which we have determined that an agency's action or inaction is unauthorized or unreasonable. In addition to addressing complaints, we work to identify system-wide issues and recommend appropriate changes in public reports to the Governor, the Legislature and agency officials.

To maximize OFCO's resources, the ombuds prioritizes investigations and interventions involving the immediate safety of a child, or emergent situations where timely intervention by OFCO could avert harmful conduct by a state child welfare agency or alleviate a family's distress. OFCO also reviews critical incidents, such as child fatalities, near fatalities and cases of recurrent child maltreatment. This allows OFCO to take action to protect children and develop recommendations to protect our state's most vulnerable population.

Through the collection of data regarding the types of complaints we receive and how they are investigated and resolved, OFCO identifies systemic issues and recommends improvements to the child welfare system.

OFCO uses Lean management principles to continuously improve services to the citizens of Washington State who contact our office; engage our employees and create an efficient work environment; and eliminate waste and increase value to those served by the child welfare system.

Values

- Independence
- Impartiality
- Confidentiality
- Credibility
- Fairness
- Respect
- Integrity

Goals, Activities, Outcomes, Key Measures of Success

1. GOAL: Promote the health, welfare and safety of children in state care, as well as the preservation of families, by investigating complaints in an impartial and timely manner.

Activity/Initiative

- Immediately investigate emergent complaints involving child safety.
- Contact complainant and begin non-emergent investigation within 15 days.
- Conduct staff review of non-emergent complaint investigations within 30 days, assessing whether state agency's action is reasonable and consistent with law and policy.

Performance Measure

- Number of complaints received, investigations completed and time needed to process each complaint.
- User survey results of consumers regarding fairness and quality of OFCO investigations.

2. GOAL: Protect children and families from harmful conduct of a state child welfare agency by altering the actions of a state agency.

Activity/Initiative

- OFCO notifies the agency caseworker and supervisor of its findings, and works with the agency to change the current course of action to one that is reasonable and consistent with state laws and agency policies.

- OFCO directs findings and concerns to agency's upper management when attempts to resolve complaint with caseworker and supervisor are not successful.

Performance Measure

- Percentage of complaints in which OFCO intervenes and the agency acknowledges the violation and/or agrees to alter its course of action.

3. GOAL: Promote system-wide improvements in the child protection, child welfare and children's residential services.

Activity/Initiative

- Identify patterns of chronic and/or system-wide issues that adversely impact child welfare and describe them in OFCO's annual report along with recommendations for improvements.
- Conduct systemic investigations of chronic or serious issues, when warranted, and present findings and recommendations in a public report.
- Periodically review the facilities and procedures of state institutions serving children, and state-licensed facilities or residences.
- Collaborate with stakeholder groups to develop value added recommendations to address systemic issues that leave children and families at risk.
- Communicate with the governor, legislators, agency officials, and community stakeholders to ensure they are aware of chronic and/or system-wide issues.

Performance Measure

- Each annual report describes chronic and/or system-wide issues that OFCO has documented in the preceding year.
- Track legislative actions in response to systemic issues identified by OFCO.
- Track agency actions to improve policies and practices in response to systemic issues identified by OFCO.

4. GOAL: Increase public awareness of OFCO's mission and enhance the ombuds' effective response to inquiries.

Activity /Initiative

- Increase OFCO participation in community outreach through meeting with stakeholder groups.
- Improve OFCO's website to: better inform the public of our duties and responsibilities and OFCO's' complaint process; provide information and referrals for frequently asked questions; provide links to related websites; and establish links to OFCO from related websites.

Performance Measure

- Number of meetings/conferences attended with stakeholder groups.
- Track specific improvements made to OFCO's website.
- Number of contacts to OFCO either by phone, complaint forms received, and website visits.