



# CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN

**FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024  
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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## Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Performance Plan

The Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) published its [Fiscal Year 2024-25 Performance Plan](#) on July 1, 2024. The CPO continues to prioritize community outreach, improving services and programs provided to citizens, assessing the agency's diversity, equity and inclusion practices and standards, and collaborating with youth, caregivers, policymakers and stakeholders to advance improvements to the child protection system. The full performance plan may be accessed [HERE](#).

## Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Quarter Four Performance Report

**SPI 1 – COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Raise awareness of the CPO to ensure every youth and family across Colorado has equitable access to the agency's services.

*Strategy: Target communications and engagements to strengthen the CPO's statewide presence and services.*

**Critical Process:** Promote awareness of the CPO among youth impacted by child protection systems to increase equitable access to services for all youth.

**Status of Key Metrics:** [Completed/Ongoing](#)

A record 92 cases were initiated by youth during FY 2023-24, marking the third consecutive year of increasing contacts from youth. The CPO continued to directly engage youth with lived experience in child protection systems through posters in 14 Colorado Department of Human Services' Division of Youth Services (DYS) facilities. Half of the cases filed by youth were filed by youth residing in DHS youth facilities. Current and former youth directly engaged with the agency by participating on guest panels with the Mandatory Reporting and Timothy Montoya task forces and by participating in focus groups for youth currently residing in residential facilities. The CPO also launched its Tori Shuler Youth Voice Collective and hosted a dozen listening sessions with children, youth and young adults who have lived experience with the child protection system.

**Critical Process:** Promote awareness of the CPO among caregivers – including parents, relatives, foster parents and kin – of children involved in the child protection system to increase equitable access to services for all types of caregivers in every Colorado community.

**Status of Key Metrics:** [Completed/Ongoing](#)

Throughout FY 2023-24, the CPO routinely met with different government agencies and advocacy organizations serving caregivers and parents in Colorado. Similar to past fiscal years, more than half the cases opened during the fiscal year were brought to the agency by families of children and youth. In particular, mothers filed approximately 43 percent of the CPO's cases.

**Critical Process:** Promote awareness of the CPO among communities of color to increase equitable access to services for youth and families disproportionately involved in Colorado's child protection systems.

**Status of Key Metrics:** [Completed/Ongoing](#)

The CPO contracted with a third-party consultant to assess the agency's engagement strategies with communities of color. This consultant has completed their assessment of the agency's outreach strategies, including unique outreach efforts and public-facing, standard agency operations. The agency will begin implementing these processes during the 2024-25 fiscal year. The agency also engaged this third-party consultant to aid the agency in facilitating two statewide task forces. This work ensures the task forces, and the

CPO were considering disproportion impacts of child protection systems – specifically mandatory reporting and residential treatment protocols – when considering reforms. The CPO has also started to track race, ethnicity, and primary language of the clients who contact the agency. All of this information will be used to inform the CPO’s services and develop additional outreach opportunities.

**Critical Process: Promote awareness of the CPO among rural communities to increase equitable access to services for every community, county and region in Colorado.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

In FY 2023-24, the CPO emphasized its statewide services through direct engagement and case services. Approximately, 31 percent of cases opened by the CPO involved services in smaller rural counties. Outside of the metro area, the CPO received the majority of cases from the southeast quadrant of the state. The CPO continues to target outreach efforts in rural areas. During the past fiscal year, the CPO hosted a two-day, in-person community engagement tour in Alamosa, Colorado.

**Critical Process: 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.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

In FY 2023-24, the CPO’s continued to see an increase in the number of cases brought to the agency by child protection professionals. Of particular note, the number of cases referred to the agency by county departments of human services nearly doubled. To support this work, the agency updated its outreach materials and initiated a service for all county departments in which they may order hard-copy flyers from the agency – free of charge – which the agency will distribute to the departments.

**SPI 2 – SERVICES AND PROGRAMS: Continue to develop and strengthen efficient and effective CPO practices to better serve Colorado citizens.**

*Strategy: Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for CPO staff.*

**Critical Process: Provide CPO staff ongoing training and education.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

To support ongoing program development and primary functions of the agency, CPO staff members attended 62 trainings in FY 2023-24 on collaborative safety, ombudsman theory, mandatory reporting, diversity, equity and inclusion, equity in child protection systems, accessibility, leadership development, agency administration, accounting and finance, artificial intelligence, management and best practices in child protection. All CPO staff were able to attend the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) conference during September 2023.

*Strategy: Apply principles of equity, diversity and inclusion to the CPO’s services.*

**Critical Process: Develop inclusive processes, systems and communications that reflect principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Of the trainings attended by CPO staff in FY 2023-24, the CPO provided staff with five in-depth sessions

regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. Topics of these trainings included health equity, DEI principles in the workplace, building inclusive environments, cultural competence, bias reduction, ableism and serving tribal children and families. The staff also engaged DEI trainings with the USOA and child protection partners.

**Strategy:** *Continue to develop the CPO's process and procedures for reviewing egregious abuse or neglect, near fatalities or fatalities of a child, as established by C.R.S. § 19-3.3- 103(1)(a)(I)(A).*

**Critical Process:** Develop and implement a unique, research-informed process for reviewing critical incidents in Colorado to improve and advance child protection systems.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

In FY 2023-24, the CPO continued to review critical incidents brought to the agency, pursuant to C.R.S. § 19-3.3-103(1)(a)(I)(A).

**SPI 3 – SYSTEMS CHANGE:** Collaborate with youth, caregivers, stakeholders and policymakers to advance improvements to child protection services, policies and laws for every community in Colorado.

**Strategy:** *Provide consistent, timely and informative communications regarding the CPO's services, ongoing projects, ombudsman practice and findings.*

**Critical Process:** Communicate findings, trending data and systemic issues to stakeholders, policymakers and the public.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO identified a number of trends through client concerns and data in FY 2023-24. Four critical issues facing child protection systems were prioritized for presentation to the [Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee](#), which the agency used to help draft legislation for the 2024 General Assembly.

**Strategy:** *Encourage citizens and stakeholders to use the CPO as a resource to improve the child protection system.*

**Critical Process:** Engage youth, caregivers, policymakers, stakeholders and communities in improving Colorado child protection systems through the CPO Policy Collaborative for Children & Families.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

Engaged in numerous task forces and recurring meeting groups across Colorado child protection systems, agency staff attended a total of 299 stakeholder meetings in FY 2023-24. They continued to facilitate the [Mandatory Reporting Task Force](#) and the [Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children and Youth from Running Away from Out-of-Home Care](#).

**Critical Process:** Serve as an independent, neutral and objective resource for legislators on child protection issues.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO continued to work closely with legislators to address systemic issues within the child protection system. During the fiscal year, the agency worked closely with the Child Welfare Interim Committee to provide research and help draft four pieces of legislation to address issues.