



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman
CASE PRACTICES AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

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Definitions

The terms and phrases listed below will be used throughout this document to help explain the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman's (CPO) case practices and operating procedures.

Agency/Provider:

Any public agency/provider within the child protection system that *"receives public moneys"* and is responsible for providing services that impact the *"safety, permanency, or well-being of the child."* See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(1)(a)(I)(A).

Assist:

A service in which the CPO independently reviews relevant records and documents, including any information provided by contacts, as well as relevant rules and laws. The CPO will use this information to help the contact resolve their inquiry.

CMS (Case Management System):

The CPO maintains an internal case management system. This database includes all records related to the CPO's handling of citizens' inquiries and investigations.

Case:

Denotes any service provided by the CPO, including information and/or resource referrals, assists or investigations.

Case Extension:

If the CPO requires additional time to complete a case the CPO will release a case extension. The case extension will be completed and released no more than 60 business days after the case is opened. **(See Policy 10.102 Case Extensions).**

Case Number:

Every inquiry received by the CPO will be assigned a unique identifying number in the CMS. Citizens may use the identifying number to locate case information on the CPO website.

Child Protection System:

Per Colorado Revised Statute §19-3.3-103(1)(a)(I)(A), Colorado's child protection system is comprised of *"any public agency or any provider that receives public moneys that may adversely affect the safety, permanency, or well-being of the child."*

Closed Lack of Information:

This finding indicates that the contact did not provide the CPO with sufficient information to proceed.

Closed Per Contact:

This finding is issued when a contact withdraws their inquiry and requests that the CPO take no further action.

Contact:

Any individual who engages the CPO with an inquiry about the child protection system.

CPO (Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman):

The Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman will be referred to as the CPO. The CPO denotes the agency as a whole and does not refer to an individual employee.

Duplicate Inquiry:

If a contact makes repeated inquiries to the CPO and the CPO has previously resolved the inquiry, the CPO will issue this finding and close the inquiry without further services.

Evidence:

The available body of facts or information that support the CPO's finding(s) in an case.

Finding:

A determination made by the CPO at the conclusion of a case.

Information and/or Resource Referral:

A CPO service that provides contacts with any information, resources or education necessary to help resolve their inquiry regarding the child protection system.

Inquiry:

A concern or question about the child protection system.

Intake:

All inquiries the CPO receives from contacts will be subject to an intake process. During that process the CPO will gather information from the contact and determine which CPO service will be most beneficial in addressing their concern or question.

Investigation:

A comprehensive, independent study of relevant facts, records, rules and law, as well as any statements by parties with information and/or subject matter expertise related to the inquiry or issue. Such information may be used to produce findings and recommendations for statutory, budgetary, regulatory and/or administrative changes to improve the child protection system.

Investigation Report:

At the conclusion of any investigation, the CPO will publicly release a report summarizing the case, including explanation of issues affecting the child protection system's ability to ensure the safety, well-being or permanency of children. Reports also include findings and recommendations. Details about the investigation report may be found in **Policy 10.200**

Investigation Report.

Ombudsman:

The term Ombudsman refers to the head of the CPO who is responsible for the implementation and execution of these practices and procedures.

Ombudsman Discretion:

The Ombudsman, or her/his designee, has the authority to determine what service, if any, will be provided to a contact. The reasons for declination of services by the Ombudsman will be documented in the CPO case management system.

Recommendation:

A suggestion or proposal, *“to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.”* See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(e).

Introduction

This document outlines general operating policies and procedures to guide the operations of the *Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman* (CPO).

In writing its procedures, the CPO completed a thorough study of policies and procedures practiced by child protection ombudsmen across the country and the world. CPO procedures were designed to mimic best practice standards set by the International Ombudsman Association, the United States Ombudsman Association and the American Bar Association.

These case practices and operating procedures have been developed to ensure that the *Ombudsman* is able to execute the functions and responsibilities of the CPO as mandated in statute.

1.000 Contacting the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman

The business hours of the CPO are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding state holidays.

The CPO can be contacted in the following ways:

Mail: Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman
1300 Broadway, Suite 430
Denver, Colorado 80203

Email: info@coloradocpo.org

Phone: 720-625-8640

Online Complaint Form: www.coloradocpo.org

Upon receipt of an email, letter or telephone message, CPO staff will respond within two business days.

In person appointments: Due to security restrictions at the Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center, the CPO is unable to accept *inquires* in person.

1.100 Role of the Ombudsman

By design, the *Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman* (CPO) serves as an independent, neutral problem solver that helps citizens navigate a complex *child protection system* in an expert and timely manner. The *Ombudsman* has independent access to child protection records that are not otherwise available to the public. This allows the CPO to objectively review and investigate *inquires*, deliver *recommendations* and drive systemic reform through research and education. Through objective study the CPO works to improve the delivery of services to children and families within the *child protection system*.

1.200 Responsibilities of the CPO

- The CPO was established pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-101. The CPO's primary duties include:
- Provide citizens free and confidential services.
- Help citizens navigate the *child protection system* and direct them towards needed services and resources.
- Objectively research and investigate concerns about the delivery of services to children and families within the *child protection system*.
- Illuminate the strengths and weaknesses within the *child protection system* that are directly impacting the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families.
- Make *recommendations* to the public, child protection *agencies/providers*, the General Assembly and the Governor that help reform and improve outcomes for children and families.

1.300 CPO Jurisdiction

The CPO receives "*complaints concerning child protection services made by, or on behalf of, a child relating to any action, inaction, or decision of any public agency or any provider that receives public moneys that may adversely affect the safety, permanency, or well-being of a child. The ombudsman may, independently and impartially, investigate and seek resolution of such complaints, which resolution may include, but need not be limited to, referring a complaint to the state department or appropriate agency or entity and making a recommendation for action relating to a complaint.*" See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(1)(a)(I)(A).

Examples of *agency/providers* the CPO has jurisdiction to review include: human services agencies, youth corrections, law enforcement, educators, medical professionals and treatment providers.

Pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-101 to 110, the CPO does not have the authority to:

- Investigate allegations of abuse and/or neglect.
- Interfere or intervene in any criminal or civil court proceeding.

- Investigate *complaints* related to judges, magistrates, attorneys or guardians ad litem.
- Overturn any court order.
- Mandate the reversal of an *agency/provider* decision.
- Offer legal advice.

1.400 Case Confidentiality

The CPO may be limited in the type of and amount of information it may share with a *contact*, depending on the *contact's* relationship to the child and circumstances of the *case*.

When completing an *intake*, child protection systems analysts will ask *contacts* to confirm at least two pieces of information that verify the stated identity of the *contact* and their relationship to the case.

Pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(3) “the Ombudsman, employees of the office, and any persons acting on behalf of the office shall comply with all state and federal confidentiality laws that govern the state department or a county department with respect to the treatment of confidential information or records and the disclosure of such information and records.” These laws include, but are not limited to, the Colorado Children’s Code, CAPTA, HIPPA and FERPA.

1.500 Contact’s Confidentiality

Pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-103 (1)(a)(I)(B) the CPO shall treat identities of *contacts* and *inquires* as confidential, unless the CPO obtains the consent of the *contact* to release their identity to an *agency/provider* and/or include the *contact's* identity in a public report.

When researching an *inquiry*, the CPO may ask a *contact* to sign a release of information form to secure additional documents and information needed to address an *inquiry*.

The CPO will release identifying information to the proper authorities for anyone that makes any statements of credible harm to themselves or to someone else.

2.000 Intake

All *inquiries* the CPO receives from *contacts* will be subject to an *intake* process and assigned a *case number*. During that process, the CPO will gather information from the *contact* and determine which CPO service is most appropriate. All information will be entered into the CMS.

The CPO will respond to all *inquiries* within 48-business hours.

Per the discretion of the *Ombudsman*, *inquiries* may be prioritized based on the individual circumstances of the *inquiry*.

The CPO may conclude the *intake* process without providing a service for one or more of the following reasons:

- Lack of information from the *contact*
- *Duplicate inquiry*
- *Ombudsman discretion*

If the *case* is not closed in the *intake* process, the CPO will provide the *contact* any of its three services. The CPO's three services are:

- *Information and/or Resources Referral*
- *Assists*
- *Investigation*

The CPO will post a public notification on the CPO website for any *case* that moves out of the *intake* process. **(See Policy 10.101 Public Notifications)**

The CPO may be limited in the type and amount of information it may share with a *contact*, if the *contact* is not the legal guardian or custodian of a child involved in a case. Any information shared with *contacts* will be done in compliance with **Policy 1.400 Case Confidentiality and Policy 1.500 Contacts Confidentiality**.

3.000 Information and/or Resource Referral

If the CPO determines that the appropriate services is an *information and/or resource referral*, the CPO will provide the *contact* with any information, resources or education necessary to help resolve their *inquiry*. The CPO may also connect *contacts* with entities that may help resolve their concern or question.

The CPO will document the *information and/or resource referral* in the CMS and note what information, resources or education was provided to the *contact*.

After work on a *case* has concluded, the *case* will be presented to the *Ombudsman* and CPO staff. A *case* may only be closed in the CMS upon the approval of the *Ombudsman* or her/his designee.

4.000 Assists

At the conclusion of the *intake* process, the CPO may determine that an *investigation* is not necessary, but the *case* warrants a higher level of review than would be possible if providing the *contact* an *information and/or resource referral*. In such circumstances, the CPO will provide the *contact* with an *assist* and will work with the *contact* to help resolve their *inquiry*.

In all *cases* involving *assists*, the CPO will independently review relevant records and documents, including any information provided by *contacts*, as well as relevant rules and laws.

To maintain its impartiality – and in keeping with statute – the CPO will independently collect any information, records and/or documents necessary for completing a *case*. “*In investigating a complaint, the ombudsman shall have the authority to request and review any information, records, or documents, including records of third parties, that the ombudsman deems necessary to conduct a thorough and independent review of a complaint so long as either the state department or a county department would be entitled to access or receive such information, records, or documents.*” See C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(1)(a)(II)(A). The CPO will incur reasonable expenses to photocopy relevant records.

In providing the *contact* an *assist*, the CPO will work to provide clarity regarding the processes, expectations and determinations in a specific *case*. This service may require the CPO to contact relevant *agencies/providers* to help gain clarity regarding their decisions and determinations. Not all *assists* require the CPO to contact relevant *agencies/providers*. CPO staff will use information gained from records, documents and/or discussions with *agencies/providers* to help provide *contacts* with answers and explanations in their *case*. The CPO may also use information and gained during a *case* to inform the *contact* and/or *agency/provider* of the need for additional communication.

All documents that are reviewed by the CPO, including records provided by an *agency/provider* or *contact*, will be scanned and electronically stored within the CMS.

The CPO will document all *assists* in the CMS and note what information, resources or education was provided to the *contact*.

After work on a *case* has concluded, the *case* will be presented to the *Ombudsman* and CPO staff. A *case* may only be closed in the CMS upon the approval of the *Ombudsman* or her/his designee.

4.100 Role of Agency/Provider During Assists

An *agency/provider* contacted by the CPO during an *assist* may expect the following:

- All initial communication with an *agency/provider* will be done in writing via email and will include a summary of the *inquiry*.
- All additional communication between the CPO and the *agency/provider* will be done in a manner deemed appropriate by both parties, including phone, email and in-person exchanges.
- The CPO will ensure all efforts to resolve the *inquiry* are done in a collaborative manner with the *agency/provider* so both entities have the ability to best serve the *contact*.

- If the case results in the identification of possible violations of rule or law, the CPO will follow the policies outlined in **Policy 4.200 Identified Compliance Concerns in Assists**.

4.200 Identified Compliance Concerns in Assists

If, through the course of any *case* involving an *information and/or resource referral, assist or investigation*, the CPO determines that an *agency/provider* may have violated any rules or laws, the CPO will issue a letter to the *agency/provider* outlining its compliance concerns. The *agency/provider* will be given 15 business days to provide a response to the CPO.

The CPO's letter, and any response submitted by the *agency/provider*, will then be provided to the *agency/provider's* supervising entity. The supervising entity will then make the final determination of whether a violation of law or rule occurred and provide any relevant remedies. The supervising entity will have 15 business days to make their determination and respond to the CPO. After the supervising entity submits its response, the CPO will post its letter, the *agency/provider* response and the supervising entity's determination on the CPO's website.

5.000 Investigation

If the CPO determines, through preliminary analysis of an *inquiry* or issue, that a case may result in *recommendations* for statutory, budgetary, regulatory and/or administrative changes to improve the *child protection system*, the CPO will initiate an *investigation*. See C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(2)(e).

Each *investigation* will include a comprehensive, independent study of relevant facts, records, rules and law. Additionally, the CPO will consider any statements by parties with information and/or subject matter expertise in a *case*.

The CPO will contact the relevant *agencies/providers* involved in the *case*. **(See Policy 5.100 Role of Agency/Provider During Investigation)** The CPO may schedule a site visit to review on-site records and meet with *agency/provider* staff.

To maintain its impartiality – and in keeping with statute – the CPO will independently collect any information, records and/or documents necessary for completing a *case*. “*In investigating a complaint, the ombudsman shall have the authority to request and review any information, records, or documents, including records of third parties, that the ombudsman deems necessary to conduct a thorough and independent review of a complaint so long as either the state department or a county department would be entitled to access or receive such information, records, or documents.*” See C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(1)(a)(II)(A). The CPO will incur reasonable expenses to photocopy relevant records.

All documents that are reviewed by the CPO, including records provided by an *agency/provider* or *contact*, will be scanned and electronically stored within the CMS.

The *Ombudsman* maintains the discretion to terminate an *investigation* at any time.

At the conclusion of an *investigation*, the CPO will issue an *investigation report* which will include *findings* and *recommendations*, as well as any violations of rule or law. The *investigation report* will be posted to the CPO's website.

The CPO will document all *investigations* in the CMS. Prior to closing the *case* in the CMS, the *case* will be presented to the *Ombudsman* and CPO staff. A *case* may only be closed in the CMS upon the approval of the *Ombudsman* or her/his designee.

5.100 Role of Agency/Provider During Investigation

An *agency/provider* involved in an *investigation* may expect the following:

- All initial communication with an *agency/provider* will be done in writing via email and will include a summary of the *inquiry*.
- All additional communication between the CPO and the *agency/provider* will be done in the manner deemed most effective to address the *inquiry* and/or issue involved in an *investigation*, including phone, email and in-person exchanges.
- The CPO will submit all requests for documents and/or records to the *agency/provider* in writing via email.
- Prior to the public release of an *investigation report* – which includes *findings* and *recommendations* – the *agency/provider* will be:
 - Provided a copy of the CPO's *investigation report*.
 - Given 15 business days to respond to any CPO *finding* and/or *recommendation*.
 - All final *agency/provider's* responses must be submitted in writing via email.
 - The CPO will consider any *agency/provider* responses and – if appropriate based on the information provided – revise its *findings* and *recommendations* prior to publicly releasing its *investigation report*.
 - Advised that the CPO's *investigation report* and the *agency/provider's* responses will be made public and, in addition to posting the *investigation report* on its website, the CPO may distribute the *investigation report* to citizens, stakeholders and legislators.
- If the case results in the identification of possible violations of rule or law, the CPO will follow the policies outlined in **Policy 5.200 Identified Compliance Concerns in Investigations**.

5.200 Identified Compliance Concerns in Investigations

If, through the course of any *case* involving an *information and/or resource referral*, *assist* or *investigation*, the CPO determines that an *agency/provider* may have violated any rules or laws, the CPO will issue a letter to the *agency/provider* outlining its compliance concerns. The *agency/provider* will be given 15 business days to provide a response to the CPO.

The CPO's letter, and any response submitted by the *agency/provider*, will then be provided to the *agency/provider's* supervising entity. The supervising entity will then make the final determination of whether a violation of law or rule occurred and provide any relevant remedies. The supervising entity will have 15 business days to make their determination and respond to the CPO. After the supervising entity submits its response, the CPO will post its letter, the *agency/provider* response and the supervising entity's determination on the CPO's website.

6.000 CPO Document Requests to Outside Agencies or Providers

Pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(a)(II)(A), *"In investigating a complaint, the ombudsman shall have the authority to request and review any information, records, or documents, including records of third parties, that the ombudsman deems necessary to conduct a thorough and independent review of a complaint so long as either the state department or a county department would be entitled to access or receive such information, records, or documents."* When requesting records from an outside entity or agency, CPO staff will submit a written request for records to the agency or entity that clearly defines the records needed.

If the CPO requests access to records, the CPO will submit a written request.

The CPO staff will limit their request for records to those that are related to the *case* or relevant to the circumstance surrounding the *case*. The CPO will also incur reasonable costs for the photocopying of all files.

7.000 Case Length

It is the goal of the CPO to provide a timely response to all contacts. The length of time for a *case* to be completed will vary depending on internal CPO resources, the complexity of the issues, the length of time for outside reports to be obtained and, in some instances, for criminal or civil proceedings to be completed.

Services provided to contacts by the CPO, including the production and distribution of letters of compliance concerns, are generally completed within 60 business days. Any delay outside of the above timeframes will be documented in the CMS and approved by the *Ombudsman*.

8.000 Case Conclusions

The CPO will document all *cases* in the CMS. Prior to the closing the *case* in the CMS, the *case* will be presented to the Ombudsman and CPO staff. A *case* may only be closed in the CMS upon the approval of the *Ombudsman* or her/his designee.

If the CPO released an *investigation report* in the *case*, the *contact* will be provided with a copy of the *investigation report*.

A *contact* may withdraw their *inquiry* at any time during a *case*. The CPO will close the *case* in such circumstances, pending the *Ombudsman's* approval or her/his designee.

9.000 CPO Recommendations

The CPO will issue *recommendations* pursuant to C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(e), which mandates the CPO to, “*recommend to the general assembly, the executive director, and any appropriate agency or entity statutory, budgetary, regulatory and administrative changes, including systemic changes, to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.*”

10.000 Public Reporting

The CPO will provide citizens with clear and consistent reports detailing the CPO's work to serve the public and improve the *child protection system*. **Policies 10.000** through **10.200** detail the CPO's practice of releasing information. A reference chart detailing the CPO's public reporting practices below.

CPO PROCESS	CPO ACTION	PUBLIC REPORTING	TYPE
INFORMATION AND/OR RESOURCE REFERRAL	Provide information, resources or education.	YES	Public Notification (See Policy 10.101)
ASSIST	Work to help resolve <i>inquiry</i> .	YES	Public Notification (See Policy 10.101)
INVESTIGATION	Comprehensive, independent study of facts and issues.	YES	Public Notification (See Policy 10.101) Investigation Report (See Policy 10.200)
CASE EXTENSIONS	The CPO identifies a <i>case</i> that requires additional time for completion.	YES	Case Extensions (See Policy 10.102) Public Notification (See Policy 10.101)

RECOMMENDATIONS	CPO issues a <i>recommendation</i> to an <i>agency/provider</i> .	YES	Recommendations (See Policy 12.000)
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10.100 Case Announcements

To hold the CPO accountable to the public and ensure transparency of the CPO's work, the CPO will make information concerning all pending *cases* available to the public through its website.

The CPO will communicate information about pending *cases* in two ways:

- Public Notifications
- *Case Extensions*

10.101 Public Notifications

After the CPO opens a *case*, a public notification of that *case* will be posted on the "Pending Cases" page of the CPO's website. Each *case* will be identified on the "Pending Cases" page by a unique *case number*.

Each public notification will include:

- The *case number*
- Agency Type
- Area of concern
- CPO Service
- Case Status
- Date the CPO opened the *case*

Below is an example of a public notification:

Case Number	Agency Type	Area of Concern	CPO Service	Status	Date Case Opened
2017-XXXX	Example Service Area	Example of Area of Concern	Example CPO Service	Example Status	X/XX/2017

After a *case* is closed in the CMS, the status on the public notification will be changed from "ONGOING" to "COMPLETE." After the status is changed to "COMPLETE" the public notification will remain on the "Pending Cases" page for 10 business days. If the CPO completes a *case extension* or *investigation report* in a *case*, those documents will appear in the public notification.

10.102 Case Extensions

If the CPO requires additional time to complete a *case* the CPO will release a case extension.

The *case extension* is designed to act as a mechanism to hold the CPO accountable to the public and ensure transparency of the CPO's work.

The *case extension* will be completed and released no more than **60 business days** after the *case* is opened.

Each *case extension* will include:

- *Case number*
- Complaint Summary
- Reason for Extension
- Date Case Opened
- Anticipated Completion Date
- Final Status

Case extensions will be posted on the "Case Extensions" page of the CPO's website.

10.200 Investigation Reports

In meeting its statutory requirements to "*improve accountability and transparency in the child protection system and promote better outcomes for children and families involved in the child protection system,*" as stated in C.R.S. §19-3.3-101(2)(a), the CPO will publicly release all *investigation reports*.

A copy of the CPO's *investigation report* will be provided to the *agency/provider* prior to the report's public release. The *agency/provider* will have **15 business days** to respond to any CPO findings and/or *recommendations*. All *agency/provider's* final responses must be submitted in writing via email. Any response provided to the CPO will be included in the *investigation report*.

The CPO will consider any *agency/provider's* response and – if appropriate based on the information provided – revise its *findings* and *recommendations* prior to publicly releasing its *investigation report*.

Each *investigation report* will include:

- Executive Summary
- Relevant *agencies/providers*
- Summary of the *inquiry*
- *Investigation* summary

- Conclusion
- Findings and *Recommendations*
- *Recommendation* summary
- *Agency/Provider* Response

All *investigation reports* will be posted to the “Investigation Reports” page on the CPO’s website.

In determining the release of any information, the “*ombudsman, employees of the office and any persons acting on behalf of the office shall comply with all state and federal confidentiality laws that govern the state department or a county department with respect to the treatment of confidential information or records and the disclosure of such information and records,*” as stated in C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(3). These laws include, but are not limited to, the Colorado Children’s Code, CAPTA, HIPPA and FERPA.

11.000 Data Collection

The CPO records all actions taken during the life of a *case* in the CMS.

12.000 Recommendations

The CPO’s website will include a running list of all CPO *recommendations*. The list will be updated during the first week of every month.

Each *recommendation* listed will include:

- *Case number*
- *Recommendation* tracking number
- Date the CPO issued the *recommendation*
- Full-text of the CPO’s *recommendation*
- *Agency/provider* that received the *recommendation*
- *Agency/provider’s* response (if applicable)

Below is an example of a *recommendation* on the “Recommendations” page:

Case Number	Recommendation Number	Date Issued	Agency/Provider	Recommendation	Agency/Provider Response
2017-XXXX	2017-XXXX-F1(R1)	XX/XX/2017	Example Agency/Provider	Full text of recommendation.	Agree/Disagree/Partially Agree

In determining the release of any information, the “*ombudsman, employees of the office and any persons acting on behalf of the office shall comply with all state and federal confidentiality laws that govern the state department or a county department with respect to the treatment of*

confidential information or records and the disclosure of such information and records,” as stated in C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(3). These laws include, but are not limited to, the Colorado Children’s Code, CAPTA, HIPPA and FERPA.

13.000 CPO Informational Reports

To ensure the CPO is effectively meeting its mandate to *“educate the public concerning child maltreatment and the role of the community in strengthening families and keeping children safe,”* as stated in C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(c), the CPO must provide citizens with a consistent and timely flow of information about issues within the *child protection system* and the overall functioning of the CPO.

The CPO will do this through the scheduled release of the following informational reports:

- Annual Report: Per C.R.S. §19-3.3-108, will be submitted on September 1 of every year.
- State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) Government Act: Per C.R.S. §2-7-201 to 207.
- Quarterly Reports

Each report will be released and posted on the “Informational Reports” page of the CPO’s website.

14.000 Special Initiatives

The CPO is charged with recommending systemic changes to “...improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.” (C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(2)(e)). Additionally, the CPO is uniquely situated to gather and share information with state and non-state entities to help facilitate their work on enhancing the state’s child protection system. The CPO shares recommendations and information through its Special Initiatives -projects that leverage comprehensive research, and in certain instances stakeholder engagement processes, to identify and address topics relevant to improving the state’s child protection system.

Working on Special Initiatives is one way that the CPO is engaging the entities that comprise Colorado’s child protection system in order to address critical issues in collaboration. The purpose of the CPO’s Special Initiatives work is to ensure that the policies, rules, laws and funding mechanisms intended to safeguard children are designed to reflect best practices in the field of child protection and are implemented in a thoughtful, consistent and coordinated way throughout the state.

14.100 Special Initiatives Processes

The CPO identifies Special Initiatives on an ongoing basis by reviewing call topics and trends, research and best practices in the field of child protection, and by leveraging staff knowledge, observations and interactions with stakeholders, the CPO Board and the public.

The Child Protection Ombudsman has discretion over how Special Initiatives are prioritized and considers the immediacy of issues, the Office’s authorizing statute, resources, competing priorities and project timelines, and whether the CPO or another entity is best suited to complete the project.

For each Special Initiative undertaken by the CPO, an action plan is created that lists implementation activities, staff’s roles and responsibilities, timelines, relevant stakeholders, the final product(s) that will be produced, and how the final product(s) will be shared with the public and/or stakeholders. Additionally, the action plan lists follow-up activities that need to occur once the issuance of the final product(s) has/have been made. Follow-up activities, such as monitoring how information shared by the CPO is making an impact on the child protection system, will be used to guide future work.

14.200 Special Initiatives Outcomes and Deliverables

Work on Special Initiatives allows the CPO to serve as both a research hub and an innovative change agent—while simultaneously providing a neutral, independent and collaborative space for stakeholders invested in protecting Colorado’s children and families. Anticipated deliverables include:

1. Promoting and initiating policy, rule, law, and/or funding reform(s). When CPO’s Special Initiatives result in clear recommendations for change, the agency is committed to working with all stakeholders to generate support for and to drive these changes.
2. Sharing information with stakeholders and/or the public. When CPO’s work on Special Initiatives reveals important information regarding issues pressing to the enhancement of Colorado’s child protection system, the agency is committed to creating a robust communications plan to ensure information targets and reaches applicable audiences. The CPO anticipates that sharing information may include:
 - a. Publications of briefs and other reports,
 - b. The creation of data sets and the completion of analyses, and
 - c. The creation of a research and best practices repository.

15.000 Legislative Involvement

The CPO, as mandated in C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(e), makes recommendations and provides guidance “...to the general assembly...[regarding] budgetary, regulatory, and administrative changes, including systemic changes, to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.” Recommendations to the General Assembly are a product of the CPO’s work on Special Initiatives, cases, and engagement with stakeholders and citizens.

While the General Assembly is in session, legislators engage the CPO to provide testimony, guidance and/or recommendations on bills and amendments. Additionally, while the General Assembly is in session, the CPO monitors legislation as it is introduced to evaluate its impact on the state’s child protection system.

Providing testimony for legislation that pertains to the child protection system, when deemed appropriate by the Ombudsman, is an integral part of how the CPO ensures recommendations are being considered by the General Assembly. Monitoring legislation as it is introduced provides the CPO the opportunity to share applicable recommendations as bills go through the legislative process.

Year-round, legislators use the CPO as a resource. The CPO and legislators may collaborate to develop legislation ideas regarding changes needed “...to improve the safety of and promote better outcomes for children and families receiving child protection services in Colorado.” See C.R.S. §19-3.3-103(2)(e). Legislators routinely seek the expertise of the CPO and utilize the agency’s unique position to obtain objective insight regarding issues impacting the child protection system. This may include asking the CPO to review certain issues, facilitate stakeholder collaboration and/or develop and report on recommendations designed to improve child protection systems. Legislators also utilize the CPO as a resource for their constituents, often connecting the agency with citizens who have concerns about the child protection system.

To ensure the General Assembly has access to the CPO’s work and expertise, the CPO maintains resources on its website that is tailored for legislators. This information includes summaries of the CPO’s formal recommendations to child protection agencies and/or providers, a list of bills that its monitoring and information on emerging issues related to the state’s child protection system.

16.000 Open Meetings Laws

All CPO board meetings are open to the public pursuant to C.R.S. §24-6-401 to 402.

17.000 Colorado Open Records Act (CORA)

The CPO is committed to transparency. The CPO is subject to the CORA (C.R.S. §24-72- 201 to 206) and in accordance with the provisions outlined in C.R.S. § 19-3.3-103(1)(a)(I)(B). In adhering to this Act, the CPO will comply with all state and federal confidentiality laws with respect to the treatment of confidential information or records and the disclosure of such information and records.

17.100 Procedures for Handling Record Requests

All records requests submitted to the CPO by mail, courier or email shall be immediately provided to the *Ombudsman*. The *Ombudsman* will approve all responses to the CORA except in extraordinary circumstances he/she will authorize a designee.

The CPO will accept only records requests made in writing or electronically via email. Records request made via social media shall not be accepted and must be resubmitted. Record requests or requestors that cite the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) will be treated as though they were made pursuant to the CORA.

When responding to a records request, the CPO shall make every effort to respond within three business days, as is required by C.R.S §24-72-203(3)(b). A request is received the day an email or letter containing the request is opened. The three-business day response time begins the first business day following receipt of the request. A request received after noon on any day the CPO is officially closed will be considered received as of the following business day.

No employee of the CPO may modify, redact or omit any records they are required to provide, pursuant to this policy, to the *Ombudsman* or his or her designee handling the request. Staff should never assume a document is exempt and should always consult the *Ombudsman* before making a final determination. Redactions and decisions about whether a record falls under an exemption to the CORA will be made by the *Ombudsman* in consultation with the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

When feasible, the CPO will endeavor to provide electronic copies of files to requestors if such alternative is significantly less burdensome to provide than paper copies. When responsive records cannot be easily or cost effectively provided electronically to a requestor, the CPO will work with the requestor to schedule a time to inspect the records in person. The CPO is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except state holidays. The *Ombudsman* may grant exceptions where the CPO, requestor or the records produced require special accommodations.

When a requestor (either an individual or organization) has an overdue balance for completing a prior request to the CPO, work on a new CORA request will not begin until the overdue bill is paid in full.

17.200 Fees

When a request requires the production of more than 25 pages of documents or more than one hour of staff time to locate or produce the records, the CPO will charge the requestor for all copying expenses and for staff time in accordance with C.R.S. §24-72-205(5)(a) and applicable law.

Any cost charged to a requestor shall not exceed the actual cost of producing the records, in accordance with C.R.S. §24-72-205(5)(a) and applicable law.

For requests where the CPO anticipates more than 25 pages will be produced and/or more than one hour of staff time will be consumed, the CPO will provide a requestor with advance notice and an estimate of compliance costs. Such costs must be paid in full before the production of records unless alternative arrangements have been made through the *Ombudsman*.

17.300 Production of Documents

When the number of pages produced in response to a records request exceeds 25 pages, the CPO will charge \$0.25 per page for all documents copied.

When researching the location of a document, retrieving or producing records consumes more than one hour of staff time, the CPO shall charge \$20 an hour for all staff time. An hourly rate not to exceed \$30 an hour when specialized document production or specialized skills are required to fully comply with a records request. In extraordinary circumstance, the use of a third-party contractor may be necessary and will be discussed with the requestor in advance.

By policy of the CPO, the requestor shall also be charged \$30 an hour for time spent by an attorney engaged in the practice of law directly related to a records request, including but not limited to, the review of documents for privilege or other exemptions to production; document redaction; creation of documents that articulate the privileged nature of the requested documents or conducting CORA related legal research.

Payment is due within 30 calendar days of the invoice date. Past due amounts will be referred to collections.

17.400 Format of Records Produced

The CORA guarantees that *“all public records shall be open for inspection by any person at reasonable times, except as provided in this part 2 or as otherwise specifically provided by law,”* as stated in C.R.S. §24-72-201. The CORA does not guarantee access to public records in a specific format. When the production or review of records in a specific format would interfere with the regular discharge of duties of the CPO and staff, in accordance with C.R.S. §24-72-203(1)(a), or levy an undue burden upon the CPO, the *Ombudsman* will determine the appropriate format for the records to be produced. The CPO may require that members of the public only be allowed to review copies of documents when the custodian of records determines that allowing access to originals could interfere with the regular discharge of duties of the CPO, its staff or the production of original records could jeopardize the condition of the records.

17.500 CPO Contact for CORA Requests

For details on how to file a CORA request, please visit www.coloradocpo.org. Additionally, anyone seeking information may call the CPO at 720-625-8640.

18.000 Legal Advice

The CPO does not provide legal advice to *contacts* or *complainants*.

19.000 Mandatory Reporting

CPO staff members are required under C.R.S. §19-3-304 to report known or suspected child abuse and/or neglect. CPO staff will inform the *Ombudsman* or his/her designee prior to reporting alleged abuse and/or neglect, unless doing so would place a child or adult at risk of harm. CPO staff shall immediately, upon receiving such information, report or cause a report to be made to the county department, local law enforcement or through the Colorado's statewide child abuse reporting hotline (1-844-CO4-KIDS).

20.000 Conflict of Interest

Staff must have the ability to act independently and impartially in order to perform the duties necessitated by their position. Staff must be above reproach in all relationships and must not maintain any appearance of a conflict of interest. The CPO has a conflict of interest policy within the personnel manual. Each staff member must certify annually that they have reviewed the policy and have no conflicts of interest that would impair their ability to carry out their duties.

21.000 Filing a Grievance

Should a *complainant* believe that any staff member performed their duties in an unsatisfactory manner, the *complainant* is entitled to file a written grievance with the *Ombudsman*. (See **Appendix A: Grievance Policies**)

Should a *complainant* believe that the *Ombudsman* performed his/her duties in an unsatisfactory manner, the *complainant* is entitled to file a written grievance with the CPO Board. (See **Appendix A: Grievance Policies**)

APPENDIX A: Grievance Policies

Complaints Regarding CPO Staff Member Performance

Should a complainant to the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) be dissatisfied with the performance of a CPO staff member during the course of their involvement with the CPO, the complainant may file a grievance with the Ombudsman. In order to do so, the complainant must submit their detailed concerns in writing to the Ombudsman.

Grievances should be addressed to the Ombudsman and can be mailed to:

Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman
Attn: Complaint Regarding CPO Staff Member Performance
1300 Broadway, Suite 430
Denver, Colorado 80203

Once received, the Ombudsman will thoroughly review the grievance and take the following steps to ensure resolution:

1. Review the written grievance and speak with the complainant should more information be necessary.
2. Meet with staff associated with the grievance.
3. Review the work completed by CPO staff.
4. Provide written feedback to the complainant regarding the findings of the grievance review and any plan necessary to resolve the complainant's concerns.

THE COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

PUBLIC COMPLAINT PROCESS

ARTICLE I: AUTHORITY

Section 19-3.3-102(3)(a)(IV), C.R.S., requires the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman Board (the "Board") to develop a public complaint process related to the Child Protection Ombudsman (the "Ombudsman").

ARTICLE II: GENERAL GUIDELINES

Before filing a complaint, the following general guidelines should be considered:

1. The public complaint process addressed in this policy is only intended to address performance-related issues with the Ombudsman. Specifically, this policy addresses whether the Ombudsman acted ethically or complied with agency procedures.
2. The public complaint process addressed in this policy is not intended to appeal the outcome or result of a case submitted to the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman (the "Office").

ARTICLE III: PROCEDURES

Section 3.1 Procedure for Filing a Complaint.

Any person who has a complaint against the Ombudsman related to his or her performance, and who cannot resolve the issue through discussion directly with the Ombudsman, may file a complaint with the Board. The following procedures must be followed for submission of a public complaint:

1. The complaint must be in writing, and must include the name, address and telephone number of the person submitting the complaint.
2. The complaint shall set forth, as precisely as reasonably possible, the nature of the complaint and the efforts, if any, to resolve the complaint.

3. The complaint must be submitted with the following designated attention to the below address:

Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman
ATTN: PUBLIC COMPLAINT CONCERNING OMBUDSMAN
Ralph L. Carr Judicial Building
1300 Broadway, Suite 430
Denver, Colorado 80203

4. Once received, the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman Staff ("Office") shall immediately forward the public complaint unopened to the Board Chair.

Section 3.2 Procedure for Resolution of Public Complaint.

Once a complaint is filed against the Ombudsman and received by the Board Chair, the following procedures address resolution of the matter:

1. The Chair or his or her designee will review the public complaint and determine, in his or her discretion, whether additional information is necessary from the individual. The Board Chair or designee shall send to the individual within thirty days an acknowledgment that the complaint was received.
2. The Chair or his or her designee shall notify the Ombudsman within the same thirty days that a complaint needs to be addressed at the next regularly scheduled meeting so the topic may be placed on the Board's agenda.
3. The public complaint will be distributed to the Board members in advance of the next regularly scheduled meeting for their review.
4. At the meeting, the Board shall discuss the complaint in public, unless the contents of the complaint addresses personnel issues related to the Ombudsman or the Chair, in his or her discretion, determines that the issue may cause potential embarrassment to the individual complainant.
5. If the complaint must be discussed in Executive Session, the Board Chair will call for a motion to enter into Executive Session.

6. In order to resolve the complaint, the Board may need to discuss the complaint with the Ombudsman or obtain additional information.
7. Following the Board's discussion concerning the grievance, whether in public or in Executive Session, the Board shall in public session and by majority vote determine what, if any action, should be taken in response to the complaint. The Board, as delegated to the Chair, shall provide a written response to the complainant notifying the complainant and the Ombudsman of the Board's determination.
8. The complaint shall be resolved as expeditiously as resources allow.

ARTICLE IV: AMENDMENTS

Section 4.1 Procedures.

This Public Complaint Process may be amended or repealed, in whole or in part, by a majority vote at any publicly noticed meeting of the Board and shall be effective upon adoption or amendment.

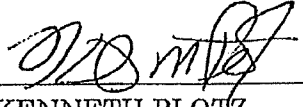
Section 4.2 Distribution.

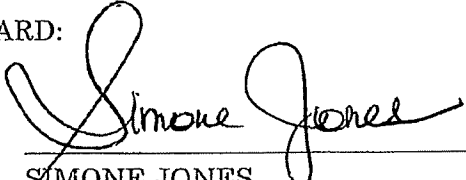
The Chair, as may be delegated to the Ombudsman, shall provide a copy of the latest version of this Public Complaint Process to all new Board members upon their appointment, and to any other person who requests a copy. The latest version of the Public Complaint Process shall be made available to the public via the Office website.

Section 4.3 History.

Adopted and effective by the Board on July 13, 2017.

CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD:


KENNETH PLOTZ
Board Chair


SIMONE JONES
Board Vice-Chair