



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman

Fiscal Year 2018-2019

Performance Management System

July 31, 2018

Stephanie Villafuerte,
Child Protection Ombudsman

Table of Contents

Background	3
Mission	3
Vision	3
Major Agency Functions	4
Role of the CPO	4
Responsibilities of the CPO	4
Performance Management System	5
Strategic Policy Initiatives	6
Conclusion and Timeline.....	10

Background

The Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) was established in June 2010, under Senate Bill 10-171. This legislation provided that the CPO would operate as a program through a contract with a local non-profit agency, issued and managed by the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).

Senate Bill 10-171 was passed in response to the deaths of 12 children in Colorado who were known to child protection services. The deaths of these children in 2007 sparked an outcry by the public that there be greater oversight, accountability and transparency of the child protection system in Colorado. The public demanded to know more about how the systems charged with protecting Colorado’s children were keeping them safe and working to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Years after the CPO’s creation, legislators determined that CPO needed independence from the agencies it was designed to review. So, on June 2, 2015, Senate Bill 15-204, *Concerning the Independent Functioning of the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman*, was signed into law. This legislation transformed the original “program” into a distinct and independent state agency. The new, independent CPO opened in 2016.

The concept of an ombudsman dates back hundreds of years and is designed to provide citizens with an independent, unbiased and trusted intermediary between the public and an entity. In a similar fashion, the CPO works to provide a clear channel between the citizens of Colorado and the agencies and providers tasked with protecting children. The CPO is guided by standards set by organizations such as the United States Ombudsman Association and the American Bar Association. Using those standards, the CPO serves the public by independently gathering information, investigating complaints and providing recommendations to child protection agencies and providers.

To ensure the accountability and transparency of the CPO and the Ombudsman, the legislature also created the Child Protection Ombudsman Board (CPO Board) in 2015. The CPO Board was the first of its kind in the nation. By law, the CPO Board is required to oversee the Ombudsman’s performance and act as an advisory body on strategic direction and outreach decisions by the CPO.

The CPO is now housed within the Colorado State Judicial Branch and is located at the Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center in Denver. Colorado’s current Child Protection Ombudsman, Stephanie Villafuerte, was appointed in December 2015 by the CPO Board. Ombudsman Villafuerte took office in January 2016.

Mission

The Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman works to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of Colorado’s children by investigating complaints, delivering recommendations and driving systemic reform in the child protection system.

Vision

Ensuring safety for Colorado’s children today and envisioning a stronger child protection system for the future.

Major Agency Functions

Role of the CPO

By design, the CPO serves as an independent, neutral problem solver that helps citizens navigate a complex child protection system in an expert and timely manner. The CPO has independent access to child protection records that are not otherwise available to the public. This allows the CPO to objectively assist citizens with concerns, investigate issues affecting the child protection system, 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.

Responsibilities of the CPO

The CPO was established pursuant to C.R.S. 19-3.3-101. In addition to providing all citizens free and confidential services, the CPO provides citizens and stakeholders four primary services.

NAVIGATE – The CPO helps citizens navigate the child protection system and directs them towards needed services and resources. Citizens often contact the CPO with questions about how a child protection agency/provider functions or which system provides a certain service. If the CPO determines that a citizen’s inquiry does not contain a complaint alleging violations by an agency/provider, the CPO will help resolve their question by providing either systems navigation or a resource referral.

INVESTIGATE – The CPO objectively researches and investigates concerns about the delivery of services to children and families within the child protection system. If the CPO determines that a complaint about an agency/provider within the child protection system includes allegations that rules or laws were violated in the delivery of services to children, the CPO will open an investigation. During an investigation CPO staff will conduct a comprehensive, independent study of relevant facts, records and witness statements. The CPO’s investigations may include a single agency/provider or multiple systems impacting multiple families in Colorado.

ILLUMINATE – The CPO’s work illuminates the strengths and weaknesses within the child protection system that are directly impacting the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families. By publicly releasing investigation reports, violations and data, the CPO provides citizens and stakeholders with the information necessary to maintain a transparent and accountable child protection system.

REFORM – The CPO will 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.

Performance Management System

Introduction

The CPO's Performance Management System is designed to ensure CPO staff maintain continuous communication concerning progress in achieving the key metrics outlined in the CPO's [Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Plan](#). This system will also provide CPO staff the opportunity to discuss any needed adjustments to the agency's strategy for completing the key metrics.

Task Management and Progress Communication

WEEKLY STAFF MEETINGS – CPO staff began meeting weekly in January 2018, as opposed to the previous bi-weekly schedule. This change was made in response to the growing number of contacts the CPO receives, as well as the increasingly complex cases the CPO is reviewing. During these weekly meetings – known internally as “case staffing” – CPO staff discuss agency operations, ongoing cases and legislative updates. Additionally, child protection systems analysts present cases to the Ombudsman they feel are ready to be closed.

Many of the discussions held during these weekly meetings are directly related to key metrics listed in the CPO's Performance Plan. For example, staff routinely address cases to ensure they are being closed within the 60-business day deadline outlined in the CPO's *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*. For cases that need additional time, CPO staff discuss whether a case briefing is appropriate. These discussions are directly related to critical processes outlined in the CPO's Strategic Policy Initiative Number Two.

TODOIST – During the past fiscal year, the CPO began using the web-based task tool, Todoist. Unlike previous task management programs utilized by the CPO, Todoist does not assign tasks to staff members. The program's predominant function within the agency is to provide staff with an outline of agency goals and tasks for each month. This may include upcoming meetings, deadlines and discussion points for ongoing projects. Many of the items listed in Todoist are designed to ensure the CPO is on track to complete critical processes outlined in the CPO's first and third strategic policy initiatives.

QUARTERLY SMART ACT MEETINGS – Each quarter, the CPO will hold a meeting with all staff to determine the status of each key metric outlined in the CPO's Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Plan. Unlike the weekly staff meetings, these quarterly meetings are dedicated to discussing projects and progress related to the CPO's three strategic policy initiatives. Summaries of these meetings will be reflected in the CPO's Annual Performance Report and Performance Evaluations. They will also be included in the CPO's presentations to the Joint Judiciary Committee.

CPO DATABASE – The CPO has continued to utilize its database to efficiently and accurately track its caseload. Additionally, the CPO has started utilizing data to help determine whether the agency is on track to complete critical processes outlined in Strategic Policy Initiative One, specifically which communities and organizations the CPO is repeatedly coming into contact with.

Strategic Policy Initiatives

During Fiscal Year 2017-2018, the CPO received a record 611 contacts from citizens and stakeholders. To ensure the CPO meets the growing demand for its services, the agency began a scheduled review of its *Case Practices and Operating Procedures* in May 2018. CPO staff spent months researching the practices and policies of similar ombudsman offices across the country. As a result, the CPO revised portions of its *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*. To ensure the CPO is utilizing the tools and guidance provided in the SMART Act, the CPO's [Fiscal Year 2018-19 Performance Plan](#) has been revised to accommodate the anticipated changes to its *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*.

The majority of the changes made to its *Case Practices and Operating Procedures* focus on giving the CPO more flexibility to achieve strong outcomes for families, allowing the CPO to be more proactive in addressing issues affecting the child protection system and ensuring that issues identified by the CPO are resolved and systems are improved. The CPO has adjusted a number of key metrics within Strategic Policy Initiative Two to accommodate growth under its new *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*.

1

STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVE: Improve communication methods and increase outreach campaigns to better educate and engage citizens and stakeholders on issues facing the child protection system.

The CPO is statutorily required to educate citizens and stakeholders “concerning child maltreatment and the role of the community in strengthening families and keeping children safe.” See C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(2)(c). The CPO has identified the following strategies and critical processes as ways to become more accessible to the public and improve the consistency in which it shares its work with citizens and stakeholders. The strategies, critical process and key metrics outlined below are designed to ensure the CPO is fulfilling its mandate to educate the public regarding issues affecting the child protection system.

STRATEGY ONE: Maintain consistent, timely and informative methods of communicating the CPO’s work to citizens and stakeholders.

Critical Process – Produce and release quarterly reports.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Produce and release two CPO Quarterly Reports.

Critical Process – Complete investigation reports and case briefings using standardized templates and post finalized documents to the website in a timely fashion.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- 100 percent of CPO’s reports will be posted to the website within 48-business hours of finalization.
- Develop a notification system to alert a list of subscribers when briefings and reports are posted to the website.
- Assess any needed changes to report formats and public release practices.

Critical Process – Develop and maintain a Dashboard page on the CPO’s website that provides citizens and stakeholders access to CPO data.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Launch Dashboard on CPO website.
- Assess improvements and needs of the Dashboard page.
- Update data in Dashboard during the first week of every month.

Critical Process – Ensure transparency regarding the CPO’s ongoing work by consistently updating and posting public notifications of pending cases, case briefings and legislative updates.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Update the list of public notifications on the Pending Cases page of the CPO’s website weekly.
- Adjust the Pending Cases page of the CPO’s website as necessary and improve functions that are confusing or inefficient.
- 100 percent of case briefings will be completed and posted to the Case Briefings page of the CPO’s website within the 60-day deadline set in the CPO’s *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*.

Critical Process – Continue to improve communication with legislators concerning issues the CPO has identified and provide consistent and timely communication of CPO findings and recommendations.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Create policy for consistently sharing information with legislators, including an email listserv.
- Create listserv that includes all legislators.
- Provide information about the ongoing work the CPO is doing and how to access that information on the CPO website.

STRATEGY TWO: Expand outreach efforts and improve campaigns to better engage and serve communities less familiar with CPO services.

Critical Process – Continue to increase engagement with foster and adoptive parents, kinship providers, children and juveniles, mandatory reporters and the child protection legal community through education and outreach campaigns.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Identify organizations and agencies/providers – which the CPO has not previously partnered with – that serve the five identified communities.
- Distribute CPO literature to all agencies/providers and organizations identified.
- Develop a strategic plan to connect with identified organizations and agencies/providers.
- Schedule speaking and informational meetings.
- Complete outreach campaigns with four of the organizations and agencies/providers.

Critical Process – Increase engagement with agencies/providers and organizations in rural communities through education and outreach campaigns.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Distribute CPO literature to all child welfare departments and judicial districts in the state.
- Complete two outreach campaigns in different rural judicial districts. During those campaigns engage with entities such as, child welfare departments, court improvement programs, school districts, regional hospitals and law enforcement.
- Create listserv of all rural agencies/providers and organizations.

Critical Process – Expand services to the Spanish-speaking community through increased outreach and improved accessibility.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Distribute Spanish literature to all county child welfare departments and all judicial districts.
- Create the capability to view a Spanish version of the CPO website.

2

STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVE: Implement practices that ensure the CPO manages its caseload efficiently and effectively, allotting staff the necessary time and resources to investigate systemic concerns.

The demand for CPO services has increased steadily since the agency’s inception, as has the breadth and complexity of issues presented to the CPO. To facilitate systemic reform through comprehensive investigations and inclusive policy resolution, the CPO must recognize complex cases quickly and resolve less complicated cases faster. The strategy below will help the CPO achieve this goal and ensure that the quality of services is maintained.

STRATEGY ONE: Implement practices and procedures that will decrease the amount of time Information/Resource Referrals and Assists are open and conversely increase the amount of time CPO staff dedicate to systemic issues affecting the child protection system.

Critical Process – Streamline the process for identifying inquires that result in Information/Resource Referrals or Assists and close such cases in a timely manner.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- 80 percent of inquiries resulting in an Information/Resource Referrals will be closed within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry.
- 80 percent of inquires resulting in Assists will be closed within 60-business days.

Critical Process – Meet deadlines for completing investigations, as stated in the CPO’s Case Practices and Operating Procedures.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- 70 percent of CPO investigations will be closed within the 60-business day deadline. (This figure does not include investigations in which case briefings are completed.)

Critical Process – Utilize data to identify trends in the child protection system to launch investigations sooner.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Continue holding weekly Case Staffing meetings.
- Develop an electronic system for tracking trends and issues identified by staff.
- Launch one investigation based on information gained from data collected from cases involving assists.

3

STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVE: Increase the expertise and resources needed to investigate and research systemic issues within the child protection system.

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.*” See C.R.S. 19-3.3-103(2)(e). These recommendations are often included in the CPO’s investigation reports. An investigation is the most time and resource intensive service the CPO provides. To ensure the CPO is completing these cases in a timely manner and maintaining a quality of work that will drive change within the child protection system, the agency must ensure its staff are both capable and well equipped.

STRATEGY ONE: Expand expertise and resources to ensure the CPO is fulfilling its mandated charge of investigating systemic issues and driving reform across the child protection system.

Critical Process – Analyze whether systemic issues warrant additional staff and expertise.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Hire additional child protection systems analyst.
- Redistribute caseloads and reassess best approaches to systemic investigations and research.

Critical Process – Use expertise of staff to complete outreach in relevant areas.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- As the expertise of current staff grow, and/or the CPO gains additional staff, CPO staff will aid in outreach efforts and identifying systemic issues within their given area of expertise. These areas of expertise may include, DYS, mental health or child welfare.

STRATEGY TWO: Improve how the CPO tracks and analyzes its recommendations to agencies/providers.

Critical Process – Design and implement a system to track status of CPO recommendations.

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2018-2019:

- Create and implement a policy that allows the CPO to track recommendations and determine whether they have been implemented.

Conclusion and Timeline

The Child Protection Ombudsman respectfully submits this report to the Joint Budget Committee and the General Assembly, as is required under C.R.S. 2-7-204. The agency will comply with its requirements under the statute and will submit the required reports and evaluations.

June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research and write Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Plan.• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Plan.
July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research and write Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Management System.
August 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Management System.
October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research and write Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Report.• Hold first quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.
November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Report.
December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold second quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.• Research and write Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Quarter Two Performance Evaluation.
January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Quarter Two Performance Evaluation.
March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold third quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.• Research and write Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Quarter Three Performance Evaluation.
April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Quarter Three Performance Evaluation.
June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Plan.