



**CHILD PROTECTION**  
**OMBUDSMAN**  
of COLORADO

**Office of Colorado's Child Protection  
Ombudsman**

**Fiscal Year 2019-2020**

**Performance Management System**

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## **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**

We are innovative change agents committed to informing and reforming child protection systems for children, families and communities.

## **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. The CPO receives complaints concerning actions or inactions by child protection agencies that may adversely impact the safety, permanency or well-being of a child. Child protection agencies are those that receive public funds to protect or care for children. This includes law enforcement, mental health agencies, child welfare services and the Division of Youth Services.

In addition to providing all citizens free and confidential services, the CPO provides citizens and stakeholders three primary services:

**Information and Resources Referral (IRR)** – The CPO provides citizens with information, resources and/or education to help resolve their questions regarding the child protection system. The CPO will speak with a citizen on the phone to learn more about their concern. CPO staff may personally connect the caller with a resource that is best suited to address their question.

**Assist** – This is the most common services provided by the CPO. The CPO works with citizens to clarify what is happening in their specific case, including processes and actions taken by an agency or provider. CPO staff will complete an independent review of relevant records, rule and law. Depending on the complexity and nature of the inquiry, the CPO may contact the agency/provider involved to gain a better understanding about a specific situation. In some instances, the CPO may facilitate communication between the caller and the agency involved in the case with the goal of resolving the problem.

**Investigation** – The CPO will open an investigation if it determines a case may result in recommendations for statutory, budgetary and/or administrative changes to improve the broader child protection system. A comprehensive, independent study of relevant facts, records, rules and law will be completed. The CPO will interview all relevant parties and may interview subject matter experts. For all investigations, the CPO will contact the relevant agency/provider and release a public investigation report.

## **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 2019-2020 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. 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.

**TRELLO** – In May 2019, the CPO assigned each staff member an account in the online task management program, Trello. The program allows all CPO staff members the ability to track projects and pertinent cases. During the CPO's weekly meetings, Trello is used to review the status of all CPO projects and cases. This has helped streamline communications regarding deadlines, projects involving multiple staff members and upcoming events.

**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

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 – 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 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- 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.
- Maintain timely posting of all CPO briefings and reports.

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

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- Update the list of public notifications on the Pending Cases page of the CPO’s website weekly.
- 100 percent of case extensions will be completed and posted to the Case Extension 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 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- During the summer months, send legislators a survey asking about their interests in child protection issues and if there are any areas specifically they and/or their constituents want to be informed about.

**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 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- Distribute CPO literature to all relevant agencies/providers and organizations.
- Complete outreach campaigns with four organizations and agencies/providers the CPO has not previously engaged with.
- Distribute a survey to the CPO’s stakeholder listserv seeking feedback regarding awareness of CPO services and interests in receiving additional materials or coordinating an informational meeting.

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

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- 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.

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

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- 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 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 inquiries that result in Information/Resource Referral or Assists and close such cases in a timely manner.**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- 90 percent of inquiries resulting an Information/Resource Referral will be closed within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry.
- 90 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 2019-2020:**

- 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 2019-2020:**

- Launch two investigations 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 2019-2020:**

- Analyze data from the previous fiscal year to determine the impact the additional staff had on decreasing caseloads and increasing the CPO’s capacity to complete systemic investigations and research.
- Analyze data to determine the nature of the systemic issues facing the child welfare system.
- Using information from this analysis, determine whether to seek funds for additional staff.

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

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- 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 system to track status of CPO recommendations.**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

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



# 4

**STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVE: Establish the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center, which will serve as an objective and innovative space for citizens and stakeholders to discuss and improve child protection systems.**

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. 19-3.3103(2)(e). As part of this, the CPO will create the Public Policy Advancement Center to research, investigate and promote best practices in child protection systems and to make recommendations to improve Colorado’s child protection systems, services and agencies.

**STRATEGY ONE: Ensure the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center is an efficient, effective and inclusive space to promote improvements in Colorado’s child protection system.**

**Critical Process – Implement thorough and consistent practices to ensure the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center is effectively identifying priorities and providing an inclusive environment for discussion.**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Launch the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center.
- Establish public processes and expectations regarding how the program will select issues and what it will produce.
- Establish a space on the CPO’s website dedicated to informing citizens, stakeholders and legislators about the issues being addressed and the products being produced.

**Critical Process – Develop efficient outreach mechanisms to ensure the public is informed of the issues and has clear expectations regarding what the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center will produce.**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Implement any applicable practices or products detailed in the CPO Communication Plan.
- Develop listservs of applicable stakeholders.
- Develop and implement a system for consistently informing citizens, stakeholders and legislators about ongoing work.
- Develop and implement a system for receiving public comment that accommodates for citizens and stakeholders in rural areas who may not attend meetings and discussions in person.

Develop and implement a system for distributing and promoting final products and recommendations developed through the program.

**STRATEGY TWO: Ensure the center is consistently identifying relevant issues and developing well-vetted, objective and detailed recommendations for change.**

**Critical Process – Implement practices that will facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and ensure the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center is transparent and accessible**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Develop and implement public procedures and practices for seeking and incorporating input from stakeholders and citizens.
- Develop and implement public procedures and practices for alerting stakeholders and citizens when the program selects a new issue or project.

- Develop and implement public procedures and practices for alerting stakeholders and citizens when recommendations have been issued.

**STRATEGY THREE: Ensure the CPO is producing products that effectively guide the child protection community in implementing recommendations developed through the CPO's Public Policy Advancement Center.**

**Critical Process – Implement and maintain a process for assessing the outcomes of recommendations developed through the CPO's Public Policy Advancement Center.**

**Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-2020:**

- Create and implement a policy that allows the CPO to publicly track recommendations developed through the program and determine whether they have been implemented.
- Solicit stakeholder feedback regarding the products and recommendations developed through the program.
- Develop and implement a public reporting system which demonstrates how the CPO is working to ensure recommendations are 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.

<b>June 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Plan.</li><li>• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Plan.</li><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Management System.</li><li>• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Management System.</li></ul>
<b>October 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Report.</li><li>• Hold first quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.</li></ul>
<b>November 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Performance Report.</li></ul>
<b>December 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold second quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.</li><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Quarter Two Performance Evaluation.</li></ul>
<b>January 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Quarter Two Performance Evaluation.</li></ul>
<b>March 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold third quarter review meeting with Ombudsman and staff.</li><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Quarter Three Performance Evaluation.</li></ul>
<b>April 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submit and post Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Quarter Three Performance Evaluation.</li></ul>
<b>June 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research and write Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Performance Plan.</li></ul>