



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman

Fiscal Year 2016-2017
Performance Report

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Stephanie Villafuerte
Child Protection Ombudsman

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). From 2011 through 2015, the CPO was housed by the nonprofit, the National Association of Counsel for Children, and was supervised by the CDHS. 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” housed with CDHS, into a distinct independent state office. Additionally, the legislature created the Child Protection Ombudsman Board in 2015. Colorado’s current Child Protection Ombudsman, Stephanie Villafuerte, was appointed in December 2015 by the Board and took office in January 2016.

Mission

The mission of the CPO is to bring accountability and transparency to the child protection system and promote better outcomes for children and families. The CPO fields and reviews complaints regarding child protection agencies, defined in C.R.S. 19-3.3-103 as, “any public agency or any provider that receives public moneys that may adversely affect the safety, permanency, or well-being of the child.” Those agencies include – but are not limited to – CDHS, law enforcement, public health providers, educators, day care providers, medical professionals and treatment providers. The CPO serves the children of Colorado by driving policy reform and improving best practices within the child protection system.

Performance Plan and Strategic Policy Initiatives

Since becoming independent, the CPO has relocated and is now housed in the Colorado Judicial Branch. After taking office, the Ombudsman launched and completed an extensive assessment of CPO operations. Information collected during that assessment was used to create the CPO’s first [Performance Plan](#) which was submitted to the Joint Budget Committee and the General Assembly, as is required under C.R.S. 2-7-204, on August 1, 2016.

The CPO’s strategic policy initiatives were created after the Ombudsman’s analysis revealed areas where the CPO needs to improve by utilizing impactful strategies. Those strategies include four goals comprised of broad, long-term strategies to make the CPO a more efficient and effective agency. Each of those goals encompass specific strategies that will drive the CPO forward. During Fiscal Year 2016-2017, the CPO will submit a report each quarter detailing its progress in accomplishing the performance measures outlined in the Performance Plan.

The [CPO’s 2016-2017 Performance Plan](#) and subsequent reports, including the [Performance Management System](#) and [Quarter One Performance Evaluation](#), are posted on the [agency’s website](#). A complete report of the CPO’s strategic policy initiatives may be found in the Performance Plan.

Summary of CPO’s Goals and Progress

Below is an overview of the CPO’s goals, performance measures and key metrics for Fiscal Year 2016-2017. The CPO submitted its Quarter One Performance Evaluation – its most recent performance evaluation – on October 1, 2016. Summaries of that report are also included below.

Goal One: Establish an efficient office to ensure seamless delivery of services to the public.

When the CPO relocated to the Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center in January 2016, it initially lacked a permanent office space, as well as the necessary physical infrastructure, including phones, copiers and IT services. It was also essential for the CPO to develop several its own operation systems. The CPO created four strategies to achieve Goal One.

STRATEGY ONE: Build physical infrastructure of the CPO

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: The CPO will work to create a safe work space with allotment for growth. The CPO will also secure the necessary hardware, software and IT services for the office.

Quarter One Status: The CPO completed the key metrics for this strategy during the first quarter. The CPO office space was completed at the end of July 2016 and furniture and programing were installed.

STRATEGY TWO: Build operating infrastructure

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: To ensure the proper use of public funds the CPO will develop internal financial policies and processes and create necessary operating policies.

Quarter One Status: The CPO has started reviewing its operating budget monthly. The office is working with the Attorney General’s office (AG) to finalize the CPO’s fiscal rules, internal financial controls and personnel rules.

STRATEGY THREE: Establish Board structure and operating policies

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: In coordination with the executive, legislative and judicial branches, the CPO will work to fill vacancies through appointments. The CPO will also provide the Board support in its creation of its by-laws, procedures for the evaluation of the Ombudsman as well as fiscal and travel rules. In addition to other support, the CPO will organize the required rural Board meeting.

Quarter One Status: All but one position on the Board has been filled and the Board is operational. The CPO has adopted and implemented travel and fiscal rules created by the judicial department and is providing the Board necessary reports and information monthly. The Board has started working with the AG to create its by-laws and the Ombudsman evaluation process. Additional efforts by the Board and the CPO are ongoing.

Goal Two: Create transparent and accountable operating policies that promote the CPO’s accessibility and responsiveness to the public.

The CPO must develop operating policies to proceed in accordance with mandatory requirements, as stated in C.R.S. 19-3.3-101. Procedures must promote accessibility, responsiveness and transparency. The CPO created two strategies to achieve Goal Two.

STRATEGY ONE: Create a general operations manual for handing inquiries from the public

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: During this fiscal year, the CPO will work to develop polices for how the office receives complaints, reviews complaints and how it determines and discloses case dispositions. The CPO will also identify mechanisms to implement and track CPO recommendations.

Quarter One Status: Efforts to complete essential policies are ongoing. The CPO expects to publish its Operation Manual in January 2017. The CPO is researching what information is useful and appropriate for the public and stakeholders. The office is also studying the most effective methods of tracking the recommendations it makes.

STRATEGY TWO: Create communication policies in accordance with state law

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: The CPO will create procedures for: responding to Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) requests, internal document retention and filing and procedures to comply with Colorado Open Meeting Laws (OML).

Quarter One Status: Information about the CPO's procedures in handling information requests have been posted to the CPO's website. The office has started working with the AG to ensure its policies align with statute. Both CPO and staff and board members have been provided literature on OML.

Goal Three: Institute outreach and communication plans to educate and advise the public and stakeholders on trends and recommendations to improve the child protection system.

A communication strategy is required to address the CPO's statutory duty to educate and conduct statewide outreach to stakeholder groups. As an independent office, it is critical that the CPO develop communication strategies to be accessible and efficient for the public. The authorizing legislation for the CPO mandates that it act as a "key advisor concerning issues relating to child safety and protection." A long-term public policy plan will ensure that the CPO fulfills its responsibility to make advisory recommendations to child protection agencies and other stakeholders, including the Governor and the General Assembly. The CPO created three strategies to achieve Goal Three.

STRATEGY ONE: Develop a public policy strategy

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: In developing its public policy strategy the CPO will create both short and long-term plans. The office will also utilize its new database to start identifying trends and that information will be used to help educate stakeholders and lawmakers about concerns within the child protection system.

Quarter One Status: CPO staff have identified and prioritized eight systemic policy issues within the child protection system. Staff have started collecting information on the systemic complaints. The CPO's new database launched on October 3, 2016. In August, multiple outreach efforts were completed and the CPO is now analyzing ways to best serve lawmakers in the 2017 legislative session.

STRATEGY TWO: Establish outreach strategy to help expand utilization of the CPO's services

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: During Fiscal Year 2016-2017 the CPO will work to expand its reach by developing a bi-lingual initiative, increase contact with key groups and secure speaking engagements at key stakeholder conferences and meetings.

Quarter One Status: Since the start of the current fiscal year, the Ombudsman has presented to roughly 400 members of the child protection community at speaking engagements across Colorado. The CPO has started working with judicial officers, the Colorado State Judicial Court Improvement Project and other members of the legal community. The Ombudsman has also continued to participate in key stakeholder groups.

STRATEGY THREE: Improve communication with the public and stakeholders

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measures and Key Metrics: To improve its communication, the CPO will develop the following: protocols for communicating data related to citizen complaints, a quarterly report for citizens, stakeholders and the media as well as strategies to proactively and reactively respond to media outlets on high-profile child abuse cases and investigations.

Quarter One Status: CPO staff have discussed what information may be most useful to the public and is currently researching what information is shared by ombudsman offices across the country. A rough concept of the quarterly report has been created and the CPO is in the process of drafting its communication policies.

Goal Four: Increase staff to meet the growing demand for services.

An increasing demand for services is taking away from outreach opportunities and impacting the CPO's ability to pursue other mandates. The CPO will require additional resources to continue delivering quality work and proactively improve the child protection system, as it is statutorily required to do. This includes additional outreach to the public and proactive reviews and investigations of areas the CPO has yet to sufficiently address. Those areas include: foster families, adoptive families and practices at the Department of Youth Corrections. Additional staffing is key in positioning the CPO to meet these demands. The CPO has created two strategies to achieve Goal Four.

STRATEGY ONE: Analyze the CPO's needs to meet the demand for outreach and education and comply with statutory mandates

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measure and Key Metrics: The CPO will assess any additional funding that may be needed to bolster the part-time position of Communications and Policy Director.

Quarter One Status: Since joining the CPO in July, the Communications and Policy Director has helped complete the annual report, all reports required under the SMART Act, handled multiple media requests as well as prepared staff members for interviews and provided support and outreach at five conferences. The CPO has assessed the additional funds needed to complete additional tasks such as the CPO's first quarterly report, assisting in systemic reviews and drafting policies for the CPO Operations Manual. A request for additional funds to meet these needs was submitted to the Joint Budget Committee on November 1, 2016.

STRATEGY TWO: Monitor increasing call demand and analyze ways to create investigative capacity for systemic complaints

FY 2016-2017 Performance Measure and Key Metrics: Analyze how additional funding may be used to create a second full-time investigator position.

Quarter One Status: The CPO has assessed the workload of its current Investigator to help determine the need for additional staff. The number of complaints the CPO is receiving continues to increase, which in turn is increasing the caseload of its investigator. Also, since the start of Fiscal Year 2016-2017, the CPO has received complaints and identified eight systemic issues that need addressing. Currently, the CPO does not have enough staff to review and or investigate these issues in a timely manner. In addition to reviewing complaints and working on investigations, the current Investigator has played a key role in launching the CPO's new database. A request for additional funds to meet these needs was submitted to the Joint Budget Committee on November 1, 2016.