



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman

Fiscal Year 2019-2020

Quarter Three Performance Evaluation

April 10, 2020

Stephanie Villafuerte,
Child Protection Ombudsman

Strategic Policy Initiatives

The Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) continues to work on three Strategic Policy Initiatives (SPI) that were developed during Fiscal Year 2018-19 and is beginning work on an additional SPI that was developed in Fiscal Year 2019-20. In concert with one another, the four SPI are ensuring the CPO has the necessary resources and practices to address system-wide issues affecting the child protection system, while also providing a high quality of service for citizens seeking one-on-one assistance. The SPI are designed to guide the agency's work for multiple fiscal years in the areas of communication and outreach, efficient and impactful practices, expanding expertise and promoting best practices. To create meaningful change within the child protection system, the CPO must continue updating its SPI to be responsive to emerging needs.

The CPO has been evolving its practices since Fiscal Year 2018-19, effectively growing its impact and capacity. From improving communication to increasing resources, the CPO made progress in each of the SPI defined in the Fiscal Year 2018-19 Performance Plan. Communication between the CPO and the entities that it interacts with – such as agencies/providers, legislators, and citizens – is more readily accessible, transparent and understandable than in previous years. This is partly due to the CPO contracting with a local communications firm. The CPO staff have access to better tools and resources, such as Westlaw, to help with legal research and Monday.com to coordinate project management efforts and to facilitate hitting deadlines. Also, the CPO has hired for new positions, effectively expanding the team's expertise and capacity. Furthermore, by promoting best practices, an SPI that was added in Fiscal Year 2019-20, the CPO is leveraging the best available data, research, evidence and testimonials to ensure that objective, accurate and reliable information is delivered to stakeholders so it can be maximized to improve the child protection system.

The numbers are telling; they show that the CPO's efforts are on track and making a difference. The CPO has served 477 citizens so far in Fiscal Year 2019-20, which is on track with projections. This is an indication that the public views the CPO as a vital resource, an entity that can help them navigate the complexities of, resolve issues with, and answer questions about, the state's child protection system. Additionally, the CPO has published two reports, one issue brief and 10 letters of compliance concern so far in Fiscal Year 2019-20, highlighting issues affecting children and families throughout Colorado and promoting improvements.

SMART Act reports and other CPO planning efforts help to ensure we continue to handle the demand for services in an efficient and effective manner. As mentioned, this Q3 SMART Act report highlights changes to the agency's SPI, and internally, we continue to update our Case Practices and Operating Procedures to ensure we have thought through and documented the agency's approach to handling each detail of our SPI.

Moreover, the CPO continues other efforts to improve its practices. The CPO holds annual staff retreats to facilitate the development of ideas and techniques to improve how the CPO fulfills its statutory charge. The CPO meets weekly to discuss agency operations and determine how the agency is progressing in achieving its SPI. The CPO's [Fiscal Year 2019-20 Performance Plan](#) is frequently reviewed by CPO staff. The CPO used its weekly discussions and Performance Plan to write this Quarter Three Performance Evaluation. Below is an update on the CPO's progress in achieving the Key Metrics outlined for Fiscal Year 2019-20. The updates reflect data as of April 10, 2020.

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 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO is emailing its quarterly newsletter to stakeholders on the CPO’s listserv. With the anticipated release of the CPO’s new website, the CPO is working to develop an online option for additional stakeholders to add themselves to the listserv. During Q2 and Q3 the CPO did not post any investigation reports or case briefings to its website. This is because the CPO did not complete any investigation reports during these quarters. Completed documents, along with other deliverables, will be posted on the CPO’s new website once it’s launched.

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 2019-20:

- 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*.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The list of public notifications is being updated in accordance to the procedures listed in the CPO's *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*. While the CPO continues to update its Pending Cases page on its website in a timely manner and in accordance with its *Case Practices and Operating Procedures*, the CPO plans to remove this page from website during Q4. This is because a new format to deliver this information is being developed.

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 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO is on track to send a survey to legislators during Q4 to ask them about their interest in child protection issues and if there are any areas specifically they and/or their constituents want to be informed about. *(Please note that the survey may be delayed due to COVID-19 and the associated suspension of the 2020 legislative session.)*

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 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO distributes "rack cards" and/or information to all relevant agencies/providers and organizations during meetings and presentations. The CPO is working to complete outreach campaigns with four organizations and agencies/providers the CPO has not previously engaged with, such as the Criminal Juvenile Defense Council and Mount Saint Vincent in Denver, but with several in person events being cancelled and/or delayed due to COVID-19, we anticipate having to adjust our timeframe for these campaigns. The CPO plans to distribute a survey during Q4 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 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. During Q4, the CPO plans to distribute CPO literature to all child welfare departments and judicial districts in the state. The CPO is planning on hosting its out of town board meeting during Q4 and during this time expects to complete two outreach campaigns in different rural judicial districts. *(Please note that the outreach campaigns may be delayed due to COVID-19 and the associated suspension of the 2020 legislative session.)*

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

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO has contracted with a local communications firm; the CPO is currently working with the firm to finalize all outreach materials and the CPO’s new website. Once all outreach materials and the CPO’s new website are complete, the CPO plans to translate them into Spanish and make them available.

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 number of open Information/Resource Referrals and Assists 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 2019-20:

- 90 percent of inquiries resulting in Information/Resource Referral will be closed within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry.
- 90 percent of inquiries resulting in Assists will be closed within 60 business days.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is on track to meet both goals. A complete update on these metrics will be provided in the CPO's Q4 SMART Act Performance Evaluation.

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

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-20:

- 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.)

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: To date, the CPO has not opened an investigation for Fiscal Year 2019-20. If an investigation is opened, the CPO will work to meet the 60-business day deadline.

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

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-20:

- Launch two investigations based on information gained from data collected from cases involving Assists.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: The CPO is no longer launching investigations as the sole way of researching and sharing information. During Q3, the CPO launched a new process –Special Initiatives (SI). Through SI, the CPO researches and shares best practices regarding child protection issues. The CPO launched its first SI – Child Fatalities – in Q3. This topic was chosen by a thorough review of CPO's trends/data (including Assists) but is not a direct result of an investigation.

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 2019-20:

- 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 these analyses, determine whether to seek funds for additional staff.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: On an ongoing basis, the CPO analyzes data to determine the impact staff is having on decreasing caseloads and increasing the CPO's capacity to complete systemic investigations. Also, on an ongoing basis, the CPO analyzes data to determine the nature of the systemic issues facing the child welfare system. Based on these ongoing analyses, the CPO determined that additional staff are needed, particularly because the CPO's caseload is on track to meet or exceed what the Office handled last year, and an employee resigned during Q3. The CPO requested during the 2019-20 budget process \$35,749 General Fund to help improve recruitment and retention of employees; however, due to the impact of COVID-19 on the state's funds it is unclear whether the request will be granted. The CPO anticipates hiring two additional analysts when funds become available in order to bring the CPO's total number of analysts to four.

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

Key Metrics During Fiscal Year 2019-20:

- 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: Towards the end of Q2, the CPO hired a Director of Legislative Affairs and Policy. The expertise of this staff member is being leveraged to aid in outreach efforts to the legislature and executive branch agencies, and to identify systemic issues within the administration of human and social services throughout the state. Additionally, as current staff's expertise has grown, especially in the area of DYS, current staff have been assisting in outreach efforts and identifying systemic issues.

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

Critical Process – Design and implement system to track the 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.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Three Update: During Q2 and Q3, the Deputy Ombudsman coordinated with partners to get updates on each of the recommendations the CPO issued since FY2017-18. The Deputy Ombudsman is working on ways to share this information on the CPO's new website.

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.

*****Update: The CPO has developed a new process to research and share information about best practices –Special Initiatives. The CPO is no longer working on a Public Policy Advancement Center, as SI activities will accomplish many the goals the Center was being developed to accomplish. The CPO is working to develop new performance metrics to measure the success of SI. The CPO will update its Q4 Performance Evaluation with these new metrics and provide an update on progress.*****

Conclusion

The 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 CPO will comply with its requirements under the statute and will submit the required reports and evaluations.