



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman

Fiscal Year 2019-2020

Quarter Four Performance Evaluation

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Strategic Policy Initiatives

Strategic Policy Initiatives (SPI) help to ensure that the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) is effectively and efficiently implementing practices to address system-wide issues impacting the child protection system, while also providing a high quality of service for citizens seeking one-on-one assistance. SPI are intended 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, the CPO regularly updates SPI as the needs and resources of the agency expand, and as the field of child protection changes.

During the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2019-20, the CPO worked on three SPI that were presented in the CPO's Fiscal Year 2019-20 Performance Plan. Additionally, the CPO developed an additional SPI that was identified during the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2019-20 and presented in the agency's Quarter Three Performance Evaluation. The CPO is pleased to share an update regarding each of these SPI in this Quarter Four Performance Evaluation.

The CPO continued to increase its **communications and outreach** efforts during quarter four. Communication between the CPO and the entities that it interacts with – such as agencies/providers, legislators, and citizens – continues to be more readily accessible, transparent and understandable than in previous years. Of note, the CPO launched a new website, making the agency's mission, vision and functions clearer to the public and providing tailored content for specific audiences, such as youth, providers and legislators. The new website is already proving to be an effective way of interacting with the public, as the site has already connected dozens of citizens to the CPO's services.

Throughout the fourth quarter, the CPO experienced an evolution in operations, creating more **efficient and impactful practices**. This was due in part to increased staff capacity, resilience and expertise and the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The CPO hired a Client Services Analyst, increasing the agency's capacity to respond to citizens' requests. Across the board, leadership and staff demonstrated great resilience by quickly adapting practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Working remotely, staff streamlined practices and leveraged technology to engage youth and stakeholders to efficiently maintain caseloads. Leadership and staff attended stakeholder webinars to increase **expertise** regarding citizens' needs during this unprecedented time, and to identify the obstacles and opportunities confronting the child protection system as services are provided over the phone and/or by videoconferencing. Additionally, the CPO developed a new project management system to assist in the delegation of agency resources.

As mentioned, the CPO also developed its new SPI during the fourth quarter. The SPI is dedicated to improving the way the CPO gathers and shares information about **best practices**. The new SPI is focusing the CPO on 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.

Overall, the CPO is pleased to report that its efforts remained on track throughout Fiscal Year 2019-20. The agency opened 725 cases, 150 more cases than the previous fiscal year and a 19 percent increase from the agency's previous record of 611. 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 published a total of 53 letters of compliance concern and two issue briefs, each highlighting issues affecting children and

families throughout Colorado and promoting improvements.¹

SMART Act reports and other CPO efforts help to ensure the agency continues to handle the demand for services in an efficient and effective manner. These efforts include:

- Regularly reviewing the CPO's [SMART Act performance reports](#).
- Updating SPI in the CPO's SMART Act Performance Plan, as needed.
- Updating the CPO's [Case Practices and Operating Procedures](#) to better plan and document the agency's approach to handling each detail of SPI and fulfilling its statutory responsibilities.
- Hosting annual staff retreats to facilitate the development of ideas and techniques to improve how the CPO fulfills its statutory charge.
- Weekly CPO staff meetings to discuss the agency's operations and determine how the agency is progressing in achieving its SPI.

The CPO drew from information discussed during these efforts to write this Quarter Four Performance Evaluation and is pleased to present an update regarding the CPO's progress in achieving the SPI outlined in its Fiscal Year 2019-20 Performance Plan. The updates presented in this report reflect data from April 1, 2020 through June 30, 2020.

¹ Please see the "Identified Compliance Concerns in Investigations" and "Special Initiatives" sections in the CPO's [Case Practices and Operating Procedures](#) to learn more about letters of compliance concern and issue briefs.

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 Four 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. The CPO’s launched a new website and is working to develop an online option for additional stakeholders to add themselves to the listserv. During Q4, the CPO did not post any investigation reports to its website. This is because the CPO did not complete any investigation reports during this quarter. Completed documents, along with other deliverables, have been posted on the CPO’s new website.

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: COMPLETED

Quarter Four Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO has removed the Pending Cases and the Case Extension pages from the CPO’s website. How this information will be shared in the future will be updated in the “Public Notifications” section of 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 2019-20:

- 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 Four Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. Due to COVID-19 and the stunted 2020 legislative session, the CPO decided to postpone the development and dissemination of a survey to legislators until the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

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 Four 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, but with several in person events being cancelled and/or delayed due to COVID-19, the CPO has had to adjust the timeframe for these campaigns. It is anticipated that these campaigns will be completed during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Additionally, the CPO adjusted the timeframe to develop and disseminate 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. It is anticipated that the survey will be developed and disseminated during the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

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 Four Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. During Q4, the CPO developed and printed literature to distribute to all child welfare departments and judicial districts in the state. It is anticipated that literature will be distributed during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Due to COVID-19, the CPO decided to postpone its out-of-town board meeting, and as such, it has postponed the completion of two outreach campaigns in different rural judicial districts. It is anticipated that the outreach campaigns will be completed during the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

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 Four Update: The CPO is on track with its Communication Plan and implements activities in a timely manner. The CPO contracted with a communications firm to translate CPO outreach materials into Spanish. It is anticipated that these materials will be distributed during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Additionally, the capability to view the CPO’s website in Spanish was created and a Spanish version of the CPO’s complain form is now available on the 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 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 an 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 of receiving the inquiry.

Status: ONGOING

Quarter Four Update: The CPO successfully closed 90 percent of inquiries resulting in an Information/Resource Referral within 30 business days of receiving the inquiry and 90 percent of inquiries resulting in Assists within 60 business days of receiving the inquiry.

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 Four Update: The CPO did not open any investigations during Fiscal Year 2019-20.

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: COMPLETED

Quarter Four 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: COMPLETED

Quarter Four 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.

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: COMPLETED

Quarter Four Update: Staff routinely aid in outreach efforts and identify systemic issues within their given area(s) of expertise.

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: COMPLETED

Quarter Four Update: During Q2, Q3 and Q4, the Deputy Ombudsman coordinated with partners to get updates on each of the recommendations the CPO issued since the 2017-18 fiscal year. The Deputy Ombudsman is working on ways to share this information on the CPO’s new website and anticipates that updates will be provided on the website during the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

4

STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVE: Establish the CPO as a leader in information gathering and dissemination as it relates to issues facing the child protection system.

Please note that this SPI is new and is replacing the SPI *“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”* that was listed in the CPO’s FY 2019-20 Performance Plan. This SPI was developed to reflect the CPO’s new process for researching and sharing information about best practices –SI. 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 will report its progress on this SPI starting in FY 2020-21. As such, please find the plan for this SPI listed below.***

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 is advancing 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. The CPO has identified the following Strategies and Critical Processes to better establish itself as a leader regarding child protection issues and best practices. The Strategies, Critical Processes, Key Activities and Key Metrics and Outcome(s) outlined below are designed to ensure the CPO is fulfilling its mandate to recommend systemic changes regarding issues affecting the child protection system.

STRATEGY ONE: Identify systemic issues that are pertinent to improving the child protection system.

Critical Process – Determine the potential impact of a proposed Special Initiative.		
Key Activities		
<p>Fiscal Year 2020-2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will provide substantive educational content to help inform the public and/or stakeholders. • Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will systemically change practice statewide. • Determine if a proposed Special Initiative will 	<p>Fiscal Year 2021-2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the policy implemented during Fiscal Year 2018-19, the CPO will analyze the recommendations from the same period and determine whether they have been implemented. That information will be included in the CPO’s Annual Report. 	<p>Fiscal Year 2022-2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine whether the Critical Process was completed during Fiscal Year 2020-21. • If the Critical Process has not been completed, determine the circumstances preventing the CPO from completing the task and develop appropriate Key Activities.

systemically change systems statewide.		
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Key Metrics and Outcome(s): The number of Special Initiative projects proposed versus those completed will be used to track this critical process. This critical process is ongoing.

STRATEGY TWO: Allocate agency and staff resources appropriately to ensure Special Initiatives completion and timely impacts.

Critical Process – Develop and execute a project management system to better allocate staff’s time to ensure the timely completion of case management and Special Initiatives projects.

Key Activities

Fiscal Year 2020-2021	Fiscal Year 2021-2022	Fiscal Year 2022-2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign staff to specific projects strategically to maximize work outputs. Ensure work products are produced on a consistent basis to mitigate backlog and overload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine whether the Critical Process was completed during Fiscal Year 2020-21. If the Critical Process has not been completed, determine the circumstances preventing the CPO from completing the task and develop appropriate Key Activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine whether the Critical Process was completed during Fiscal Year 2021-22. If the Critical Process has not been completed, determine the circumstances preventing the CPO from completing the task and develop appropriate Key Activities.

Key Metrics and Outcome(s): Backlog and/or overload will be measured and monitored to track this critical process. This critical process is ongoing.

STRATEGY THREE: Ensure the public and/or stakeholders receive notice of Special Initiatives launches and outcomes.

Critical Process – Complete, publish and provide notices of CPO products in a timely fashion.

Key Activities

Fiscal Year 2020-2021	Fiscal Year 2021-2022	Fiscal Year 2022-2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure CPO products are placed on the CPO’s website in a timely manner. Develop a notification system to notify the public/stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure CPO products are placed on the CPO’s website in a timely manner. Develop a notification system to notify the public/stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine whether the Critical Process was completed during Fiscal Year 2021-22. If the Critical Process has not been completed,

of new products released by the CPO. (E.g. mail chip notification system)	of new products released by the CPO. (E.g. mail chip notification system)	determine the circumstances preventing the CPO from completing the task and develop appropriate Key Metrics.
Key Metrics and Outcome(s): The number of notifications sent to the public/stakeholders will be used to track this critical process. Additionally, the CPO will track that it is posting products to the website in a timely manner. This critical process is ongoing.		

STRATEGY FOUR: Track and analyze recommendations to monitor CPO’s impacts and progress.

The CPO has a statutory responsibility to maintain an accountable and transparent agency. Tracking and reporting the outcomes of its recommendations will provide a strong gauge for determining the CPO’s impact in reforming the child protection system.

Critical Process –Track the uptake and implementation of recommendations.		
Key Activities		
Fiscal Year 2020-2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine whether recommendations are being acknowledged and/or implemented. 	Fiscal Year 2021-2022 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the policy implemented during Fiscal Year 2018-19, the CPO will analyze the recommendations from the same period and determine whether they have been implemented. That information will be included in the CPO’s Annual Report. 	Fiscal Year 2022-2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine whether the Critical Process was completed during Fiscal Year 2021-22. If the Critical Process has not been completed, determine the circumstances preventing the CPO from completing the task and develop appropriate Key Activities.
Key Metrics and Outcome(s): The number of recommendations acknowledged and/or implemented will be used to track this critical process. This critical process is ongoing.		

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.