



# CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN of COLORADO

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## COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

Board Meeting  
November 18, 2021

Record of Proceedings

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*Notice of this meeting was provided pursuant to the Colorado Open Meetings Law, § 24-6-402, C.R.S.*

### CONVENE

The meeting of the Child Protection Ombudsman Board was convened via Zoom teleconference at 8:00 a.m. by Board Chair, Ann Roan

A quorum of the Board was present.

### INTRODUCTIONS

#### **PRESENT AT THE MEETING**

##### **Board Members on Zoom**

Ann Roan, Chair  
Simone Jones, Vice-Chair  
Hon. Ken Plotz  
Hon. Amanda Hopkins  
Victoria Shuler  
Brian Bernhard  
Jerene Petersen  
Judith Martinez  
Dr. Coral Steffey

##### **Others Present**

Stephanie Villafuerte, Child Protection Ombudsman  
Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman  
Janna Fischer, Assistant Attorney General

#### **PRESENT FROM THE PUBLIC**

Dr. Richard Krugman

### INTRODUCTIONS

Pursuant to guidance handed down by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment regarding the spread of COVID-19, Chair Ann Roan facilitated the meeting via teleconference. Board

members, Child Protection Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte, Deputy Ombudsman Jordan Steffen and Assistant Attorney General Janna Fischer participated via Zoom teleconferencing.

Chair Ann Roan welcomed everyone.

**Farewell to Former CPO Board Member, Dr. Richard Krugman**

Ombudsman Villafuerte thanked Dr. Richard Krugman for his service to the CPO Board. She noted Dr. Krugman’s substantial contributions to the growth and development of the Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) and stated that his guidance was invaluable during his four-year term.

Dr. Krugman thanked Ombudsman Villafuerte and all board members for their work and collaboration during his term. He urged the Board to continue assessing how to improve the child protection system and urged the CPO to continue producing public reports to highlight issues identified by the agency. Chair Roan and board members thanked Dr. Krugman for his service to the Board and wished him well in his future endeavors.

**Welcome to New CPO Board Member, Dr. Coral Steffey**

Ombudsman Villafuerte welcomed Dr. Coral Steffey to the Board. Dr. Steffey was appointed by the Speaker of the House, Alec Garnett, to fill the position of a “health care professional with previous experience with child abuse and neglect cases.” Dr. Steffey is filling the position formerly held by Dr. Krugman.

Dr. Steffey thanked Ombudsman Villafuerte and the Board for welcoming her.

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*September 9, 2021, Meeting Minutes*

Chair Roan entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on September 9, 2021. Jerene Petersen made a motion to approve the final minutes of September 9, 2021, and Tori Shuler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

*October 13, 2021, Special Meeting Minutes*

Chair Roan entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the special meeting held on October 13, 2021, to review Ombudsman Villafuerte’s annual performance evaluation. Ms. Petersen made a motion to approve the final minutes of October 13, 2021, and Tori Shuler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 8:23 a.m. Chair Roan called for a motion to enter executive session for the purposes receiving statutorily required training and finalizing the Child Protection Ombudsman’s evaluation. Judge Amanda Hopkins made a motion to enter executive session for the purposes of receiving statutorily required training and finalizing the Child Protection Ombudsman’s evaluation. Ms. Petersen seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session was held for the Board to receive legal advice pursuant to §24-6-402(3)(a)(II), C.R.S.

The Executive Session was recorded in compliance with §24-6-402(2)(d.S)(I)(A), C.R.S

Deputy Steffen attended the executive session in part, attending only the Board training.

Ombudsman Villafuerte and Assistant Attorney General Fischer attended the executive session in whole.

At 9:48 a.m. Chair Roan returned the meeting to open session.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

### **Human Resources and COVID-19**

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the agency is still working on a hybrid schedule. CPO staff continue to come into the office on Mondays and Tuesdays of each week. Staff are free to choose where they work for the remainder of the week. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated there was no disruption to services as a result of remote work, and staff continue to keep pace with the increasing caseload. Currently, the CPO anticipates receiving more than 1,000 cases during Fiscal Year 2021-22.

Ms. Petersen asked what is causing the increase in cases. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated the increase is not a result of COVID-19 or the ongoing pandemic. The agency has continued to implement effective outreach campaigns and has established itself as a resource for citizens, agencies and legislators.

Ms. Petersen inquired if the nation-wide workforce shortage has impacted the CPO's caseload, specifically county human services departments which are struggling to recruit and maintain staff. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that the CPO has seen a number of cases that involve concerns that caseworkers are not completing face-to-face contacts with families. The agency is currently working to study the issue and summarize its findings.

Judge Hopkins stated that a county department in her district had no caseworkers at one point in time. The impacts of the limited workforce are concerning, and she is encouraged to hear the CPO is addressing the issue.

Ombudsman Villafuerte stated the workforce shortage has also impacted the number of applications the CPO has received for vacant positions as well.

### **Financial Update**

Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that, to date, the CPO has a balance of \$839,000. The agency plans to fill the current analyst position during the next couple of months, which will bring the agency to a total of 10 full-time employees.

The CPO continues to utilize funds in its legal budget and regularly contacts Assistant Attorney General Janna Fischer for her assistance on matters. Increasingly, Assistant Attorney General Fischer is attending meetings with stakeholders that include discussions of complicated legal matters. She also assisted the CPO recently with a former client who made threatening comments to two employees at the agency. Deputy Steffen provided a summary of the case and thanked Assistant Attorney General Fischer for all of her assistance. Chair Roan also offered her gratitude and offered the Board's support for any similar incidents that take place in the future.

Ombudsman Villafuerte detailed the agency's [Agency Summary and Budget Request for Fiscal Year](#)

[2022-23](#). The request has been submitted to the CPO's assigned budget analyst and Ombudsman Villafuerte will present the request to the Joint Budget Committee in December. The CPO is requesting to classify all the agency's positions and increase salaries to meet the standards of those classifications. The CPO worked with the Supreme Court Administrator's Office to identify the proper classification for each position, as well as an appropriate salary range for the Child Protection Ombudsman position. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that the agency has worked on creating this structure for several years and obtaining the requested classifications and salary adjustments will help the agency retain and recruit qualified employees.

The CPO's request has been posted to the agency's website.

### **Legislative Update**

Ombudsman Villafuerte updated the Board regarding the CPO's work to address Colorado's mandatory reporting law. The CPO published its brief regarding inadequacies of the law in September and, following the release of that brief, the CPO was contacted by several legislators interested in introducing legislation to address such issues.

Representative Froelich, Representative Young and Senator Fields have signed on to be primary sponsors of the bill. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the CPO is working with the sponsors to facilitate the stakeholder process for the pending bill. The CPO hosted the first stakeholder call on November 10, 2021, and more than 94 people – representing more than two dozen agencies and organizations – attended the call. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that, overall, there is a consensus that areas of the bill need to be addressed.

Ms. Petersen asked whether the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) will impact mandatory reporting and other areas of the child protection system. She stated that FFPSA will significantly impact child welfare in Colorado and requested time during the next meeting to discuss the impacts of the federal legislation.

Ombudsman Villafuerte said that time for that discussion will be made during the meeting in January 2022.

Ms. Petersen said that the conversation would be extremely beneficial as there are a lot of moving parts, particularly as it relates to residential treatment services. Brian Bernhard stated that he is also interested in learning how FFPSA is impacting the CPO's work.

Chair Roan suggested the January meeting agenda center around this conversation and allow for substantial discussion of the impacts of FFPSA. She also inquired whether one of the sponsors for the mandatory reporting legislation has pulled a bill title. Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that Representative Froelich had pulled a title.

Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that, in preparation for the 2022 legislative session, Tiffany Madrid, Director of Legislative Affairs and Policy, is working to set up meetings with legislator to discuss upcoming legislation and services provided by the CPO.

### **New Developments and Projects**

Ombudsman Villafuerte updated the Board regarding the CPO's work to incorporate safety science into its critical incident reviews. The CPO has continued its work with Collaborative Safety, Inc., to develop a unique program that will allow the agency to review critical incidents and identify issues.

As discussed during the September meeting, the CPO hosted a training for staff and stakeholders to provide an overview of safety science and its benefits in reviewing critical incidents. Approximately 45

people attended the training. CPO staff then attended approximate 15 hours of subsequent training.

Ombudsman Villafuerte said that, during the coming months, the CPO will continue to work with Collaborative Safety to develop its unique database and develop policies and practices for how the CPO will handle such cases. Ombudsman Villafuerte said the agency will work to ensure it is transparent about its efforts and will continue to communicate updates with stakeholders.

Ms. Petersen stated that she attended the first training and found the framework to be extremely helpful, particularly in ensuring that reviews do not result in the “blame game.” She stated that incorporating partners could help to boost morale of people working on the front lines of child protection.

Dr. Steffey stated that, from a healthcare perspective, it is crucial to ensure that people do not perceive reviews of critical incidents as punitive.

Ombudsman Villafuerte agreed and informed the Board that that the agency is currently assessing what funding will be needed to continue this work and retain the services of Collaborative Safety next fiscal year.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

Chair Roan thanked members for their time and Assistant Attorney General Fischer for her guidance.

**ADJOURN**

Chair Roan entertained a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bernhard made a motion to adjourn, and Ms. Martinez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 10:26 a.m.

**ATTESTATION**

As Board Chair and Board Vice-Chair, I attest that these minutes of the open public meeting held on November 18, 2021, of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman Board substantially reflect the substance of the discussion and action taken related to the matters under the authority of the Board and in compliance with the Open Meetings Law, § 24-6-402, C. R.S.

*Ann M. Roan*

Board Chair

January 14, 2022

Date

*Judith Martinez*

Board Vice-Chair

January 14, 2022

Date

