



# **CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN**

**FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023  
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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## Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Performance Plan

The Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) published its [Fiscal Year 2023-24 Performance Plan](#) on July 1, 2023. The CPO continues to prioritize community outreach, improving services and programs provided to citizens, assessing the agency's diversity, equity and inclusion practices and standards, and collaborating with youth, caregivers, policymakers and stakeholders to advance improvements to the child protection system. The full performance plan may be accessed [HERE](#).

## Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Quarter Four Performance Report

**SPI 1 – OUTREACH AND EDUCATION:** Educate the public and stakeholders about the CPO to ensure equitable access to services and to identify opportunities for improvement.

**Strategy:** *Target communications and engagements to strengthen the CPO's statewide presence and services.*

**Critical Process:** Engage youth impacted by the child protection system to increase the number of youth who receive services directly from the CPO, promote equitable access to services and improve how the agency serves youth in Colorado.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO continued to directly engage youth with lived experience in child protection systems through posters in 14 Division of Youth Services facilities and a Google Search Ads pilot campaign. A record 72 cases were initiated by youth in FY 2022-23 – marking a 200% increase since FY 2020-21. Current and former youth directly engaged with the agency by participating on guest panels with the Mandatory Reporting and Timothy Montoya task forces and by participating in focus groups for youth currently residing in residential facilities. The CPO received funding to launch the Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program which will allow the agency to create more consistent engagement opportunities with youth and young adults.

**Critical Process:** Engage child protection professionals, including but not limited to treatment and service providers, educators, medical providers, mental health professionals and the child protection legal community.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

Throughout FY 2022-23, the CPO routinely met with 20 different government agencies and advocacy organizations. Serving as an educational resource for stakeholders in Colorado and nationally, the CPO presented at nine different professional conferences and hosted 28 different educational opportunities for child protection professionals. During the fiscal year, a total of 168 cases were initiated by professionals.

**Critical Process:** Engage caregivers – including parents, relatives, foster parents, adoptive parents and kin – of children involved in the child protection system to help ensure all caregivers have equitable access to CPO services.

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**Status of Key Metrics:** **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO had 742 cases initiated by caregivers in FY 2022-23. Listening to caregiver concerns, the CPO collaborated with stakeholders through the Colorado Department of Human Services' Statute Review Group to bring forward Senate Bill 23-210 which improves the CPO's ability to address concerns. The agency also discussed foster parent outreach and worked to develop effective messaging and new avenues for reaching birth parents.

**Critical Process: Engage rural communities to ensure citizens across Colorado are informed of the CPO's services and have equitable opportunities to inform the agency and improve practices.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

In FY 2022-23, the CPO emphasized its statewide services through direct engagement and digital promotions designed to connect with youth, families and professionals in rural communities located in every region of Colorado. Piloting a digital promotions campaign, the CPO directly engaged people in rural Colorado counties. For the fiscal year, 151 cases were initiated by clients in counties with a population under 70,000.

**Critical Process: Evaluate the CPO's listserv to determine which communities the CPO is engaging with and how to increase the CPO's statewide presence.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed**

In FY 2022-23, the CPO's listserv grew by 11.8% to 794 subscribers. Surveying its listserv, the agency discovered that engaged subscribers are primarily child protection professionals. As such, the CPO is working to expand its listserv and reach new audiences across Colorado.

**Critical Process: Engage legislators in the CPO's work.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO continued to fulfill its statutory charge of providing educational opportunities and policy recommendations to the Colorado General Assembly. During FY 2022-23, the CPO held a Legislative Open House for legislative aides. During legislative session, the CPO offered testimony and education on numerous bills, often responding to legislators' requests for the CPO's input and perspective on such initiatives. This included three presentations to the Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee during summer 2023.

**Strategy: *Provide consistent, timely and informative communications regarding the CPO's services, ongoing projects, ombudsman practice and findings.***

**Critical Process: Continue to develop effective methods for delivering and promoting the CPO's services and ongoing work.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO expanded its engagement capacity in FY 2022-23 with the hiring of a part-time Public Information Coordinator. The agency distributed six newsletters, 10 website updates and over 150 social media posts. The agency engaged in numerous task forces and recurring meeting groups across Colorado child protection systems. Agency staff attended a total of 170 stakeholder meetings in FY 2022-23.

**Strategy: *Apply principles of diversity, equity and inclusion to the CPO's communications.***

**Critical Process: Identify whether the CPO is serving all the states' racial/ethnic groups to develop targeted outreach campaigns.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO developed an internal method for tracking client race and ethnicity in FY 2022-23. During the fiscal year, CPO cases were initiated by 233 people identifying as Caucasian, 282 as Hispanic or Latino/e, 30 as Black/African-American, nine as American Indian/Alaska Native and two as Asian. An analysis concluded that the agency must build partnerships with agencies serving communities of color and families with disabilities to effectively reach them.

**Critical Process: Develop inclusive processes, systems and communications that reflect principles of diversity, equity and inclusion to share the CPO's services with all of Colorado's diverse communities.**

**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Utilizing the results of an independent DEI assessment in FY 2021-22, the CPO began to apply a DEI lens to all outgoing communications in FY 2022-23. The agency contracted a website redesign for greater accessibility and readability.

**Critical Process: Offer opportunities for the public, legislators and other stakeholders to engage in the CPO's system work.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Regularly meeting with stakeholders, policymakers and members of the public to discuss concerns and issues with child protection, the CPO completed 72 such engagements in FY 2022-23. The agency offered members of the public an opportunity to have their voice heard in each meeting of the Timothy Montoya Task Force and Mandatory Reporting task forces which are both open to the public and include a period for public comment.

**SPI 2 – SERVICES AND PROGRAMS: Continue to develop and strengthen efficient and effective CPO practices to better serve Colorado citizens.**

**Strategy: *Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for CPO staff.***

**Critical Process: Provide CPO staff ongoing training and education.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

To support ongoing program development and primary functions of the agency, CPO staff members attended 96 trainings in FY 2022-23 on collaborative safety, ombudsman theory, mandatory reporting, diversity, equity and inclusion, equity in child protection systems, accessibility, leadership development, agency administration, accounting and finance, artificial intelligence, management and best practices in child protection.

**Strategy: *Apply principles of equity, diversity and inclusion to the CPO's services.***

**Critical Process: Provide CPO staff ongoing training and education on diversity, equity and inclusion to inform staff of the disproportionate impact of the child welfare system on communities of color, under-resourced communities and people with disabilities.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Of the trainings attended by CPO staff in FY 2022-23, 14 focused on training and education around diversity, equity and inclusion. Topics of these trainings included health equity, DEI principles in the workplace, building inclusive environments, cultural competence, bias reduction, ableism and serving tribal children and families.

**Strategy: *Continue to develop the CPO's unaccompanied immigrant children's program – established by C.R.S. § 19-3.3- 103(1)(a.5)(I) – to better review and monitor the safety and well-being of unaccompanied immigrant children.***

**Critical Process: Engage unaccompanied immigrant children residing in state-licensed care that are in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement and professionals that serve them.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

In FY 2022-23, the CPO distributed outreach materials, facilitated meetings, engaged in two facility visits, hosted meetings and responded to one complaint involving an unaccompanied immigrant child. In March 2023, the CPO was notified that the Devereux Colorado Unaccompanied Children’s Services Program was closing. The CPO continues to monitor how the UIC population is served by Colorado facilities.

*Strategy: Continue to develop the CPO’s process and procedures for reviewing egregious abuse or neglect, near fatalities or fatalities of a child, as established by C.R.S. § 19-3.3- 103(1)(a)(I)(A).*

**Critical Process: Develop and implement a unique, research-informed process for reviewing critical incidents in Colorado to improve and advance child protection systems.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO completed two mappings in two fatality cases in FY 2022-23, sending public letters to the agencies involved. The process was found to need improvement by adopting a hybrid, in-house system.

**SPI 3 – PUBLIC POLICY: Continue to serve as a leader in advancing reforms to Colorado’s child protection system.**

*Strategy: Identify and/or support systemic improvements to the child protection system.*

**Critical Process: Analyze CPO data to identify systemic child protection issues.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO identified a number of trends through client concerns and data in FY 2022-23. Four critical issues facing child protection systems were prioritized for presenting to the Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee.

**Critical Process: Facilitate and support stakeholder engagement through the CPO’s Public Policy Advancement Center.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO hosted nine meetings of the Timothy Montoya Task Force and six meetings of the Mandatory Reporting Task Force as required by statute.

*Strategy: Provide consistent, timely and informative communications regarding the CPO’s public policy efforts, which may include findings and recommendations*

**Critical Process: Communicate the CPO’s efforts, findings and recommendations to the public, legislators and stakeholders.**

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**Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing**

Engaged in numerous task forces and recurring meeting groups across Colorado child protection systems, agency staff attended a total of 170 stakeholder meetings in FY 2022-23. The agency distributed six newsletters, 10 website updates and over 150 social media posts. Feedback and an internal audit of the CPO’s website determined the existing structure was insufficient and required a redesign.