



COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

PUBLIC MEETING

March 14, 2024

Record of Proceedings

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 8:05 a.m. by Chair Benjamin Rounsborg.

A quorum of the Board was present.

INTRODUCTIONS

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Board Members

Benjamin Rounsborg, Board Chair
Brian Bernhard
Coral Steffey
Hannah Seigel Proff
Connie Vigil
Aaron Miltenberger
Judith Martinez
Katy Saehler

Others Present

Janna Fischer, Senior Assistant Attorney General
Stephanie Villafuerte
Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman
Karen Nielsen, Director of Administrative Services

PRESENT FROM THE PUBLIC

Matthew Tulley

INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Ben Rounsborg and Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte facilitated the meeting via Zoom teleconference. Chair Rounsborg welcomed everyone.

NEW BOARD MEMBER INTRODUCTION

Chair Rounsborg introduced the newest board member Katy Saehler. Ms. Saehler reported that she is a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) and has worked in Denver, Jefferson, Adams and Arapahoe counties during the past 10 years on dependency and neglect and truancy cases. She stated that she has developed a passion for working with older youth and delinquency youth and is excited to have a seat on this Board where she can impact change at a higher level.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 11, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Chair Rounsborg entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on January 11, 2024. Hannah Seigel Proff made a motion to approve the final minutes of the January 11, 2024, meeting. Judith Martinez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

AGENCY OPERATIONS

Ombudsman Villafuerte delivered the agency operations report.

Ralph Carr Judicial Center Vandalism

Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that the Ralph Carr Judicial Center (RCJC) still remains in a state of flux. Director of Administrative Services Karen Nielsen continues to participate in remediation and construction tenant update meetings twice a week. During these meetings, she receives updates on hygienist reports, building safety protocols, the salvageability of personal and state belongings and furnishings and the pre-approval processes for the insurance claims.

The status of the building remains unchanged, and we do not yet have a confirmed timeline for when construction will start or when reoccupation may occur.

The CPO has secured a temporary office space called Venture X which is close to the Capital to conduct business and be present during legislative session. She reported that while the building vandalism may present temporary challenges for the agency, having a place for new employees to on-board and employees to regularly go for team meetings and trainings helps mitigate concerns and fosters a positive transition experience for staff. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that it is a wonderful space and extended an invitation to board members to visit.

The CPO further acquired a storage unit to store the agency's electronic equipment, some office supplies and documentation during the interim. The unit provides a secure and controlled environment to store these items. Without knowing when the CPO will move back into the RCJC, the storage unit acts as a proactive measure to prevent additional losses that might occur in this transitional period.

Ombudsman Villafuerte noted that there are expenses associated with leasing temporary office space and renting a storage unit, which are currently being covered by our existing budget. However, the CPO plans to submit these expenses for insurance reimbursement.

The only concern is that the temporary space constraints will affect the Board's ability to meet in person, which has been a goal for the board. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that she is collaborating with Chair Rounsborg to potentially secure a meeting space in Jefferson County for a May 9, 2024, hybrid meeting.

The CPO will provide ongoing updates to the Board regarding the status of the building.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Ombudsman Villafuerte delivered the executive director report. The Board was provided with a copy of the CPO's financial and legal expense reports.

Financial Report

FY 2023-24 Budget – Ombudsman Villafuerte provided board members with the CPO's current FY 2023-24 operating budget report. She reported that there is approximately \$1,000,000 remaining. She stated that the number might seem high, the majority of the budget goes to staff payroll and benefits and it does not account for a number of ongoing projects including our DEI training and the Tori Shuler Youth Program.

She mentioned that there might be some surplus due to vacancy savings but expressed no concerns regarding the overall budget.

Legal Services Report – Ombudsman Villafuerte provided the Board with the CPO's FY 2023-24 legal services report. She reported that the CPO has a FY 2023-24 legal services budget of \$13,000 and that there is \$2,500 remaining. In previous years, the CPO had exceeded our legal services budget but when the office approached the Department of Law expressing the desire to be mindful of the overage in expenditures, the agency was informed that this was in line with their preferred operating procedures.

She stated that the office continues to utilize these legal services for HR matters because the Judicial Department has not upheld the memorandum of understanding with the CPO. She thanked Assistant Attorney General Janna Fischer for her leadership and expertise. They continue to be a great resource to the office.

There was a discussion about the significant growth in the number of independent agencies, noting that they face similar challenges as the CPO. SAAG Fischer reported that her leadership is aware of these issues and is actively engaging with state judicial leadership to address them.

The board inquired about how they can assist or what support they can provide. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that she appreciates the offer and will think about that. She stated that she has learned to re-staff internally in order to accommodate some of these changes and find our own solutions. For example, the CPO has recently hired a part-time administrative assistant and continue to work with our HR consultant Kristen Mahlin. CPO operations are running smoothly despite the challenges.

FY 2024-25 Budget Request – Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that in February 2024, the CPO's budget analyst delivered his recommendations to the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) regarding the request items submitted to the JBC. The agency requested additional funding for additional staff to support increasing caseloads and administrative support. This includes a full-time position dedicated to data analysis. The agency also requested additional funds to support staff training and development, communication efforts and necessary IT software and hardware.

Ultimately, the JBC approved the following additional funding for FY 2024-25:

- 1.0 FTE for a CPO Data Analyst

- 1.0 FTE for an additional Client Services Analyst
- 0.5 FTE for an Administrative Specialist
- \$31,300 for IT Upgrades and Ongoing Support
- \$4,000 for Communications

The CPO will continue to monitor the Long Bill as it is introduced and works through the Colorado General Assembly.

The Board complimented Ombudsman Villafuerte and her team for increasing the CPO's budget at a time when funds are dwindling, scrutinized and incredibly tight across the state. They reported that it is a testament to the advocacy, lobbying and excellent work the CPO has been doing.

Ombudsman Villafuerte thanked the Board for their comments and reported that the addition of the communications manager and the data analyst will fill critical gaps and be critical to the CPO's long-term success.

Staff Growth and Development

Staff Changes - Ombudsman Villafuerte reported the CPO has several new staff changes.

Welcome Matt Seavey – The CPO is excited to welcome Matt Seavey to the team. Matt is joining the agency as its first contract case investigator. Matt will aid the Client Services Team with its complex cases. Matt joins the agency with years of experience as a legal investigator. Matt's first day with the agency will be Monday, March 18, 2024.

Welcome Brody Furline – The CPO is equally excited to welcome Brody Furline to the team. Brody will join the team as a part-time, contract administrative specialist. Brody brings several years of experience to the agency and will provide much needed assistance with the increased administrative responsibilities absorbed by the CPO.

Programming

Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program – Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that during Fiscal Year 2022-23, the CPO received funds to establish the Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program (TSYVP). This program is specifically designed to uplift the experiences and voice of youth and young people with lived experience in the child welfare system. To help the CPO implement this program, the agency has contracted with Ms. Shuler and Fostering Great Ideas.

She reported that she continues to work with Ms. Shuler to outline programming for the current fiscal year. Beginning this month, the TSYVP will kick off a statewide listening tour to connect with youth. This tour will take place virtually and in person. These trainings are intended to give the CPO opportunities to connect with youth and programs that serve youth. The agency will work to provide education on the CPO's services, as well as learn from youth regarding how to improve CPO outreach and materials.

There was some discussion regarding whether any of the events would include any of the youth or juvenile justice facilities. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that that has not yet been determined. However, engaging more youth statewide is always a goal of the CPO, and she would welcome conversations with board members to discuss their ideas.

Board members expressed their excitement for the program. The CPO will continue to provide the Board with updates as meetings are set and schedules are developed.

Staff Development

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen provided the Board with an update on staff development initiatives.

Staying Active in Wellness Training – Deputy Ombudsman Steffer reported that Angel Weant provided the entire CPO team with training regarding the trauma cycle. The training provided by Ms. Weant provided the CPO team with tools to address the trauma cycle associated with the work of the agency. This included ways to keep one’s wellness front of mind and balancing personal needs and work duties.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training and Support – Deputy Ombudsman Steffen mentioned that the CPO received one-time funding as part of its Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget to contract with a third party to assist the agency with equity, diversity and inclusion support and training. The CPO has started working to bring Doris Tolliver on board to complete this important work. On Monday, February 26, 2024, Ms. Tolliver held the first in-person training with CPO staff. Additional training sessions have been scheduled with staff from now through the end of June 2024.

Communication Training – Deputy Ombudsman Steffen stated that Kristen Mahlin, Owner and Founder of CoachCraft, LLC, has continued her work to support the CPO’s human resources programs. This month, Ms. Mahlin will lead the team through a training session on effective communication in the workplace and how to have strong and constructive conversations with coworkers.

The day will also include a review of the revised employee handbook and HR policies, allowing staff the opportunity to ask questions.

LEGISLATION

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the legislative session is up and running and that CPO has been actively monitoring bills introduced during the 74th Colorado General Assembly. She stated that one of the important highlights and exciting trends we are seeing is the increased utilization of the CPO as a resource withing the child protection system.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that it finally feels like the CPO is evolving into what she would describe as a statewide agency. As a result, the CPO is preparing for an onslaught of outreach materials in response to the exciting trend. These proactive efforts are making a significant impact, particularly in the presence and support of foster youth.

She directed the board members for more specific details on legislation to watch in the CPO Operations Report. A few are listed below:

Legislation to Watch -

House Bill 2024-1017, Bill of Rights for Foster Youth In pertinent part, this bill establishes a statutory bill of rights for children and youth in Foster Care in Colorado. This bill was drafted based on the findings presented in the CPO’s 2021 [Issue Brief: Strengthening Colorado’s Foster Youth Protection Laws](#).

House Bill 2024-1170, Rights for Youth Division of Youth Services in Facilities This bill establishes, in statute, rights for youth who are the responsibility of the CDHS, whether the youth is detained or committed to the care and physical custody of a juvenile facility operated by CDHS.

House Bill 2024-1046, Child Welfare System Tools In pertinent part, this bill will require the CPO to contract with a third-party evaluator to conduct an audit of the Colorado family safety assessment and the Colorado family risk assessment. The third-party evaluator will create a report summarizing the results of the audit, which will be published and presented to the General Assembly.

House Bill 2024-1120, Resources for Persons in Child Welfare System This bill requires that prior to adding a person found responsible for child abuse or neglect to the automated child welfare system, a county department of human or social services must provide, within 14 days, a written notice to the person of the opportunity for hearing to appeal the finding. The notice must include, among other things, information about the CPO.

The CPO will keep board members informed of any upcoming events or hearings.

PUBLIC POLICY

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen delivered the public policy report.

The CPO's Policy Collaborative for Children and Families

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the CPO continues its work to administer the two legislatively created task forces, the Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children from Running Away from Out-of-home Placement (Timothy Montoya Task Force) established by [House Bill 22-1375](#) and the Mandatory Reporting Task Force established by [House Bill 22-1240](#).

Timothy Montoya Task Force – The Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Youth from Running from Out-of-Home Placement met twice in February and March 2024. Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported the group is moving through their final directives. They are specifically looking at recommendations to standardized practice across the state.

All task force materials can be found [HERE](#).

Mandatory Reporting Task Force – The Mandatory Reporting Task Force met three times during January and February. Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the group is also charged with analyzing best practices regarding these policies. To aid the task force in this analysis, the CPO has created this 50-State Comparison of Mandatory Reporting Policies. The CPO's Public Policy Analyst Bryan Kelley prepared this resource. She reported that the CPO is going to launch this data dashboard on the CPO website in April and will also be promoting it heavily for Child Abuse Prevention Month.

All task force materials can be found [HERE](#).

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen expressed her gratitude towards the CPO's Public Policy Analyst, Bryan Kelley and Ombudsman Villafuerte, who chairs both task forces and the facilitation team, for their leadership in encouraging members to think ambitiously.

Board members expressed their gratitude for CPO leadership's updates and experiencing this exciting new data dashboard that will benefit a lot of agencies and individuals.

CLOSING REMARKS

Chair Rounsberg thanked the board and staff for their efforts and reported that he is currently exploring a space for a hybrid meeting for the May 2024 Board meeting.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reminded the board members that any travel expenses incurred for attending the meeting would be reimbursed.

ADJOURN

Chair Rounsborg entertained a motion to adjourn. Ms. Coral Steffey made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hannah Seigel Proff seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 9:01 a.m.

ATTESTATION

As Board Chair and Board Vice-Chair, I attest that these minutes of the open public meeting held on March 14, 2024, 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.

/s/Benjamin Rounsborg
Board Chair

May 10, 2024
Date

Judith Mast
Board Vice-Chair

May 13, 2024
Date

