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**COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD**

**PUBLIC MEETING  
May 9, 2024  
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 at the Jefferson County Administration and Courts Facility in Golden, Colorado at 8:37 a.m. by Chair Benjamin Rounsborg.

A quorum of the Board was present.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

**PRESENT AT THE MEETING**

**Board Members**

Benjamin Rounsborg, Board Chair  
Judith Martinez, Board Vice-Chair  
Hannah Seigel Proff  
Connie Vigil  
Hon. Gail Meinster

**Board Members on Zoom**

Aaron Miltenberger  
Charles Tedesco  
Coral Steffey  
Wendy Buxton-Andrade

**Others Present**

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

**PRESENT FROM THE PUBLIC**

Ken Winn

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Chair Rounsborg and Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte facilitated the hybrid meeting and warmly welcomed everyone. Ombudsman Villafuerte expressed her gratitude to Chair Rounsborg for hosting the meeting in his office.

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*March 14, 2024, Meeting Minutes*

Chair Rounsborg entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on March 14, 2024. Hannah Seigel Proff made a motion to approve the final minutes of the March 14, 2024, meeting. Connie Vigil seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Ken Winn reported that he attended the meeting to learn more about the functions and responsibilities of the Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO).

## **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 current FY 2023-24 operating budget report. She reported that there is \$876,000 remaining. She stated that the large amount is primarily attributed to catching up on general operating expenses, with the majority of it comprising payroll and benefits. The number will significantly drop as we approach the end of the fiscal year.

She mentioned that there is a significant surplus, and she is collaborating with the leadership team to determine the best use of the savings. Some of the projects include mediation training, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training, individualized senior leadership training, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy and communications training.

Other special projects include adding an ADA-compliant accessibility component to the CPO website, creating messaging and collateral for the youth programming and enabling staff to attend the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) conference in the Fall 2024.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reminded board members that Deputy Ombudsman Steffen is president of the USOA and that she is doing a remarkable job. CPO staff will be presenting at the conference, sharing what we are learning and doing, as well as learning from others.

*Hon. Gail Meinster joined the meeting at 8:45 a.m.*

***FY 2023-24 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 legal services budget of \$13,000 and that there is \$621.00 remaining. She stated that the office continues to utilize these legal services. She thanked SAAG Fischer for her expertise. They continue to be a great resource to the office.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that when the CPO goes over budget, the funding does not come out of the CPO's operating budget. She stated that the CPO anticipates that they will continue to utilize its legal services budget for the remainder of FY 23-24.

She said a few things led to the overage, such as the CPO's active legislative session and consulting with SAAG Fischer. Specifically, the CPO utilized legal services extensively to address services not provided by the State Court Administrator's Office (SCAO). These included services related to human resources management, payroll and procurement that CPO leadership staff have not been able to take on.

### **Damage to the Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center and CPO Office Suite**

Ombudsman Villafuerte stated that the CPO has continued to attend meetings hosted by SCAO. Generally, SCAO has advised that it will be at least a year before we are able to return to the building. Agency leadership has worked closely with SCAO to stay informed of ongoing work and updates.

The CPO continues to work closely with SCAO and State Risk Management to submit insurance claims, including those to recover costs for the lease workspace, costs associated with the leased space and storage unit. She reported that the CPO is hopeful for future reimbursement.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the CPO has extended its lease for the workspace at Venture X Denver and the agency will continue to operate as it has for the past four months.

Chair Rounsborg reported feeling discouraged by this news but was glad to hear that the team continues to meet frequently, emphasizing the importance of staying connected.

SAAG Fischer reported that the Attorney General's office has informed staff that they may not return to the Ralph L. Carr Judicial building until August 2026.

### **The Office of Administrative Services for Independent Agencies (ASIA)**

Ombudsman Villafuerte reminded the group that House Bill 23-228 was established to provide the independent state agencies with administrative and fiscal support for agency operations. She reported that last fall, five of the independent agencies had engaged in a hiring process to hire the director of ASIA. Unfortunately, in January of this year, the group was unable to fill the position when the final candidate declined the position.

This year the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) discussed how best to get ASIA operational. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the eight independent office representatives met with Alfredo Kemm, JBC Budget Analyst, to discuss next steps. In short, the group agreed to revise the language in the legislation and extend the deadlines for hiring a new executive director.

She further reported that the ASIA Board has hired Ms. Kristen Mahlin as the HR consultant to assist with the eight independent offices in the recruiting, screening, and hiring processes and that the deadline to hire the executive director needs is pushed back to July 1, 2024.

ASIA will also be housed in the Ralph L. Carr Building. There was a discussion about the increasing number of independent agencies involved and that fact that this program will take years to fully develop. Ombudsman Villafuerte will keep the Board apprised of developments as they occur.

## **PUBLIC POLICY**

### **Colorado General Assembly**

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the Colorado General Assembly officially adjourned on May 8, 2024. She reported that it was a fantastic session for the CPO, noting that the CPO was highly visible throughout the legislative session.

## **Monitored Legislation**

The CPO has actively monitored several bills introduced during the 74th Colorado General Assembly. Some highlights of the legislative session discussed in today's meeting are outlined below:

### ***House Bill 2024-1017, Bill of Rights for Foster Youth***

- Status: Governor Signed
- 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](#).
- Information on HB 24-1017 may be found [HERE](#).
- Listen to Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte's testimony during the bills hearing in the House Health and Human Services Committee [HERE](#).

### ***House Bill 2024-1170, Rights for Youth Division of Youth Services in Facilities***

- Status: Passed through both houses. (Eff. 5/3/2024)
- 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.
- Information on HB 24-1170 [HERE](#).

### ***House Bill 2024-1046, Child Welfare System Tools***

- Status: Still under consideration. (Eff. 5/3/2024)
- 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.
- Information on HB 24-1046 [HERE](#).

### ***House Bill 2024-1120, Resources for Persons in Child Welfare System***

- Status: Still under consideration. (Eff. 5/3/2024)
- 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.
- Information on HB 24-1120 [HERE](#).

## **GENERAL OPERATIONS**

### **Update of the Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program**

Ombudsman Villafuerte introduced Ms. Shuler to the group and reminded everyone that she is a crucial part of why the CPO exists, having served on the CPO Board from inception to August 2022. She reminded the board that during this fiscal year the CPO received funds to establish the Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program (TSYVP), and that the CPO contracted with Ms. Shuler and Fostering Great Ideas to implement the program.

Ms. Shuler stated that TSYVP is specifically designed to uplift the experiences and voice of youth and young people with lived experience in the child welfare system. She stated that the goal of the program is to improve

the youth experience contacting the CPO and increase the number of youth who know about the office and, in turn, utilize the CPO as a resource.

*Aaron Miltenberger joined the meeting at 9:30 a.m.*

Ms. Shuler outlined the program's statewide youth listening tour plan for engaging youth initiative aimed at connecting with youth across the state and gathering feedback on youth access to the CPO through focus groups and surveys. Survey questions were created and vetted by youth at the survey focus group to gather both quantitative and qualitative data that is shared with the CPO in an effort to continually be responsive to youth feedback.

Through this program the CPO will connect one-on-one with young people with lived experience, with the goal of integrating their experiences and feedback into policies the CPO is working on, as well as receive feedback on CPO programs and messaging.

*Mr. Winn left the meeting at 9:50 a.m.*

The discussion focused on the outcome of the first four virtual listening events and two in-person events and other suggestions from board members on how to reach foster youth and youth in Division of Youth Services facilities and how to make the CPO more youth friendly. The Board thanked Ms. Shuler for her work with the CPO and her contributions to youth across the state.

The CPO will provide the Board with a summary of the program's first year later this summer.

*The Board took a break at 10:05 a.m. and reconvened at 10:15 a.m.*

## **BOARD BUSINESS**

### **Overview of the Ombudsman Handbook**

SAAG Fischer reported that the CPO has been revising various controlling documents including personal policies and one of those documents is the Ombudsman Handbook. She reported that because the Board supervises the Ombudsman, they are required to approve it.

She reported that she sent the Ombudsman Handbook out to the Board and requested that they send their edits back to her. She will compile these changes and hopes to have the handbook approved and voted on at the next board meeting.

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that SAAG Fischer, Ms. Mahlin approved the CPO employee personnel handbook. The Ombudsman handbook needed similar changes to align with the employee personnel handbook.

### **Overview of the Ombudsman Annual Performance Evaluation**

SAAG Fischer and Ms. Mahlin with CoachCraft, LLC provided the Board with an overview of the process for completing the Ombudsman's annual performance evaluation. She reported that she and Ms. Mahlin will work together, as they did last year, to streamline the process and will be providing the Board and employee guidelines on best practices on how to improve reader reliability.

The discussion included the timeline of the evaluation processes and scheduling of the August 8, 2024, board meeting.

Chair Rounsborg entertained a motion to approve cancelling the July 11, 2024, board meeting to August 8, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. for the purpose of the Ombudsman annual evaluation. Ms. Vigil made a motion to approve cancelling the July 11, 2024, Board meeting to August 8, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. for the purpose of the Ombudsman annual evaluation. Dr. Coral Steffey seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

SAAG Fischer reported that the Board will use the September 12, 2024, meeting to discuss the Ombudsman's evaluation.

**Out-of-Town Board Meeting**

Ombudsman Villafuerte discussed the out-of-town board meeting and mentioned that the office is working on setting aside some dates and times. She reported that there was a suggestion to hold the meeting in Grand Junction, Colorado, in conjunction with the Mesa County Annual Community Summit happening simultaneously.

She mentioned that she will send out a Doodle poll to check everyone's availability.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

Chair Rounsborg thanked the board and staff for their efforts and reported that he is currently exploring the possibility of holding quarterly meetings.

**ADJOURN**

Chair Rounsborg entertained a motion to adjourn. Hon. Gail Meinster made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Miltenberger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

**ATTESTATION**

As Board Chair and Board Vice-Chair, I attest that these minutes of the open public meeting held on May 9, 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.

*Isl Benjamin Rounsborg*

Board Chair

8/12/2024

Date

*Judith Matz*

Board Vice-Chair

8.14.2024

Date

