



COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

PUBLIC MEETING March 12, 2026 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 8:37 a.m. by Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte.

A quorum was not present; therefore, no formal actions were taken. The Board engaged in discussion only.

INTRODUCTIONS

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Board Members on Zoom

Hon. Gail Meinster, Board Vice Chair
Connie Vigil
Matthew Tulley
Brian Bernhard
Hannah Seigel Proff
Dr. Coral Steffey

Others Present

Haley Eagon, Assistant Attorney General II
Sarah Donahue, Assistant Attorney General II
Stephanie Villafuerte, Child Protection Ombudsman
Karen Nielsen, Director of Administrative Services
Kristen Mahlin, HR Consultant, CoachCraft, LLC
Melissa Jamieson, Executive Director, Office of Administrative Services for Independent Agencies
Chelsie Nalley, Chief Human Resources Officer, Office of Administrative Services for Independent Agencies

PRESENT FROM THE PUBLIC

Kim Dvorchak

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Ombudsman Villafuerte announced Board Chair Ben Rounsborg's resignation from the Board. The Board expressed gratitude for his service. Judge Gail Meinster was designated to serve as interim board chair for the

meeting. Assistant Attorney General II Sarah Donahue pointed out that the meeting lacked a quorum, requiring seven members to be present. The group agreed to recess for five minutes to allow additional board members to join the meeting to achieve quorum.

At 8:42 a.m. Brian Bernhard joined the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Interim Board Chair Gail Meinster facilitated the meeting via teleconference and welcomed everyone.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board was unable to review and approve the January 9, 2026, meeting minutes due to the absence of a quorum.

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 2025-26 Budget –

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the agency is running smoothly. The year-to-date balance is approximately \$731,000 of a \$2.5 million-dollar annual budget, with expenses tracking as expected. She reported that any underspending is due to vacancy savings and intentional budget conservation in anticipation of potential cuts.

FY 2026-27 Budget Request -

She reported that the agency requested a continuation of the current budget for next fiscal year due to the state deficit. The agency is awaiting the Joint Budget Committee's (JBC) upcoming deliberations, where staff analysts will provide recommendations on budget allocations across the state. She noted that the agency had reverted funds in prior fiscal years.

Legal Services Budget -

Ombudsman Villafuerte also mentioned that the agency's legal services budget is \$47,000 and is currently overspent by \$9,000. The increased complexity of Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) requests, document access and need for additional legal assistance has contributed to the overage and legal expenses.

She noted that the agency's legal budget is managed through discussions with the Attorney General's Office and clarified that the budget is not capped and that the CPO is allowed to continue accessing legal services with a new annual allocation provided each fiscal year.

AGENCY PROGRAMMING

Case Data

The agency has opened 848 cases so far, this fiscal year. She reported that the agency is struggling to manage high caseloads, which has contributed to longer case review times. However, the agency remains committed to providing thorough, high-quality services to every client as we work to return review times to normal.

Staff Changes

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the Client Services team is currently down two client services analyst positions, with recruitment underway and that there is an anticipated hire date in May 2026. She also noted that she is reviewing ongoing staff turnover within the Client Services Team which has led to an increase in caseloads for all analysts.

House Bill 25-1200

Ombudsman Villafuerte outlined the implementation of House Bill 25-1200, which gives the agency authority to enter 24/7 facilities for educational purposes, including residential care facilities and Division of Youth Services facilities. She explained the strategic plan for rolling out this new authority, including mailing out posters and educational materials and meeting with facility directors in the coming weeks.

The importance of the statutory changes is intended to allow the agency to take complaints within the facilities and to increase youth engagement with the agency. Ombudsman Villafuerte views this as a three-to-five-year effort.

She reported that the agency is developing and will finalize memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with agencies and facilities regarding entry, information sharing, and complaint processes, using a template provided by the Attorney General's Office.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb25-1200>

Youth Outreach Video

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the agency created a new video for youth on its website to help them better understand and connect with the agency.

Link to the youth video can be found here: <https://coloradocpo.org/youth/>

PUBLIC POLICY COLLABORATIVE

Development of Policy & Procedures

Ombudsman Villafuerte announced the creation of policies and procedures for the agency's Public Policy Collaborative, which will be posted on the agency's website to support transparency and accountability.

House Bill 24-1046

Ombudsman Villafuerte reported on House Bill 24-1046, which required the agency to engage a third-party evaluator to audit Colorado's Family Safety and Risk Assessment tools. The vendor completed a 130-page report with 35 recommendations aimed at improving safety and risk assessment tools used by social workers, caseworkers, and other stakeholders. The report emphasizes the need for better definitions, training, and monitoring of these tools across the state to ensure consistency and equity.

Ombudsman Villafuerte highlighted the positive reception of the recommendations and outlined plans for stakeholder meetings and roundtable discussions, with the goal of informing potential 2027 legislation.

The Board expressed support for the initiative and raised concerns about consistency in tool implementation, which Ombudsman Villafuerte addressed by detailing the proposed solutions.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb24-1046>

A link to the audit report can be found here: <https://coloradocpo.org/special-initiative/independent-audit-of-colorados-family-safety-and-risk-assessment-tools/>

Senate Bill 25-151

The board also discussed Senate Bill 25-151. Ombudsman Villafuerte reported that the bill requires the agency to conduct a statewide survey of residential child care facilities focused on security systems and policies related to youth who run away. The survey is expected to launch on April 1, 2026, with findings to be reported to the legislature.

She noted that the bill also requires the Colorado Department of Human Services to develop and implement facility-level policies by July 1, 2026, addressing responses to youth who attempt to run away, including notification requirements and safety protocols but that the process has not yet begun.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb25-151>

CLOSING REMARKS

Chair Meinster thanked board members for their time and participation.

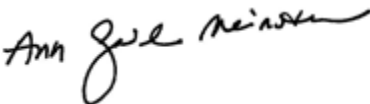
ADJOURN

Chair Meinster entertained a motion to adjourn. Matthew Tulley made a motion to adjourn, and Connie Vigil seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 9:26 a.m.

ATTESTATION

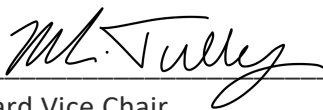
As Board Chair and Board Vice Chair, I attest that these minutes of the open public meeting held on March 12, 2026, of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman Board substantially reflect the substance of the discussion and action taken related to the matters under the authority of the Board and in compliance with the Open Meetings Law, § 24-6-402, C.R.S.



Board Chair

July 15, 2026

Date



Board Vice Chair

July 16, 2026

Date

