



CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN of COLORADO

COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

PUBLIC MEETING May 14, 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 8:32 a.m. by Board Chair, Hon. Gail Meinster.

Because a quorum was not present, the Board took no formal action and limited the meeting to discussion.

INTRODUCTIONS

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

Board Members on Zoom

Hon. Gail Meinster, Board Chair
Brian Bernhard
Matthew Tulley
Katy Saehler
Wendy Buxton-Andrade
Connie Vigil

Others Present

Haley Eagon, Assistant Attorney General II
Sarah Donahue, Assistant Attorney General II
Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman
Karen Nielsen, Director of Administrative Services

PRESENT FROM THE PUBLIC

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board was unable to review and approve the January 9, 2026, meeting minutes and March 12, 2026, due to the absence of a quorum.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION OVERVIEW

Leadership Changes

Board Chair Meinster welcomed attendees and thanked the board members, Kristen Mahlin of CoachCraft LLC, Melissa Jamieson and Chelsie Nalley of Office of Administrative Services for Independent Agencies (OASIA), and Assistant Attorney General II Sarah Donahue and Assistant Attorney General II Haley Eagon from the Department of Law for their work during the six-month recruitment process for the new agency Ombudsman.

Board Chair Meinster congratulated Deputy Ombudsman Jordan Steffen on her appointment and expressed the Board's support for her transition.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen, the incoming Ombudsman, thanked the group, expressed her appreciation to all involved, and stated that she looks forward to working closely with the Board and the team.

At 8:34 a.m. Wendy Buxton-Andrade joined the meeting.

At 8:35 a.m. Connie Vigil joined the meeting.

Interim Board Chair Appointment

Judge Gail Meinster agreed to serve as board chair for the remainder of the term until July 2027, expressing gratitude for the opportunity and thanked the Board for its support.

Interim Board Vice Chair Appointment

The group discussed the process for appointing a new interim vice chair, clarifying that this would be for the remainder of the existing term until July 2027. Matthew Tulley expressed willingness to step up as vice chair, but the Board agreed they would need a quorum to make an official appointment at their next meeting.

Board Member Recruitment

The Board discussed recruitment of new members, with Deputy Ombudsman Steffen planning to send an email with a fact sheet about Board roles and responsibilities to all board members for them to consider potential candidates. Matthew Tulley offered to reach out to contacts in education and criminal justice, with Deputy Ombudsman Steffen agreeing to handle the formal recruitment process.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen mentioned ongoing efforts to fill other three vacancies, including Matthew Tulley's position and Commissioner Charles Tedesco's role, noting that progress may be delayed due to the transition in governorship.

Board Member Attendance Practices & Compliance with Board Bylaws

The group also reviewed the Board's attendance policy, which states that attendance at regular meetings is mandatory unless excused in advance by the Board Chair, Board Vice Chair, or Ombudsman, with more than three consecutive unexcused absences potentially leading to removal. Deputy Ombudsman Jordan with circle up with Board Chair Meinster prior to next meeting regarding board attendance practices and compliance with Board Bylaws.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION OVERVIEW

Agency Leadership Update

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen informed the group that, as part of the leadership transition, she is developing an agency-facing staff transition plan and conducting director-level one-on-one meetings after completing staff conversations, with the handoff expected in June.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that as she transitions into the Ombudsman role, she will begin to oversee the Client Services Team's day-to-day operations.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that she is holding virtual office hours and working in person at the office weekly to remain available to staff.

Vandalism Repair Project and Return-to-Office Plan

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen provided an update on the vandalism repair project and the agency's expected return to the Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center (RCJC) in late October 2026. They discussed the agency's office space needs and noted that the agency has outgrown its current footprint. Deputy Ombudsman Steffen explained that the State Court Administrator's Office (SCAO) had begun considering a needs assessment before the vandalism incident, but that work was later placed on hold. She also reported that staff are expected to continue a hybrid schedule after returning to the RCJC, that all staff are designated as hybrid employees, and that the handbook includes work-from-home expectations.

HIRING UPDATES

Deputy Ombudsman and Communications Director Positions

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the Deputy Ombudsman position has been posted and that she revised the job description. She said the agency is seeking a candidate with both financial expertise and child protection system knowledge.

The team agreed to share the posting with the Directors Association, and Deputy Ombudsman Steffen invited feedback on the hiring criteria as candidate evaluation rubrics are developed.

Wendy Buxton-Andrade offered to help provide context on the Child Welfare Allocation Committee (CWAC) and emphasized the value of practical, on-the-ground experience over formal education. The group agreed that direct experience and practical knowledge are especially important for these roles, particularly in serving rural areas. Deputy Ombudsman Steffen stated that she hopes to extend an offer by early July.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen announced plans to hire a Communications Director to help manage the agency's growing workload, including media requests and CORA responses. She plans to post the position description in the coming weeks. She explained that funding for the new roles would be managed within the existing budget.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen expressed enthusiasm about filling both the positions and stated that she would share updates as they become available.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen will share the Deputy Ombudsman job posting link with board members and reported that she plans to work with OASIA and Kristen Mahlin with CoachCraft, LLC to participate on the hiring panels for both positions.

Client Service Analysts

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that both Client Services Analyst vacancies have been filled, with the new hires scheduled to start on June 8, 2026.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW & UPDATE

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen provided the Board with current FY 2025-26 budget and legal budget documentation and gave an overview of the agency's financial status. She reported that the agency is on track to meet its budget targets and expects a small six-figure reversion.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency used operational surplus funds to update its Salesforce case management database. The updates are intended to improve analysts' user experience, support more consistent investigation tracking and issue spotting, and make system information easier for staff to access. The work also aligns with the theory of change logic model developed with the University of Denver.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency used operational surplus funds to contract with Yumiko Doherty of Ignite the Change Advisors, LLC, who previously served as the agency's liaison for the House Bill 24-1046 audit project. Ms. Doherty will help develop the implementation plan for recommendations from the independent audit of Colorado's Family Safety and Risk Assessment tools, coordinate with agency partners involved in the audit and RFP process, and support continued engagement with the lived experience work group.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen also reported that she negotiated a month-to-month contract with Barefoot PR to provide communications support until the Communications Director position is filled.

Long Bill

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the Long Bill passed and fully funds the agency for FY 2026-27. She also reported that she continues to work with the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) analyst on contingency plans for possible budget reductions, noting a preference for percentage-based cuts rather than reductions to specific programs.

Staff Training Opportunities

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that she plans to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of staff training options for the upcoming fiscal year. She also noted that the training budget has been reduced due to prior budget give-backs.

Staff COLA

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that she worked with Chelsie Nalley of OASIA to analyze the 1% COLA and related compression issues. Although no COLAs were provided this year, staff will receive a 1% step-like increase.

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION OVERVIEW

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the 2026 legislative session was quieter for the agency than the prior year, when the agency advanced four significant pieces of legislation. She noted that, although the agency was less involved in major substantive legislation this year, it remained engaged in operational and administrative bills affecting independent agencies. This included work on the lobbying bill, where the agency collaborated with other independent agencies on amendments to help preserve its independence when working with legislators.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen also testified in support of House Bill 25-1430, which was intended to address a potential ballot initiative that would have set aside General Fund dollars for transportation costs. She explained

that preserving access to those funds is important because they support statewide programmatic needs, including education, child welfare and child protection, health care, and Medicaid.

She further reported that the agency was unable this year to pursue statutory cleanup related to its transition from the State Court Administrator's Office but plans to revisit that work early next year.

OPERATIONS UPDATE

Case Volume

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that the Client Services Team remains on track to handle its standard annual caseload of 1,100 to 1,300 cases and continues to see steady demand for services.

Senate Bill 25-151

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that Senate Bill 25-151 was enacted in response to recommendations from the Timothy Montoya Task Force. The bill requires the CPO to audit residential child care facilities and other out-of-home placements to assess infrastructure needs, including whether physical design or security measures could help prevent youth from running away. She noted that the agency received approximately 40 survey responses and plans to extend the deadline while working with the Colorado Association of Family and Children's Agencies (CAFCA) and the Department of Human Services to gather additional feedback. The report is due to the legislature and the Board by July 1.

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen also reported that the bill requires facilities to notify parents or caregivers within four hours when a child or youth runs away and to provide written response policies. These policies must address whether restraint may be used, how staff will search for the child or youth, and how parents or caregivers will be contacted. She noted that the Colorado Department of Human Services is developing rules for these requirements and is expected to have them in place by August. The CPO is working directly with facilities to ensure they understand the statutory requirements and begin implementation while rulemaking is underway.

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

BOARD BUSINESS

Annual Out-of-Town Board Meeting

Deputy Ombudsman Steffen reported that she will send the Board a Doodle poll to identify potential future meeting dates for the in-person out-of-town Board meeting. She also plans to add it to the agenda for the July 9, 2026, meeting agenda.

Next Board Meeting

The Board's next meeting is scheduled for July 9, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

CLOSING REMARKS

Chair Meinster thanked board members for their time and participation.

ADJOURN

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 9:55 a.m.

ATTESTATION

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

Ann Julie Meinen

Board Chair

July 15, 2026_____
Date

M. Tully

Board Vice Chair

July 16, 2026_____
Date

