



COLORADO CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN BOARD

**PUBLIC MEETING
July 9, 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 (CPO) Board was convened via Zoom teleconference at 8:38 a.m. by Board Chair, Hon. Gail Meinster.

A quorum of the Board was present.

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
Hannah Seigel Proff
Coral Steffey

Others Present

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.

At 8:42 a.m. Katy Saehler joined the meeting.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 8, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Chair Meinster entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on January 8, 2026. Matthew Tulley made a motion to approve the final minutes of the January 8, 2026, meeting. Connie Vigil seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

March 12, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Chair Meinster entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on March 12, 2026. Matthew Tulley made a motion to approve the final minutes of the March 12, 2026, meeting. Connie Vigil seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

May 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Chair Meinster entertained a motion to approve the final minutes of the meeting held on May 14, 2026. Matthew Tulley made a motion to approve the final minutes of the May 14, 2026, meeting. Connie Vigil seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

BOARD BUSINESS

Out-of-Town Board Meeting Discussion

Ombudsman Jordan Steffen reported that the CPO selected Grand Junction for the statutorily required out-of-town Advisory Board meeting due to its central location and community engagement opportunities. Members considered a few dates in October, and Ombudsman Steffen tentatively scheduled the event for October 15 -16, 2026. The group also discussed holding a community partner meeting to share information about the CPO's role, learn about local issues, and engage partners, including Collaborative Management Program representatives and judicial officers. Matthew Tulley offered to contact Mesa County partners about potential venues, including Hilltop.

Annual Board Training

Sarah Donahue, Assistant Attorney General II, reported that she would like to present the annual Board training on the Colorado Open Meetings Law, conflicts of interest, and the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) at the November 12, 2026, meeting.

Board Vice-Chair Election

Members discussed the vice-chair nomination and confirmed that Matthew Tulley had been nominated for the position.

Chair Meinster moved to nominate Matthew Tulley as Board Vice Chair. Wendy Buxton-Andrade seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Tulley's term will end on July 31, 2027.

Board Vacancies

The Board reviewed current and upcoming vacancies. Ombudsman Steffen reported limited progress on four vacancies and one seat expiring on August 1, 2026. The openings include:

- Chief Justice appointment: an individual with criminal justice experience involving children and youth.
- Governor appointment currently held by Matthew Tulley: an individual with professional experience in a rural county human or social services agency or rural private child welfare advocacy agency.
- Governor appointment: an individual with professional experience in an urban human or social services agency or urban private child welfare agency.
- Governor appointment: an individual with primary or secondary education experience.
- Senate President appointment expiring August 1, 2026: an individual formerly in foster care.

Ombudsman Steffen stated that she will continue follow-up with the Governor's Office, the Chief Justice appointment process, the Department of Law, and other potential candidate sources to expedite appointments. She also thanked Board members for their suggestions and professional connections to assist with recruitment.

At 9:06 a.m. Brian Bernhard joined the meeting.

PERSONNEL UPDATES

Deputy Ombudsman Position

Ombudsman Steffen provided an update on the Deputy Ombudsman recruitment process. The agency received 87 applications, with eight candidates selected for the first round of interviews and three advancing to the second round of interviews and offer was extended to the candidate the previous day.

Ombudsman Steffen shared that she considered the agency's leadership needs and the importance of building a balanced leadership team. She stated that the selected candidate brings experience in organizational culture, leadership coaching, and budget management. Ombudsman Steffen expressed confidence in the selection. The agency anticipates filling the position in early August.

Communications Director Position

Ombudsman Steffen reported that the Communications Director position posting has been delayed, with a goal of posting it by the end of the month. She stated that Barefoot PR will continue providing communications and social media support until the position is filled.

Client Services Analysts Positions

Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency hired two Client Services Analysts during the first week of June and that their onboarding and training are progressing successfully.

Board members expressed support for Ombudsman Steffen as she moves through the leadership transition and offered assistance as needed.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW & UPDATES

Agency Budget

Fiscal Year 2025-26

Ombudsman Steffen stated that the agency closed FY 2025-26 with a reversion of less than \$77,000, substantially less than the approximately \$200,000 reverted the prior year. She emphasized that, given the current state fiscal climate, fully using the agency's FY 2025-26 appropriation was especially important.

Fiscal Year 2026-27

Ombudsman Steffen reported that House Bill 26-1410, the Long Appropriations Bill continued the agency's approximately \$2.5 million budget for FY 2026-27.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb26-1410>

Legal Services Budget

Ombudsman Steffen stated that the agency spent \$62,500 on legal expenses during FY 2025-26, exceeding the initial \$37,500 budget.

She also reported that the Long Bill allocated \$76,833 for legal services in the current FY 2026-27, the agency's highest legal services allocation to date.

SMART ACT PERFORMANCE PLAN

SMART Act Performance Plan

Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency submitted its SMART Act Performance Plan to the Joint Budget Committee and General Assembly on July 1, 2026. The plan now incorporates the agency's Theory of Change work. She explained that the agency partnered with the University of Denver's Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to develop a visualization showing how the Client Services Team, Public Policy Collaborative, and Communications team work together to identify trends and support the Theory of Change.

A link to the report can be found her: <https://coloradocpo.org/operational-reports/>

OPERATIONS UPDATES

House Bill 24-1046 Audit Implementation and Coordination Support

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 the independent audit recommendations on 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.

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

Website Maintenance

Ombudsman Steffen stated that the agency contracted with an individual who previously worked with its former website maintenance vendor. The six-month contract will be billed at the same rate previously paid for website support and includes regular updates to staff biographies, SMART Act materials, and other website content as needed.

Legislative and Public Affairs Support

Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency entered into an annual contract with Aponte & Busam Public Affairs Consultants for legislative and public affairs support. The contractor will monitor legislation, identify emerging trends, and provide information on legislative activity at the State Capitol. The \$25,000 annual contract will be billed quarterly.

Case Management and Data Reporting

Ombudsman Steffen provided an update on the agency's Salesforce case management system and reported that the agency launched its new model on July 1, 2026. Moving forward, case information will be entered using the

new model, which is designed to improve data extraction, issue identification, trend analysis, and public reporting. The agency also developed issue-spotting templates to support issue identification and resolution. She stated that the Board will receive updates on this work, including what the data is showing and how the agency can continue to strengthen its work.

Ombudsman Steffen reported that the agency continues to work with the University of Denver's Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to assess the agency's systems, measurements, outcomes, and service delivery. This work also supports implementation of the agency's Theory of Change and the development of standardized public-facing reports. Future reporting will include data drawn from the updated Salesforce system.

As part of the next phase of this work, the agency will develop a client survey to gather feedback about clients' experiences with CPO at the conclusion of a case.

Cybersecurity Insurance

Ombudsman Steffen stated that the agency is working with the Office of Administrative Services for Independent Agencies (OASIA) and Computer Crews, its IT vendor, to complete the documentation and requirements needed to obtain cybersecurity insurance. She noted that the collaboration has been positive.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Senate Bill 25-151

Ombudsman Steffen updated the Board on Senate Bill 25-151, enacted in response to Timothy Montoya Task Force recommendations to prevent children and youth from running away from residential child care facilities. She reported that the agency, in coordination with the Colorado Association of Family and Children's Agencies (CAFCA), completed the required statewide survey. The voluntary survey was sent to 118 facilities and received 34 responses; Division of Youth Services facilities were excluded.

The CPO submitted the required report to the General Assembly by the July 1, 2026, deadline. The report, *Senate Bill 25-151 Residential Child Care Facility Survey Results: Physical Infrastructure to Prevent Young People from Running Away from Care*, summarizes the survey findings and is available on the agency's website.

The Board also discussed implementation requirements, including facility obligations to notify parents or caregivers within four hours when a child or youth runs away and to maintain written response policies addressing searches, notifications, and restraint use. Ombudsman Steffen noted that related Colorado Department of Human Services rulemaking is expected to be completed by August 2026 and that the agency will continue supporting facilities and stakeholders as they implement the statutory requirements.

Ombudsman Steffen described implementation challenges between the CPO and the State Department, including differing perspectives on urgency and approach. The discussion addressed inconsistent caseworker training, the need to sustain state-level implementation, and potential legislative strategies. Ombudsman Steffen and Ms. Doherty plan to meet on implementation planning and launch an August 2026 work group to keep community partners engaged in addressing the audit findings.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/SB25-151>

House Bill 25-1188

Ombudsman Steffen provided an update on House Bill 25-1188 and stated that the agency was contacted by clergy seeking guidance about the Mandatory Reporting bill. She reported that they were directed to consult legal counsel.

She also noted that the Mandatory Reporting Task Force will continue to maintain clear boundaries when responding to community questions and will meet with Wisconsin representatives as part of its ongoing work.

A link to the bill can be found here: <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb25-1188>

Legislative Outreach

The Board discussed the importance of the CPO maintaining relationships with legislative and judicial partners. Board members encourage Ombudsman Steffen to continue outreach and reintroduce herself to key partners in her new role.

CLOSING REMARKS

Next Board Meeting

The Board’s next meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

Chair Meinster expressed appreciation to the board and staff for all their efforts.

ADJOURN

Chair Meinster entertained a motion to adjourn. Ms. Wendy Buxton-Andrade made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Matthew Tulley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board formally adjourned the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

ATTESTATION

As Board Chair and Board Vice Chair, I attest that these minutes of the open public meeting held on July 9, 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 Gail Meinster

Board Chair

September 10, 2026

Date

Matthew Tulley

Board Vice Chair

September 10, 2026

Date

