



CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN

**FISCAL YEAR 2021-2022
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Strategic Policy Initiatives

Throughout Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22, the Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) worked on three Strategic Policy Initiatives (SPI), which are detailed goals intended to elevate the performance of the agency. Specifically, the SPI guided the CPO’s work in the areas of communication and outreach, efficient and impactful practices, expanding expertise and promoting best practices.

Each SPI – comprised of *strategies, critical processes* and *key metrics* – helped guide the CPO toward its goals.¹The CPO is pleased to share this Annual Performance Report that summarizes the agency’s FY 2021-22 Performance Plan, achievements and opportunities.

SPI 1: TARGET COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENTS TO BETTER EDUCATE AND SERVE CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS.

Strategy: *Provide consistent, timely and informative communications to citizens, legislators and stakeholders on issues facing the child protection system.*

Critical Process: Communicate issues the CPO has identified to citizens, legislators and stakeholders by providing consistent and timely notices of the CPO’s findings and recommendations.

Status of Key Metrics: **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO continued to provide consistent communications. During FY 2021-22, the CPO published two issue briefs, each of which was shared with citizens, legislators and stakeholders.¹ The CPO’s issue brief regarding mandatory reporting practices resulted in legislation to address the state’s mandatory reporting laws.² Additionally, the CPO presented its annual report to the Joint Judiciary Committee and the Senate and House committees on health and human services.³ The presentation provided an opportunity for the agency to communicate the issues it identified through its work, its progress towards goals and its response to the pandemic directly to legislators. The CPO opened a record number of cases during FY 2021-22 – totaling 982 cases. The CPO partially attributes this continued growth to the agency’s ongoing outreach and education efforts.

Critical Process: Communicate issues the CPO has identified to stakeholders and/or ensure CPO representation in stakeholder meetings.

Status of Key Metrics: **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO attended stakeholder meetings and ensured issues identified by the CPO were communicated to relevant stakeholders. CPO staff attended more than 300 stakeholder meetings. As the CPO’s program areas have expanded – including the agency’s charge to monitor the safety and well-being of unaccompanied immigrant children in state licensed care⁴ – the agency has worked to create strong relationships with applicable stakeholders. For example, the CPO has set recurring meetings with several entities, including the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy

¹ See CPO issue briefs, [“BRIDGING THE GAPS: How current law limits the effectiveness of Colorado’s child fatality reviews”](#) and [“MANDATORY REPORTERS: How Colorado’s mandatory reporter law lacks the necessary infrastructure to support those charged with reporting suspected child abuse.”](#)

² See [House Bill 22-1240](#)

³ See the CPO’s [Fiscal Year 2020-21 Annual Report](#) and [CPO’s Fiscal Year 2021-22 Annual Report](#)

⁴ See [House Bill 21-1313](#)

Network. Additionally, the CPO presented to multiple national organizations including the American Bar Association and the United States Ombudsman Association.

Strategy: Engage with communities to expand the CPO's statewide presence and to identify emerging issues in child protection.

Critical Process: Engage with the CPO's listserv to determine which communities the CPO is contacting, how to increase the CPO's statewide presence and to identify emerging issues in the child protection system.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

The CPO continues to find new ways to engage with its listserv and to utilize those connections to refine its outreach efforts. The CPO sent five newsletters to its entire listserv during FY 2021-22. These newsletters included information about the CPO's casework, including the agency's work regarding the quality of services being provided youth who are placed in residential child care facilities. The agency also utilized this listserv to help promote open positions within the agency.

Critical Process: Engage youth impacted by the child protection system to increase CPO services provided to youth clients.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

During FY 2021-22, the CPO set a record for the number of cases filed by youth. In total, 53 cases were initiated by youth. The agency continued to connect with youth residing in Division of Youth Services youth centers through the blue phones that were programed with the CPO's number during the previous fiscal year. The agency also developed posters in four languages to be posted around the only facility in the state currently housing unaccompanied immigrant children and the CPO ensure the agency's number was programed into the toll-free phones for youth. Additionally, the CPO contracted with Think of Us, a national organization that specializes in connecting with and elevating the voices of youth and young adults impacted by the child protection system. Think of US completed a series of meetings with Colorado youth to determine how the CPO may improve its services and outreach efforts. The information provided by these youth will be implemented in the CPO's programs and outreach materials during Fiscal Year 2022-23.

Critical Process: Engage parents, relatives or other caregivers of children involved in the child protection system – including biological parents, foster parents, adoptive parents – to increase CPO services provided to these clients.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

The CPO continues its efforts to engage parents, relatives and other caregivers of children involved in the child protection system. Approximately 68 percent of the questions and concerns received by the agency were from family members – including mothers, fathers, grandparents and other relatives. During the past fiscal year, the CPO presented several times to foster parents across the state and coordinated with Foster Sources to deliver the CPO's education materials to foster parents and kinship providers. Additionally, the CPO has set quarterly meetings with the Colorado Respondent Parents' Counsel to ensure the agency is aware of issues impacting parents. The CPO will continue to prioritize outreach to these populations during FY 2022-23.

Critical Process: Engage mandatory reporters – including specific services providers, educators, medical providers and mental health professionals – and the child protection legal community to increase CPO services provided to these clients.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

Through the development and successful passage of HB 22-1240, the CPO engaged with more than 30 organizations representing mandatory reporters in Colorado. During FY 2022-23, the agency will launch the Mandatory Reporting Task Force, which includes 33 members representing different mandatory reporters, entities who receive such reports and lived experts with experience with the mandatory reporting system. Additionally, during FY 2021-22, the CPO determined that its internal database does not effectively track when calls are received from mandatory reporters. The CPO is dedicating resources to updating the database during FY 2022-23.

Critical Process: Engage rural communities to increase CPO services provided to clients in rural areas.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

Approximately 30 percent of the clients who contacted the CPO during FY 2021-22 were from rural jurisdictions. This is largely consistent with previous fiscal years. During FY 2022-23, the CPO will host a series of rural community outreach sessions. This is in addition to the individual outreach completed routinely by the agency as it works to address questions and concerns raised by clients.

Strategy: *Ensure the CPO is targeting communications and services to all of Colorado's diverse communities.*

Critical Process: Identify who the CPO is serving and compare this information to Colorado demographic data.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

During FY 2021-22, the CPO began capturing client demographic data, including pronouns, how the client identifies racially and ethnically and the geographic location of each client. The CPO is working to analyze this data in a meaningful way, which also requires the CPO to determine the most appropriate comparable data set. During FY 2022-23, the agency will continue to collect this information and refine its practices for analyzing and utilizing this information.

SPI 2: IMPLEMENT PRACTICES THAT ENSURE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CPO SERVICES.

Strategy: *Implement practices and procedures that support CPO staff.*

Critical Process: Gather feedback from CPO clients to ensure quality services for citizens.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

During FY 2021-22, the CPO reassessed this critical process given the capabilities of the CPO's internal database and the effectiveness of the proposed timeline. During FY 2022-23, the CPO will reassess the best ways to collect this information.

Strategy: *Ensure the CPO is continually applying a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to its services.*

Critical Process: Provide ongoing CPO staff education on diversity, equity and inclusion to help staff best serve Coloradans.

Status of Key Metrics: Completed/Ongoing

During FY 2021-22, the CPO contracted with a third-party vendor to provide the agency with training regarding diversity, equity and inclusion principles. The vendor completed one-on-one interviews with each staff member to assess employees' perceptions of the agency and possible areas for improvement. The staff also received three

sessions of training. The findings and trainings from this vendor will be implemented during FY 2022-23 and the CPO is seeking additional resources to continue this work during FY 2023-24.

SPI 3: ESTABLISH THE CPO AS A LEADER ON ISSUES FACING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM.

Strategy: *Identify systemic issues that are pertinent to improving the child protection system.*

Critical Process: Identify systemic child protection issues from CPO data to alert citizens, legislators and stakeholders to emerging or reoccurring issues.

Status of Key Metrics: **Completed/Ongoing**

In addition to the two issue briefs mentioned above, the CPO has remained engaged with several issues that impacting the child protection system. These include quality assurance standards for residential child care facilities, addressing the placement shortages for children and youth, monitoring the well-being of unaccompanied immigrant children and elevating youth voice. The CPO hosted more than two dozen meetings to discuss these issues and will continue to facilitate and engage in similar conversations during FY 2022-23.

Strategy: *Track and analyze recommendations to monitor CPO's impacts and progress.*

The CPO has a statutory responsibility to maintain an accountable and transparent agency. Tracking and reporting the outcomes of its recommendations will provide a strong gauge for determining the CPO's impact in reforming the child protection system.

Critical Process: Track the uptake and implementation of recommendations.

Status of Key Metrics: **Completed/Ongoing**

The CPO continues to monitor the implementation of recommendations made to other agencies or organizations. However, most recommendations issued by the CPO during the past two fiscal years have been toward the Colorado General Assembly. The CPO continues to work with stakeholder and legislators to address these recommendations and the correlating issues.

Strategy: *Encourage citizens and stakeholders to use the CPO as a resource to improve the child protection system.*

Critical Process: Offer ongoing opportunities for citizens, legislators and stakeholders to engage in the CPO's system work.

Status of Key Metrics: **Completed/Ongoing**

During FY 2021-22, the CPO did a soft launch of the CPO Public Policy Advancement Center. This program houses all the CPO's systemic work and is designed to be an inclusive collaboration space to address issues impacting children and families in Colorado. The CPO works to continuously engage stakeholders, legislators and citizens in its work and included them in meetings and reviews. For example, the CPO hosted two stakeholder meeting regarding HB 22-1240, each meeting had more than 85 attendees representing dozens of organizations and individuals with lived experience. Additionally, the CPO's services are available for any individual who contacts the agency.