

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM
PERFORMANCE AUDIT, JUNE 2014

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

CONCERN

Under the current structure, the Department of Human Services (Department) has not implemented sufficient rules, contract provisions, and contract management practices to ensure that the Child Protection Ombudsman Program (Program) conducts effective reviews, produces timely and complete reports and recommendations, and performs other statutorily required duties that generate positive change for the state's child welfare system.

KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

- The current organizational structure of the Program may not be ideal to achieve the optimal level of independence.
- The Program has not implemented adequate processes to ensure that reviews and investigations comply with contract requirements, are conducted based on consistent criteria, and result in supportable conclusions. For example, the Program did not document how staff reached conclusions for 5 of the 17 case reviews in our sample (29 percent).
- The Program lacks adequate controls for reporting the results of reviews and investigations. Specifically, of the 20 files in our sample:
 - ▶ 6 contained no evidence that the complainant was informed of the outcome.
 - ▶ 3 contained no evidence that the county under review was informed of the outcome.
 - ▶ 13 contained no evidence that the Department was informed of the outcome.
- The Program is not always timely in finalizing reviews. 29 of the 163 reviews (18 percent) open in Fiscal Year 2014 took more than 30 days to finalize, and seven reviews had been open between 198 and 497 days without being finalized.
- The Program has not formally concluded on the need for a statewide grievance process, as required by statute.
- Criminal background checks were not conducted on either the current or former Ombudsman or Program staff, and Trails-based background screening did not occur for three of the four current Program staff.
- Program staff have not received data security training or signed acknowledgements of their awareness of state data security policies.
- In selecting the current vendor for the contract, the Department did not evaluate responses to the RFP based on the scoring criteria set forth within the RFP.

BACKGROUND

- The purpose of the Program is to improve accountability and transparency in Colorado's child protection system and promote better outcomes for children and families.
- The Program began in 2011 and is operated by a non-profit organization through a contract managed by the Department.
- The Program is staffed by 3.5 FTE and received an appropriation of \$370,000 for Fiscal Years 2012 through 2014 and \$504,000 for Fiscal Year 2015.
- The Program is statutorily tasked with making recommendations to improve the State's child welfare system based on the results of its reviews and investigations.
- The Program has completed 490 reviews and five investigations since it began operations.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department should:

- Develop rules, policies, and procedures that detail expectations for the Program's intake and case review processes.
- Develop rules, policies, and procedures that improve the Program's review and investigation reporting and recommendation tracking.
- Implement measureable contract deliverables and monitor performance to ensure that the Program meets all of its statutory obligations.
- Implement policies, procedures, and contract provisions to ensure that Program staff and sub-contractors meet the state's data security requirements.
- Implement appropriate controls over the vendor selection process.

The Department agreed with all of these recommendations.