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Saint Paul, MN 55103

Agency Name: Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families
Report Title: MIAC Quarterly Board Meeting - Quarter One Board Report
Date Due/Submitted: February 24, 2026
Reporting Period: 11/18/2025 to 2/23/2026

1. Summary – Quarter 1 MIAC Board Reporting

Provide a concise overview of the purpose of this report, including key issues, highlights, or recommendations for MIAC's consideration.

The purpose of this report is to provide information and data. See attached Report.

Data

Number of cases for this reporting period: 84

Number of court hearings observed for this reporting period: 106

Total number of cases that are being Monitored/investigated: 239 cases (since 1/17/2024)

During Quarter 1 reporting agencies should bring updates of initiatives that were discussed during Tribal Consultation.

2. Follow up or Action Item(s) Update from Quarter Four MIAC Board Meeting

- **Follow up Items Requested by the Board at the previous Board meeting**
 - None were requested at the Quarter Four Board Meeting.
 - **Action Items**
 - No Action Items from Quarter Four Board Meeting.
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3. Program Updates

Program/Project Description: Outline programs impacting Tribal Nations (education, environment, health, infrastructure, etc.).

- See Attached Report.

Performance Metrics: Provide data on outcomes, disaggregated where possible (Tribal-specific impacts, participation rates, etc.).

- See Attached Report.

Do you believe the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families observing court hearings makes a difference?

*Your office made a huge difference in * County case because the court took ICWA and MIFPA a lot more seriously because you were in the room. The judge did a much better job of including the tribe in the deliberations just because you were in the room. You had the court scrambling because the green cards had not been made a part of the court file. I think the Ombudsperson surprised the court when they asked that question (about the green cards not being filed). The state court judges and county attorney staff sit up just a little bit straighter when the Ombudsperson is in the room.*

Funding / Resources: Describe funding allocated, grants awarded, or technical assistance provided to Tribal Nations.

- Funded by the Legislature.

4. Legislative & Policy Updates

Summarize any new legislation, policies, or rulemaking that may impact Tribal Nations.

- Legislation to allow the Ombuds Offices to have immediate access to the SSIS System by DHS/DCYF which would allow the Ombuds to be able to work more efficiently and faster. This legislation will not directly impact Tribal Nations, but will greatly help the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families in the work that they do.

5. Recommendations for MIAC

- Support the Legislation for the Ombuds to have access to SSIS.

Signature *Jill K. P. Esch*

Submitted by:

Name: Jill K. P. Esch

Title: Ombudsperson

Agency: Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families

Date: 2/24/2026

(Q12026 -11/18/2025 to 2/23/2026)



Report for the Period 11/18/2025 to 2/23/2026

Duties of the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families

The Ombudsperson for American Indian Families investigates complaints for non-compliance of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA), the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPCWDA) as it pertains to Native Children, the Tribal State Agreement, Minnesota Statutes, Court Rules and DHS and DCYF Policies that involve child protection cases, including placement, public education and housing issues related to child protection that impact American Indian children and families. The Ombudsperson is advised by and reports to the American Indian Community-Specific Board, who are all appointed by the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. [OAIF Statute](#)

Executive Summary

- The Agency continues to observe court hearings around the State.
- The Agency attended an in-person training on Conducting Effective Investigations.
- Presented its report to the American Indian Child Welfare Advisory Board.
- Ombuds attended the two-day inaugural ICWA Training with CJI and TTCP.
- Continued communications with the State-Tribal Partnership Program Coordinator.
- Meetings with American Indian Well-Being Unit, St. Paul Indians in Action (SIA), MUID Family Preservation Committee, Children's Justice Advisory Task Force, Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) Meetings around the State, and Citizens Review Panel Meetings for Chisago, Hennepin and Ramsey.
- Attended various state agency briefings and trainings including DHS/DCYF, Data Practices, COOP, HR, SmART, Agency Budget and other topics.
- Tabled at the Ain Dah Yung Center 2026 Cherish the Children's Pow Wow.
- Meet and Greet Meetings with counties around the State and the Women of Shakopee.
- Continued communications with the GAL Program, ICWA Division.
- Meetings with the IT Consultant and others to continue to enhance the Agency's case management system, including a calendar integration.
- Appointed the Membership Director to the United States Ombudsman Association Executive Board, which allows the Director to do public sector outreach to other Ombuds offices nationwide.

Data

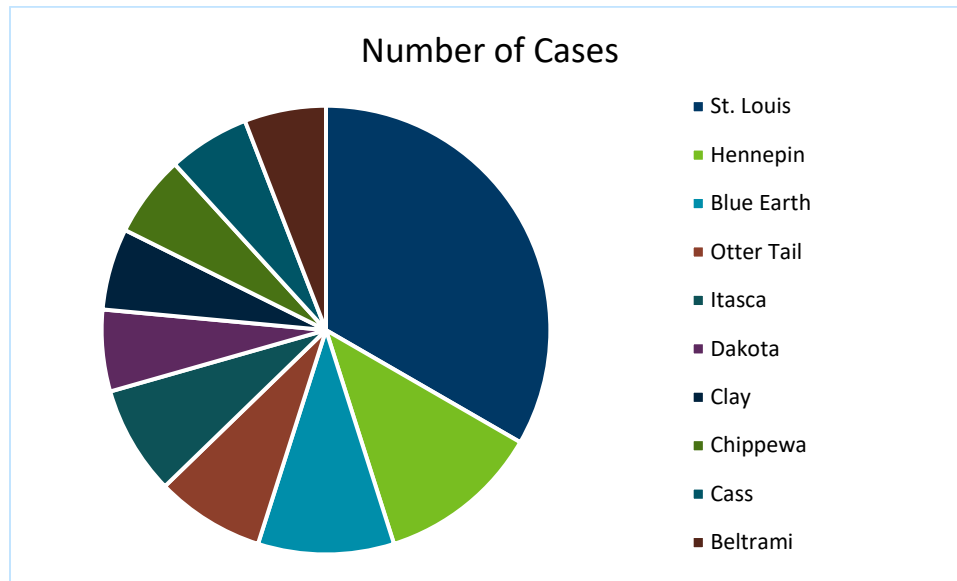
Number of cases for this reporting period: 84

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Geographical locations of intakes (online, telephone, and email)

Table 1. Counties identified during reporting period.*



*Counties with less than 3% are not shown in the graph; Appendix 1 provides the full list of counties.

Tribes

Table 2. Tribes identified during this reporting period.

Tribe	Number of Cases	Number of Cases (% of col)
No Tribe	13	15.5%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	10	11.9%
Other	9	10.7%
Red Lake Nation	9	10.7%
White Earth Nation	9	10.7%
Unknown Tribe	7	8.3%
Cherokee Nation	5	6.0%
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	5	6.0%
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	4	4.8%
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	3	3.6%
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians	3	3.6%
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation	2	2.4%
Lower Sioux Indian Community	1	1.2%
Oglala Sioux	1	1.2%
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	1	1.2%

Standing Rock Sioux	1	1.2%
Yankton Sioux	1	1.2%

Cases by Concern

Table 3. Reasons for contacting the agency.

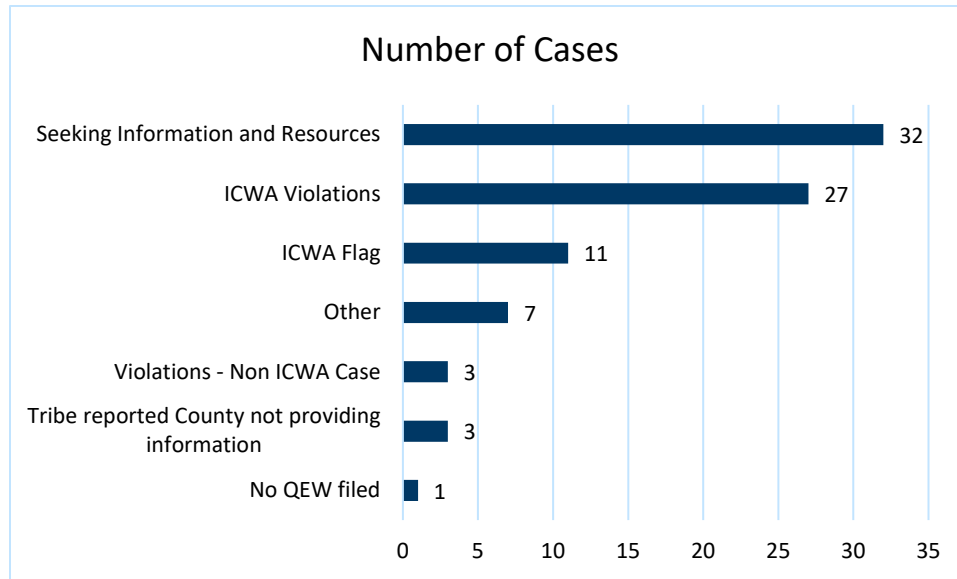


Table 3 shows that *Seeking Information and Resources* and *ICWA Violations* are overwhelmingly the top concerns that have been received during this reporting period.

Selected Matters from Cases During the Period of this Report

- Parent attorneys are telling the County to send the certified mail to their office for the parent and they can sign for the parent – which is a violation of the Notice requirement.
- Ombuds brought to the Court’s attention that the green card for the parent was not filed. County argued they did not need to serve the parents via certified mail because they had been personally served. Court stated in its order that the Assistant County Attorney’s argument was “plainly wrong”.
- Complaints from Tribes, ICWA GALs and Parents that County Social Workers were not providing Active Efforts, nor services to help reunify families.
- A county files all social worker reports with confidential status so they are not viewable by the Ombudsperson or the public. (Generally, only certain reports are filed with confidential status such as Parenting Assessment Reports or Substance Abuse Reports, but the remainder of the social worker report is made public and is viewable.)
- Court Administration is not putting the ICWA Flag on the case when Petition states child may be Native.
- Court Administration not timely removing the ICWA Flag when the Court finds ICWA does not apply.
- In several cases, Court Administration provided the wrong Zoom Meeting ID and Passcode which resulted in the Ombudsperson Office not being able to observe the court hearing.
- The Court took testimony of a parent in an Admit Deny Hearing -- despite the Ombuds bringing to the Court’s attention that there were no green cards filed in the permanency petition case.
- Grandparents upset that they were not allowed to speak in Court to share with the Court that they wanted to have visits with their grandchildren.

- Parents were told that if they voluntarily agreed to terminate their parental rights, which they did, that they would be able to receive annual pictures of their child, which they have not received.
- Agency assisted a county in getting the “tardy” UA results from the testing company -- so that the parent and child could begin unsupervised visitation.
- Court’s law clerk reached out to the Ombuds for assistance on contacting a Tribe to advise the Tribal Representative of a hearing to occur later that day or the next day.
- Non-custodial parent reported that the supervision facility kept changing the day of the week for his scheduled visit and thus not giving the parent adequate time to make necessary arrangements with what else was going on in parent’s life.

Feedback to the Following Question:

Do you believe the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families observing court hearings makes a difference?

*Your office made a huge difference in * County case because the court took ICWA and MIFPA a lot more seriously because you were in the room. The judge did a much better job of including the tribe in the deliberations just because you were in the room. You had the court scrambling because the green cards had not been made a part of the court file. I think the Ombudsperson surprised the court when they asked that question (about the green cards not being filed). The state court judges and county attorney staff sit up just a little bit straighter when the Ombudsperson is in the room.*

Yes, you are a badass. 🙌

There are times when ICWA is violated or disregarded and to have a state representative such as yourself present, even silently, can affect the parties' and sometimes the Court's approach to and treatment of our families, or active efforts or whatever the issue may be, by making the proper application of the law more likely. Practice in smaller communities can be particularly challenging and your presence or involvement can add to, or support, positive developments in ICWA case management and outcomes.

I have appreciated your work with counties to improve services to and for tribal families throughout the state.

I believe when your office observes a hearing, that it does add a layer of accountability to the proceeding and the court is more diligent about following the requirements of ICWA and MIFPA.

Based on first-hand knowledge and experience, I know that having the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families observe court hearings has made a made a difference contributing, even just by presence alone, to a more positive outcome for Indian families.

Report from the American Indian Community-Specific Board

Board Members continue to promote the Agency by providing information about the Agency and the Agency’s brochure to the community, as well as to school leadership, superintendents and supervisors. Board Members also assisted in asking the American Indian Community to consider applying for the Board.

Board Meeting on February 25, 2026.

Appendix 1. Geographic locations of intakes (online, telephone, and email)

County of Residence	Number of Cases	Number of Cases (% of col)
St. Louis	17	20.2%
Hennepin	6	7.1%
Blue Earth	5	6.0%
Otter Tail	4	4.8%
Itasca	4	4.8%
Dakota	3	3.6%
Clay	3	3.6%
Chippewa	3	3.6%
Cass	3	3.6%
Beltrami	3	3.6%
Stearns	2	2.4%
Scott	2	2.4%
Roseau	2	2.4%
Ramsey	2	2.4%
Pennington	2	2.4%
Isanti	2	2.4%
Becker	2	2.4%
Anoka	2	2.4%
Aitkin	2	2.4%
Wright	1	1.2%
Washington	1	1.2%
Stevens	1	1.2%
Steele	1	1.2%
Polk	1	1.2%
Norman	1	1.2%
Mower	1	1.2%
Morrison	1	1.2%
Hubbard	1	1.2%
Goodhue	1	1.2%
Freeborn	1	1.2%
Crow Wing	1	1.2%
Cottonwood	1	1.2%
Clearwater	1	1.2%
Benton	1	1.2%