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Office of Ombudspersons for Families

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AT A GLANCE

- In 2014, Minnesota's child population was 1,391,302. Of the total child population, 28,784 children were alleged victims of child maltreatment.
- Minnesota ranked #1 in the nation, two years in a row, in overall child well-being (2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book). However, 47% (13,525) of all accepted maltreatment reports in Minnesota involved American Indian children and children of color. American Indian children were 5.4 times more likely than a White child to be subjects of an accepted maltreatment report. African-American/Black children and children identified as two or more races comprised more than half of all the children of color in accepted maltreatment reports. [See Disparities Data at a Glance chart.]
- In 2015, the Office received 1,972 calls for assistance; consulted and resolved 44% of the case circumstances; and conducted 58 investigations.
- For FY 2017, approximately 85% of the Agency's spending is budgeted from the General Fund and 15% from the Special Revenue Fund.
- Four full-time Ombudspersons operate independently, but in collaboration with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage, Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans and the Minnesota Latino Affairs Council. Each Council appoints a volunteer community-specific board that is advisory to the Ombudspersons.

PURPOSE

The Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF) is an independent state agency whose goals are: (1) to reduce racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality in Minnesota's child welfare system; (2) to improve outcomes for children and their families involved in child protection cases; (3) to ensure that all laws governing the protection of children and their families are implemented in a culturally and linguistically competent manner; and (4) to ensure that laws protecting children and families are adhered to in decision-making processes. We work to resolve complaints from families who have been negatively impacted by child welfare social service agencies.

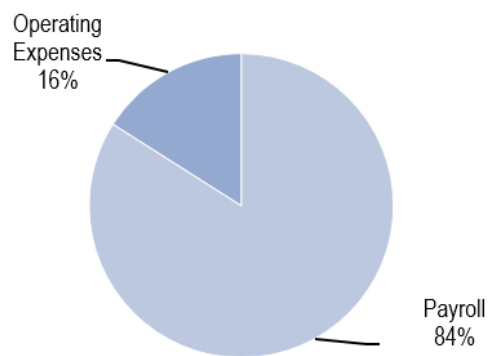
Our mission is to ensure that children and families are protected by law in all child placement proceedings conducted by public and private agencies and organizations.

The Office of the Ombudspersons for Families contributes to the following statewide outcomes:

- Strong and stable families and communities
- People in Minnesota are safe
- Efficient and accountable government services

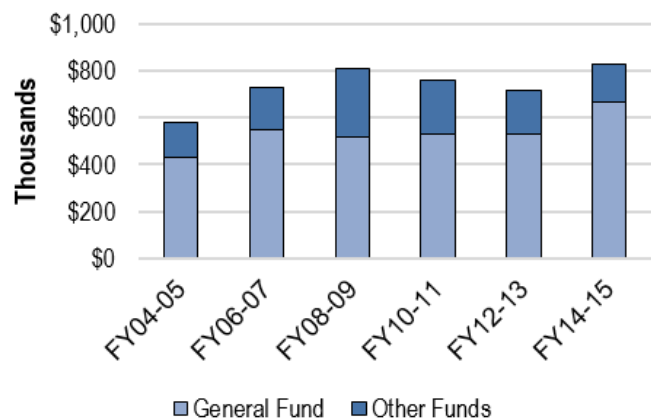
BUDGET

**Spending by Category
FY 15 Actual**



Source: BPAS

Historical Spending



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

DISPARITIES DATA AT A GLANCE

Maltreatment type by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2014 child population est.	Total unique children	Neglect (non-medical)	Physical abuse	Sexual Abuse	Mental injury	Medical neglect
African-American/Black	110,137	4,907	3,475	1,319	498	14	56
American Indian	24,478	1,917	1,551	378	154	26	24
Asian/Pacific Islander	76,569	662	392	212	73	6	8
White	1,001,557	14,625	9,497	4,392	1,845	191	164
Two or more races	69,085	3,227	2,336	826	392	31	33
Unknown/declined	N/A	634	418	190	59	1	3
Total Children	1,281,826	25,972	17,669	7,317	3,021	269	288
Hispanic ethnicity-any race	109,476	2,812	1,942	755	325	20	35

Source: Minnesota's Child Welfare Report 2014, Report to the 2015 Minnesota Legislature [Table 4, Maltreatment type by race/ethnicity, p. 8]

STRATEGIES

To accomplish its mission, the Office of Ombudsperson for Families uses the following strategies:

- **Investigation** - Through case investigations, the Ombudspersons make recommendations on cases regarding non-compliance with state or federal laws and policies. These cases include, but are not limited to: possible bias, discrimination, lack of culturally appropriate services and inadequate linguistic and cultural sensitivity.
- **Taking Complaints** - Complaints include a person making a specific claim against a county child welfare agency, or its agent; a public or private child placing agency, or its agent; the courts; the Guardian Ad Litem Program; and others. A person may call to complain about current laws, policies, and practices.

Specific examples of types of complaints received and resolved include, but are not limited to the following: Violations of the Indian Child Welfare Act; children are not placed with their families or relatives; relatives and families are not being considered for permanency placement; a mother is not allowed appropriate visitation time to breastfeed/feed her infant; no transportation to visitations; cannot get into treatment in a timely manner; inadequate housing; lack of understanding the court process/system; the public defender (parents' attorney) not being helpful; and the child protection workers' lack of cultural sensitivity. [Note: The Office of Ombudsperson for Families does not provide direct services or programs, nor do the Ombudspersons have enforcement over their recommendations.]

- **Monitoring** – (a) Monitor agency compliance with all laws governing child protection and placement that impact children of color and American Indian children; (b) document and monitor court activities in order to heighten awareness of diverse belief systems and family relationships; (c) ensure experts from the appropriate community of color including tribal advocates are used as court advocates and are consulted in placement decisions that involve children of color and American Indian children; (d) ensure guardians ad litem and other individuals from communities of color and American Indian are used in court proceedings to advocate on behalf of children of color and American Indian children; and (e) provide training programs for bilingual workers.
- **Public Policy Development** - Through public policy development, the Ombudspersons work to effect policy changes when current policies do not reflect best practices. Examples of some of the initiatives on which the Ombudspersons have worked include: Minnesota Supreme Court Children's Justice Initiative (CJI); Reviewed Minnesota Child Maltreatment Intake, Screening and Response Path Guidelines 2015, Minnesota Department of Human Services Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force; Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MNCWTS), Ramsey County Citizen Advisory Panel; and Hennepin County Child Protection Task Force. These initiatives and task forces have had an ongoing and positive impact on eliminating racial disparities and disproportionality in child welfare, and improving outcomes for children and their families involved in child protection cases.

RESULTS

<i>Type of Measure</i>	<i>Name of Measure</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
Quantity	Complaints and Inquiries received*	592	808	1,972
Quantity	Consultations/resolutions	284	310	861
Quantity	Investigations	19	29	58

*This measure tracks the number of calls/complaints to the Office of Ombudsperson for Families to make inquiries, to lodge a complaint, or request information about the child protection system and how to navigate it.

Executive Order 14-15, dated September 22, 2014, created the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children to advise the Governor and Legislature on system and practice improvements in the child protection system at all levels of government within the State of Minnesota. The Task Force was ordered to provide initial recommendations and convey its findings in a report to the Governor's Office, the Legislature and the public by December 31, 2014, and final recommendations by March 31, 2015. At the same time, counties were making fast changes to their screening and intake process. These significant policy changes resulted in an increased number of cases being screened in at the county level, which in turn led to more complaints to the Office of Ombudsperson for Families on open child protection cases.

In addition, on January 1, 2015, the Northstar Care for Children law took effect. This new law consolidated and simplified three child welfare programs: family foster care, Kingship Assistance (which replaced Relative Custody Assistance) and Adoption Assistance to support families caring for children who must be removed from the home for reasons of child protection, delinquency or disability. This also resulted in an increased number of telephone calls to the Office of Ombudsperson for Families.

M.S. 257.0755 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=257.0755>) provides the legal authority for the Office of Ombudsperson for Families

(Dollars in Thousands)

Expenditures By Fund

	Actual FY14	Actual FY15	Actual FY16	Estimate FY17	Forecasted Base	
					FY18	FY19
1000 - General	319	348	380	465	453	453
2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue	58	103	66	96	147	151
Total	377	451	446	561	600	604
<i>Biennial Change</i>				179		197
<i>Biennial % Change</i>				22		20

Expenditures by Program

Program: Ombudspersons For Families	377	451	446	561	600	604
Total	377	451	446	561	600	604

Expenditures by Category

Compensation	319	379	380	400	428	434
Operating Expenses	58	71	66	161	172	170
Other Financial Transactions	0	1				
Total	377	451	446	561	600	604

Full-Time Equivalents

	4.1	4.6	4.7	4.8	5.0	5.0
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1000 - General

	Actual		Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base	
	FY14	FY 15	FY 16	FY17	FY18	FY19
Balance Forward In	0	14	0	12	0	0
Direct Appropriation	333	334	392	453	453	453
Expenditures	319	348	380	465	453	453
Balance Forward Out	14	0	12	0	0	0
<i>Biennial Change in Expenditures</i>				178		61
<i>Biennial % Change in Expenditures</i>				27		7
Full-Time Equivalents	3.9	4.1	4.6	4.8	5.0	5.0

2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue

	Actual		Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base	
	FY14	FY 15	FY 16	FY17	FY18	FY19
Balance Forward In	91	126	115	141	137	82
Net Transfers	92	92	92	92	92	92
Expenditures	58	103	66	96	147	151
Balance Forward Out	125	115	141	137	82	23
<i>Biennial Change in Expenditures</i>				1		136
<i>Biennial % Change in Expenditures</i>				1		84
Full-Time Equivalents	0.1	0.5	0.0	0	0	0