



Report for the Period 5/21/2025 to 8/3/2025

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 Ombudsperson and Office Investigator continue to observe court hearings around the state and have found, by their observations, a number of ICWA/MIFPA violations.
- Reached out to the State Court Administration about being able to have access to the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Reports filed in Third-Party Custody cases involving a Native child.
- Invited by the Meeker County CJI Judge and the Beltrami County CJI Judge to present before their respective CJI Teams. [See Feedback section for comments from an attendee at the Meeker County CJI Meeting.]
- Meetings with Guardian Ad Litem Program ICWA Division, Carlton County ICWA Court Committee, Ramsey County ICWA Advisory Board Meeting, MUID Family Preservation Committee, Children's Justice Advisory Task Force, Children's Justice Initiative Meetings around the State, and Citizens Review Panel Meetings for Chisago, Hennepin and Ramsey. Hosted the Ramsey County CRP Meeting at Office.
- Attended and presented at the Tribal State Work Group Meeting and the ICWA Advisory Council Meeting.
- The Ombudsperson and Office Investigator attended the 2025 American Indian Child Welfare Summer Institute, along with all five members of the American Indian Community-Specific Board.
- Member of the Ramsey County Tribal Flag Installation Ceremony Committee. The ceremony will be on September 29, 2025 at 2:00 pm at the Landmark Center in St. Paul. The hope is to have flags from the 11 Minnesota Tribal Nations and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.

Number of new cases/inquiries for this reporting period – 45 cases

Number of cases that are being monitored/investigated – 179 cases

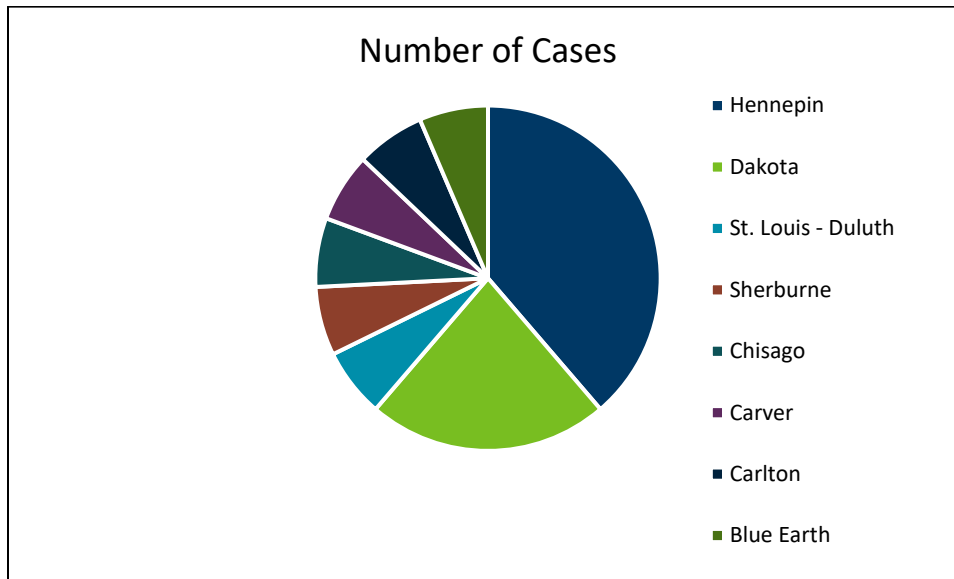
Website data

Total page views since launching the website on August 24, 2022: 15,507 views

Top 5 pages viewed: OAIF Home, What We Do, Reports, Resources, and How We Can Help

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

Table 1. Counties identified during reporting period.*



*Counties with less than 4% are not shown in the legend; Appendix 1 provides the full list.

Tribes

Table 2. Tribes identified during this reporting period.

Tribe	Number of Cases	Number of Cases (% of col)
Other	9	19.6%
Red Lake Nation	8	17.4%
White Earth Nation	7	15.2%
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	4	8.7%
Cherokee Nation	4	8.7%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	4	8.7%
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	2	4.3%
No Tribe	2	4.3%
Lac Courte Oreilles	1	2.2%
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	1	2.2%
Oglala Sioux	1	2.2%
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation	1	2.2%
Unknown Tribe	1	2.2%
Yankton Sioux	1	2.2%

Cases by Concern

Table 3. Reasons for contacting the agency.

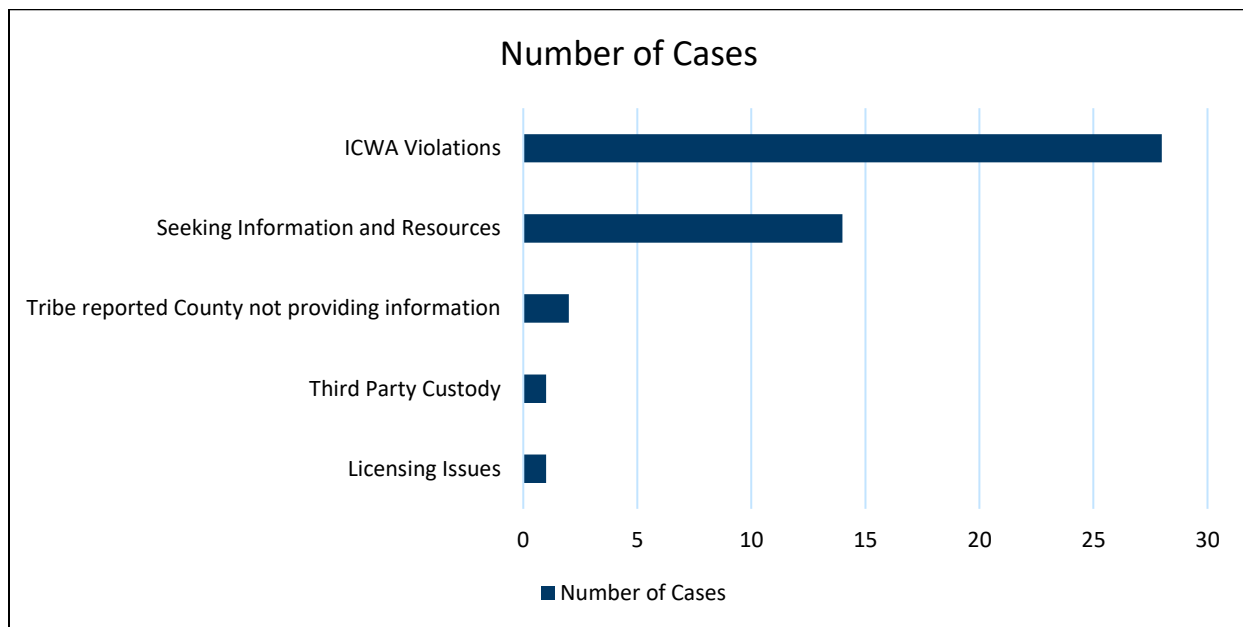


Table 3 shows that ICWA Violations, Seeking Information and Resources, and Tribe reported County not providing information as the three top concerns that have been received as submissions during this reporting period.

Table 4. Number of court hearings observed during this reporting period.

Type of Activity	Number of Counties	Observed (total)
Court Hearing	32	79

Table 4 shows the number of total counties and case hearings observed.

Selected Matters from Cases During the Period of this Report

- Parents did not understand why the County did not return their children to their care since they did as the social worker asked which was to clean up their house.
- Parents were not fully explained what their options were regarding a Voluntary Placement Agreement versus the County filing a CHIPS Petition.
- County Attorney Office incorrectly stated to the Court that it was not necessary to send the required ICWA Notices because the children remained at home under protective supervision.

- Based on court observation, it appeared County was not serving the required ICWA Notices by certified mail, but allowing the parent to sign the green card and to deliver the card personally to County.
- Ombudsperson sent a letter to the Court about violations of ICWA/MIFPA on a Family Court Third-Party Custody, including the parents had not been served and no Qualified Expert Witness provided. Court continued the evidentiary hearing based on Ombuds' letter.
- Provided information and resources to a petitioner regarding Third-Party Custody matter.
- Some counties are not allowing Office to have access to the responses from Tribes regarding whether a child is eligible for membership and the Office will be writing letters to the Court to ask for information.
- An ICWA Guardian Ad Litem educated the Court and the parties that since the green cards had not been filed, that the Court could not proceed with the Admit Deny Hearing.
- Foster care providers are frustrated that they attend the court hearings, but the courts don't call on them to inquire how the children/youth are doing.
- Continued complaints from Tribes and parents that the Counties have not been responsive when contacted.
- Continued violations that Counties are not securing the required Qualified Expert Witness Testimony to support the out-of-home placement of the child, or during the permanency proceedings.
- Continued violations for counties not including Tribes on every step of the case, not providing Tribes with all records and reports that they receive, the ICWA Notice when the court petitions are filed, family genograms are not complete, all green cards are not filed prior to the Admit Deny Hearings.

Feedback from the Community

July 23, 2025

To whom it may concern:

I am an assistant public defender in the 8th Judicial District who represents juveniles exclusively in delinquency and child protection cases, including representing Indian Children in ICWA/MIFPA cases.

I first met Jill Esch approximately 1 ½ years ago after one of our local parents' attorneys had reached out to her for assistance on a Chips/ICWA case that I also was working on. Until I met Jill, I had never even heard of the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families, the office which she leads. But I'm so glad I found out about it. I found Jill's involvement in that Chips/ICWA case extremely helpful. As Ombudsperson, she provided any and all interested litigants ICWA education by zoom; emailed any and all interested litigants ICWA educational resources; and appeared at various hearings in the case to help that everyone was complying with ICWA's/MIFPA's requirements. Jill otherwise helped to assure that my Indian Child client's rights, and that of the child's Indian Family, were protected.

Since that case, I have reached out to Jill in her capacity as ICWA Ombudsperson on several occasions regarding various ICWA issues on which I wanted/needed assistance. She has always been quick to respond to me, and consistently helpful.

Recently, she and her office investigator Natalie Goodman made an in-person educational presentation at our local Meeker County juvenile justice workgroup, attended by our local Chips judge, court administration, the Meeker County Attorney's Office, parents' attorneys, children's attorney, guardian ad litem, and Meeker County

Health and Human Services. I found the presentation interesting, relevant, and informative. And likewise, I thought the presentation was very helpful for all the local Chips stakeholders to better comply with ICWA/MIFPA. Of note, I was surprised to learn at said presentation that the Office of Ombudsperson Of American Indian Families only has 2 staff- Jill and Natalie.

Given the critically important role of the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families, and that there is every indication that there is too much work for Jill and Natalie to alone do, and not enough time to do it, I think that the tribal leaders and legislature should take quick action to increase the Office of Ombudsperson's funding. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Best Regards

Carter Greiner - Childrens'/Youth Attorney

Report from the American Indian Community-Specific Board

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council appoints the members of the American Indian Community-Specific Board. The Board advises and assists the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families pursuant to Minn. Stat. §3.9216 and attended and/or worked on the following in their capacity as Board Members:

- All Board Members attended the two-day American Indian Child Welfare Summer Institute Conference.

Board Meeting – Thursday, August 14, 2025

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

County of Residence	Number of Cases	Number of Cases (% of col)
Hennepin	11	35.2%
Dakota	7	13.0%
St. Louis - Duluth	2	3.7%
Sherburne	2	3.7%
Goodhue	2	3.7%
Chisago	2	3.7%
Carver	2	3.7%
Carlton	2	3.7%
Blue Earth	2	3.7%
Wright	1	1.9%
Washington	1	1.9%
Swift	1	1.9%
Stearns	1	1.9%
Scott	1	1.9%
Redwood	1	1.9%
Meeker	1	1.9%
Mahnomen	1	1.9%
Kandiyohi	1	1.9%
Douglas	1	1.9%
Cottonwood	1	1.9%
Clay	1	1.9%
Becker	1	1.9%
Anoka	1	1.9%