

Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO)

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Website: <http://ofco.wa.gov>

History

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds was established in 1996 by the Washington State Legislature with the enactment of Chapter 43.06A RCW. The Legislature wanted to ensure that abused and neglected children and their parents are served reasonably and fairly by government agencies. The Legislature created the Ombuds to intervene when children or their parents are subjected to unauthorized or unreasonable agency decisions. The Legislature also empowered the Ombuds to recommend changes for improving the child protection and child welfare system.

OFCO's Mission

The Mission of the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds is to protect children and parents from harmful agency action or inaction, and to make agency officials and state policy makers aware of system-wide issues in the child protection and child welfare system so they can improve services.

What We Do

Duties and responsibilities as described in RCW 43.06A and RCW 26.44:

- Provide information on the rights and responsibilities of individuals involved with the child welfare system
- Investigate complaints about agency actions or inaction that involve:
 - Any child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm.
 - A child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.
 - We intervene in cases in which we have determined that an agency's action or inaction is unauthorized or unreasonable
- Monitor procedures established by the department to carry out its responsibilities regarding child welfare services, with a particular focus on ensuring child health and safety, as well as family preservation
- Periodically review state licensed institutions serving children
- Recommend changes to improve child welfare system and better serve the needs of family and children
- Review “critical incidents” –child fatalities, near fatalities and cases of recurrent maltreatment
- Review and report on the implementation of child fatality report recommendations

Key Features

Important features of the Family and Children's Ombuds include:

- **Independence**
We are part of the Governor's Office. We operate independently from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and other state agencies.
- **Impartiality**
We act as a neutral fact-finder, not as an advocate. We step in when an agency action or inaction is unauthorized or unreasonable.
- **Confidentiality**
We do not disclose the identity of persons who have filed a complaint with us without their permission. Our records are confidential by law and cannot be obtained through public disclosure, civil discovery or court order.
- **Access to Confidential Information**
We have unrestricted access to information and records held by DSHS and are authorized by law to receive confidential information from other agencies and service providers.

Statutory Authority: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.06A>