

Office of Ombudsperson for Families' Testimony in
Support of Direct Access to Social Services Information System (SSIS)
Health & Human Services Committee
Senate File No. 4204
March 8, 2024

Dear Health and Human Services Committee:

Minnesota Statute **257.0762 DUTIES AND POWERS** subd. 2. **Powers** states:

Each ombudsperson has the authority to investigate decisions, acts, and other matters of an agency, program, or facility providing protection or placement services to children of color. In carrying out this authority and the duties in subdivision 1, each ombudsperson has the power to:

- (1) prescribe the methods by which complaints are to be made, reviewed, and acted upon;
- (2) determine the scope and manner of investigations to be made;
- (3) investigate, upon a complaint or upon personal initiative, any action of any agency;
- (4) request and be given access to any information in the possession of any agency deemed necessary for the discharge of responsibilities. The ombudsperson is authorized to set reasonable deadlines within which an agency must respond to requests for information. Data obtained from any agency under this clause shall retain the classification which it had under section 13.02 and shall be maintained and disseminated by the ombudsperson according to chapter 13.

Since June 2005 I've been hearing Minnesota's Spanish-speaking and Hispanic/Latino families' complaints on their open CHIPS cases. In order to fully investigate the complaints, I've had to send the above statutory authority via email and the regular mails to the leadership of the county responsible for the open CHIPS case to request all of the CHIPS SSIS case notes related to a case.

This procedure has been and continues to be burdensome for the county responsible for the open CHIPS case and the Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF). The county attorney has to make a decision on whether or not to fulfill the OBFF's request and when the county attorney's decision is in the

affirmative, even though a reasonable deadline has been set for the information request, it is not infrequent that the reasonable deadline is not met because the county agency has to copy the entire SSIS CHIPS file and then send it to the OBFF, usually via the mails. Upon receipt of the SSIS CHIPS file, no matter how large the file may be, the ombudsperson reads the file to get a complete picture of what may be happening, or not happening in the CHIPS case.

The information the Office of Ombudsperson for Families needs to have from the Minnesota Department of Human Services' SSIS database in order to fulfill its statutory duties includes the following:

- Information about the parents and the child/youth
- Intake and Intake Summary
- Family Assessment
- Family Investigation
- Service Plans
- Case Plans
- Case Management
- Out of Home Placement Plans
- Chronology of Case Notes
- Person Search
- Associated Work Groups
- Information about Permanency including North Star
- Permanency Records, including adoption and transfer of permanent physical and legal custody
- Placement history information

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, yet it's a very good representation of what an ombudsperson reviews in a CHIPS case.

With direct SSIS access the Office of Ombudsperson for Families will be able to quickly review all documents associated with the SSIS CHIPS file and reduce the time it takes to request the SSIS CHIPS file, which in turn will greatly aid the ombudspersons in doing their jobs and better serve our respective communities. Also, pursuant to the afore-referenced statutory authority, we have the duty and the responsibility to maintain the integrity of the information in the SSIS CHIPS file

per the mandates of Minnesota Data Practices, Chapter 13, Government Data Practices.

Sincerely,

Muriel Gubasta
March 7, 2024

Muriel Gubasta, J.D.

Ombudsperson for Spanish-speaking and Hispanic/Latino Families

