



State of Minnesota Office of Ombudsperson for Families

State of Minnesota
Office of Ombudsperson for Families
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mission Ensuring that children and families are protected by law in all child placement proceedings conducted by public and private agencies and organizations

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
- 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.



Office of Ombudsperson for Families contributes to the following statewide outcomes:

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



At a glance

In 2017 there were

1,298,657 children in Minnesota



39,606 of those were alleged victims of maltreatment

In 2017, the Office received

2,290 calls for assistance

Consulted & resolved **40%** of the case circumstances

111 investigations conducted

Four full-time Ombudspersons operate independently, but in collaboration with:

- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
- Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
- Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans
- Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

There are four community-specific boards that comprise the full board that advises the Office.

case study

Asian-Pacific Families

Complaint: A parent, who has limited English language skills, contacted the Ombudsperson for help. She expressed concerns about the lack of effective and culturally appropriate services to address her son's mental health problems—he was placed in out-of-home care for treatment. The mother complained about the lack of interpreter services being provided to enable her to communicate effectively with the mainstream providers and to provide input for her son's treatment. She also indicated that she was not in agreement with the child protection agency's decision to reunify her son with her family at that point, claiming that there seemed to be no improvement in his behavior yet.

Outcome: The Ombudsperson investigated the complaint and reviewed the case. Following the findings of her investigation, she contacted mental health providers for their feedback. She also took time to educate the parent on the child protection laws, conducted family meetings, and met with the child protection agency to resolve the mother's concerns. Case closed.

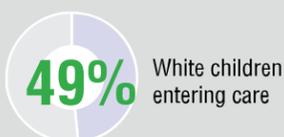
case study

American Indian Families

An American Indian grandmother contacted the Ombudsperson late on a Monday evening. A permanency hearing was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. The grandmother was extremely frustrated and concerned that custody of her grandchildren would be transferred to the foster family (no relation to her biological grandson, but related to her granddaughter). On Tuesday, the Ombudsperson contacted the social worker's supervisor, who confirmed that the Wednesday hearing would be the final hearing and the case would then be closed. The Ombudsperson immediately contacted the Tribe and the Assistant County Attorney and advised them that the matter was being investigated for possible violations of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act. The Ombudsperson also provided legal information and resources to the grandmother and encouraged her to hire an attorney to intervene on her behalf, which she did. Sixteen months after contacting the Ombudsperson, the grandson was permanently placed with his grandmother, and the granddaughter was placed with her biological family. The half siblings visit with each other twice a month. The grandmother firmly believes that if she had not contacted the Ombudsperson, the outcome would have been very different.

Out-of-Home Care in 2016

White children remain the largest group, both entering care and continuing in care in 2016. However, **disproportionality remains a significant concern** for children in out-of-home placement.



Compared to white children, based on child population estimates

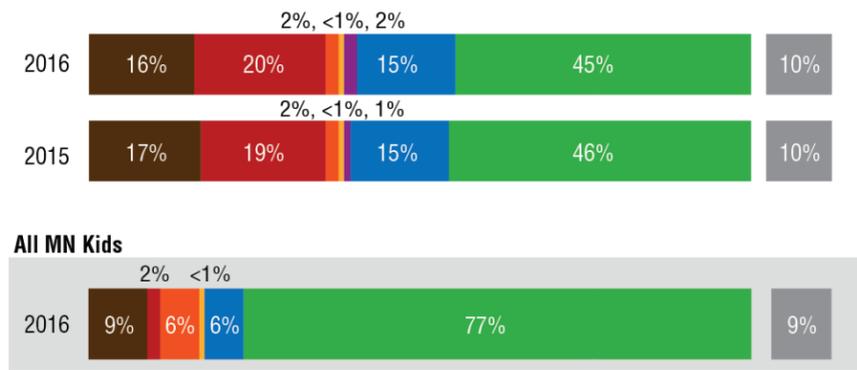
American Indian children were **17.6x** more likely to experience care

Minnesota is #1 in the nation for the removal of American Indian children.

Children identified as **two or more races** were **4.8x** more likely to experience care

African American children were **3.1x** more likely to experience care

Minnesota Children in Out-of-Home Care 2016



Strategies

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

Investigation

Investigate decisions, acts, and other matters of an agency, program, or facility providing protection or placement services to children of color and American Indian children, including cases that do not comply with state or federal laws and policies.

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; and others.

Specific examples of types of complaints received and resolved include, but are not limited to, the following: social worker/supervisor will not return call; ineffective counsel, or no attorney provided; violations of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act; the social worker and/or Guardian ad Litem do not speak the parents' language, nor are interpreter services being provided; child protection workers lack cultural sensitivity and are disrespectful.

Monitoring

Ensure that court officials, public policy makers, and service providers are trained in cultural diversity; also, that Guardians ad Litem and other individuals from communities of color are recruited, trained, and used in court proceedings to advocate on behalf of children of color.

Public Policy Development

Through public policy development, the Ombudspersons work to effect policy changes when current policies do not reflect best practices. The following initiatives reflect how we utilize the strategies in our work:

- African American Babies Coalition
- African American Leadership Council
- Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare
- Black Child Development Institute of MN
- Child Well-Being Network
- Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council (CECLC)
- DHS Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force
- Family Preservation and Wellness Subcommittee of the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors Group (MUID)
- George Foundation – Building Resilience
- Government Alliance on Race & Equity MN Team
- Hennepin County Child Protection Task Force
- Indian Child Welfare (ICWA) Education Day Committee
- Minnesota Supreme Court Children's Justice Initiative (CJI)
- Minnesota Task Force on Financing the Future of Child Welfare
- Minnesota's Best Practices for Assessment and Investigations
- Network for the Development of Children of African Descent
- Ramsey County Children's Justice Initiative Team
- Ramsey County Citizen Advisory Panel
- Ramsey County Ending Racial Disparities Task Force
- Statewide Racial Disparities Initiatives (ongoing from 2000)

Staff

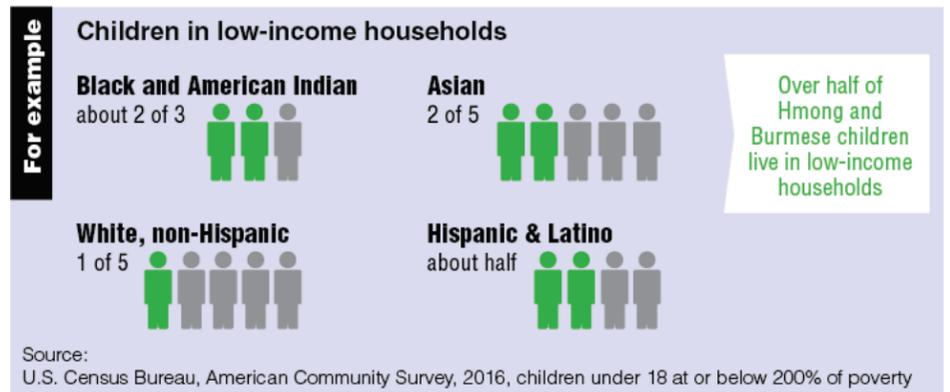
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For more information about child welfare in Minnesota, visit the child welfare publications page at www.dhs.state.mn.us

RACE	2015		2016		All MN Kids, 2016	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
African American/Black	2,348	17%	2,423	16%	122,535	9%
American Indian	2,617	19%	2,946	20%	26,515	2%
Asian	248	2%	296	2%	79,013	6%
Pacific Islander	13	<1%	17	<1%	1,226	<1%
Unknown/Declined	146	1%	235	2%	--	--
Two or more races	2,049	15%	2,277	15%	70,937	6%
White	6,191	46%	6,810	45%	990,412	77%
Total	13,612	100%	15,004	100%	1,290,638	100%
Hispanic (any race)	1,292	10%	1,426	10%	113,525	9%

Minnesota's children are treated unequally

Minnesota ranked #4 in child well-being according to the 2017 annual national Annie E. Casey Kids Count profile. This measure is a composite of 16 indicators in the areas of education, economic well-being, health, and family and community. However, Minnesota continues to have some of the nation's largest racial disparities across these domains.



The Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Families exists to help give families of children of color a voice in the child welfare system, to help combat these persistent disparities within the child welfare system and across all areas of child well-being.

Results

Measure	2015	2016	2017	Sparkline
Complaints and Inquiries received*	1,972	2,221	2,290	
Consultations/resolutions	861	809	918	
Investigations	58	86	111	

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

Steady call volume increase

Governor Mark Dayton's Task Force on the Protection of Children met from September 2014 through March 2015 and developed 93 recommendations for improvements to the State of Minnesota's Child Protection System. The Minnesota Legislature quickly acted on several of the Task Force's recommendations, which resulted in an increased number of cases being screened in at the county level. According to DHS statistics, there was an increase of over 10,000 reports received annually between 2012 and 2015. Additional statistics showed that screened-out reports decreased from 70.3% in 2014 to 67.5% in 2015. This means that an additional 3% of reports were screened-in for assessment or investigation.

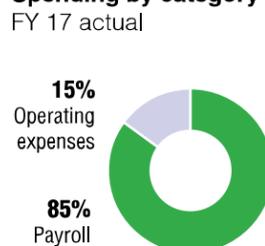
All of the changes put forth by the Minnesota Legislature and the Task Force greatly affected the number of telephone calls and complaints to the Office of Ombudsman for Families (OBFF), as illustrated in the above graph. Consequently, the OBFF provided more consultations and case resolutions to complainants, as well as more investigations of CHIPS cases. The statewide ripple effect of the increases in calls has not only affected the social services agencies, the courts, the state Guardian ad Litem Program and other major stakeholders, but has also underscored the limited resources of the OBFF. For instance, the number one reason for the call volume increase is parental drug abuse, followed by alleged neglect – 2,091 (27.1%) and 1,894 (24.5%), respectively. (Minnesota's Out-of-Home Care and Permanency Report, 2016)

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, Kinship 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 Ombudsman for Families.

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

Budget

Spending by category



Historical spending

