

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:

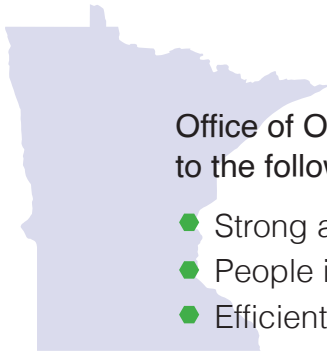
- 1to reduce racial and ethnic disparities and disproportionality in Minnesota’s child welfare system
- 2to improve outcomes for children and their families involved in child protection cases
- 3to ensure that all laws governing the protection of children and their families are implemented in a culturally and linguistically competent manner
- 4to 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 2023 there were

1,309,503 children in Minnesota

32,341 of those were alleged victims of maltreatment



In 2023, the Office of Ombudsperson for Families received

540 calls for assistance

consulted & resolved 383 of the case circumstances

33 investigations conducted

*The Office of Ombudsperson for Families reorganized in 2021, with the formation of the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families (OAIF) as a separate agency.

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

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

Each Ombudsperson receives advice from a community-specific board.

case study

African American Families

Complaint: The African American aunt of a three-year-old boy filed a complaint with OBFF while she was in the process of exploring permanency options with an attorney for her nephew. He had been adopted at birth by another relative, who died unexpectedly, and temporarily placed with this aunt and her husband. He found his adoptive mother unconscious, and the aunt wanted him to see his therapist immediately. The county did not respond to the aunt’s request for insurance information so the aunt could get him into counselling. The OBFF began a review of the complaint and learned that the county was exploring permanent placement with another non-relative family who had one of the boy’s siblings. His aunt had completed a home study, so the OBFF began to investigate why the aunt had not been considered for permanency.

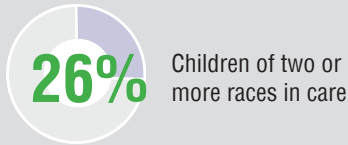
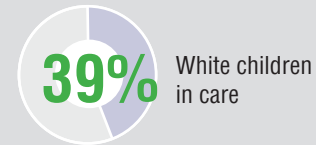
Outcome: OBFF’s involvement helped the aunt avoid delays in getting appropriate medical attention and permanency for her nephew. The adoption was completed in a timely manner, and it was determined that the aunt would be eligible for adoption assistance and funds to help cover attorney fees. He is a precocious child with some developmental challenges, but he has adjusted well with his aunt and uncle and has visits with his siblings regularly. He has a loving community of friends and church family. What was in the child’s best interest was a permanent home with the aunt and uncle, who are family.

Staff

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Out-of-Home Care in 2023

White children remain the largest group, both entering care and continuing in care in 2019. However, **disproportionality remains a significant concern** for children in out-of-home placement.

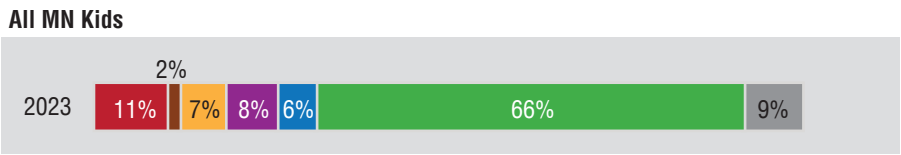
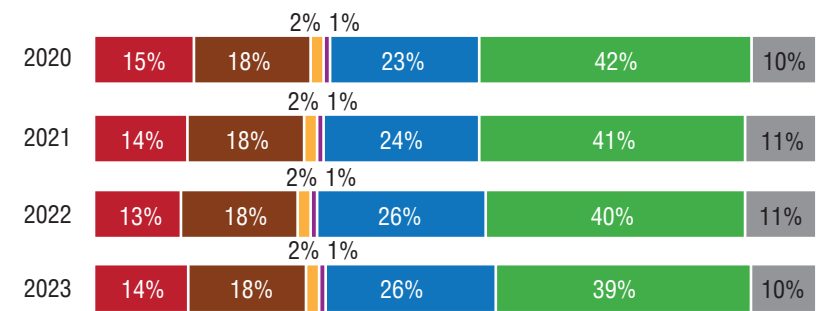


Compared to white children, based on child population estimates

Children identified as **two or more races** were **7x** more likely to experience care

African American children and children who identified as **Hispanic** were **2x** more likely to experience care

Minnesota Children in Out-of-Home Care 2023



Strategies

To accomplish its mission, the Office of Ombudsperson 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, 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; 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

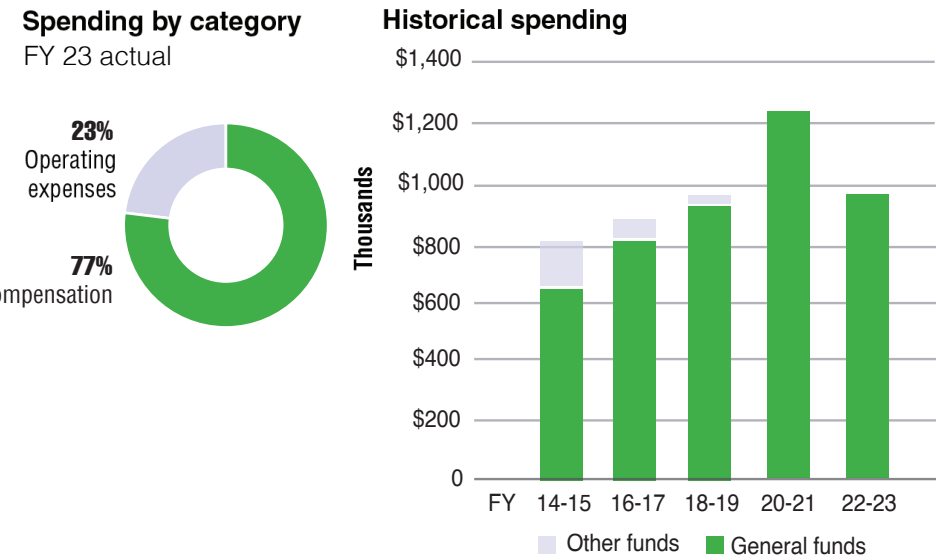
Ensure that court officials, public policy makers, and service providers are trained in cultural diversity; also, that Guardians ad Litem and other individuals from communities of color are recruited, trained, and used in court proceedings to advocate on behalf of children of color.

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
- African American Wellbeing Unit
- Black Child Development Institute of MN
- Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council (CECLC)
- DHS Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force
- Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)
- Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem Program
- Minnesota Supreme Court Children's Justice Initiative (CJI)
- Mitchell Hamline School of Law to Transform Child Protection
- Network for the Development of Children of African Descent
- Statewide Racial Disparities Initiatives (ongoing from 2000)

Budget



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

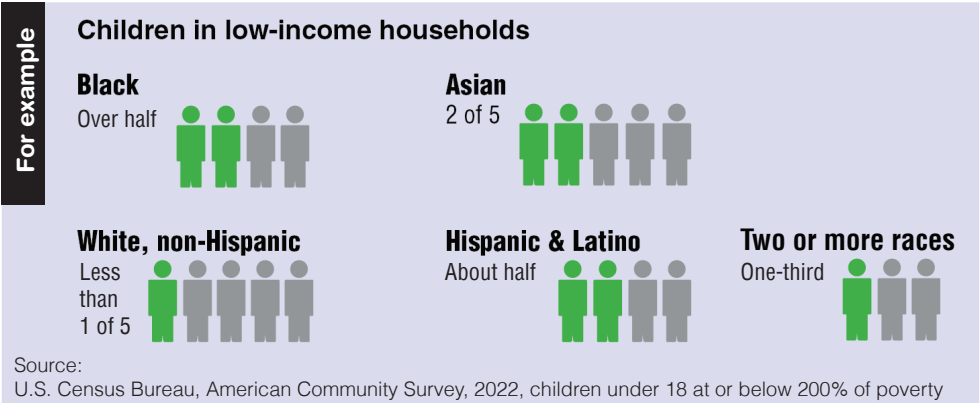
RACE	2020		2021		2022*		2023*	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
African American/Black	1,959	15%	1,718	14%	1,446	13%	1,466	14%
American Indian	2,454	18%	2,246	18%	2,020	18%	1,908	18%
Asian/Pacific Islander	202	2%	209	2%	194	2%	167	2%
Unknown/Declined	146	1%	116	1%	121	1%	145	1%
Two or more races	3,027	23%	3,010	24%	2,902	26%	2,734	26%
White	5,631	42%	5,122	41%	4,532	40%	4,093	39%
Total	13,387	100%	12,421	100%	11,217	100%	10,513	100%
Hispanic (any race)	1,397	10%	1,318	11%	1200	11%	1,091	10%

*OAIF handled cases for American Indian families in these years, rather than OBFF.

All MN Kids, 2023					
RACE	NUMBER	PERCENT	RACE	NUMBER	PERCENT
African American/Black	149,400	11%	Two or more races	78,395	6%
American Indian	27,336	2%	White	853,891	66%
Asian/Pacific Islander	87,825	7%	Total	1,300,934	100%
Unknown/Declined	104,087	8%	Hispanic (any race)	122,338	9%

Improvements the OBFF has made to ensure equity for all Minnesota children and families

Minnesota ranked #5 in child well-being according to the 2023 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.



Ombudsperson for Families

Is an independent state agency strengthening family connections through child welfare design that creates racial equity in services and improves outcomes for all children of color.

Results

Numbers in this section do not include data from the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families

Measure	2022	2023
Complaints and Inquiries received*	619	540
Consultations/resolutions	352	383
Investigations	57	33

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

Call volume for the Office of Ombudsperson for Families has decreased because of the creation of the Office of Ombudsperson for American Indian Families

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (FFPSA) marked a significant policy shift toward child welfare finance reform for certain time-limited prevention services to keep children in their homes and with their families whenever safe and possible. The OBFF participated in several workgroups designed to assist MN DHS in drafting a five-year plan. The workgroups included identifying candidacy; description of the types of prevention services and programs expected to improve outcomes for children and families, and how those services/programs will be monitored; and defining quality residential treatment programs (Q RTP) as promising, supported or well-supported practices. MN's FFPSA Five-Year Prevention Plan is completed and has been submitted to the federal government. MN's Title IV-E state plan for FFPSA specialized settings-Q RTP was approved and became effective October 2021.

As a recommendation under Governor Walz's and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan's One Minnesota Plan, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) was created. Although Minnesota is ranked as one of the top states to live, work, and raise children, that has not been true for all families. The creation of DCYF, along with successful collaborations between OBFF and the One Minnesota Plan, allow us to reimagine Minnesota's government structure to prioritize funding that will provide holistic support for children, youth, and families of every race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and zip code, and provide equitable opportunities for success.

The African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act. Aligned with the One Minnesota Plan, the Act prioritizes the safety and well-being of children within their homes and communities. These efforts also include an emphasis on continuous efforts to preserve a child's family and prevent out-of-home placement, consistent engagement with the family, and court verification that local agencies are engaging in these efforts; and safety plans for family before court petitions are filed.

The Office of Ombudsperson for Foster Youth. The OBFF provided recommendations to the Legislative Task Force on Child Protection about legislation for direct access to the Social Services Information System (SSIS), which contains data used in child protection case management. Access would facilitate prompt reviews of documents related to SSIS Child/ren in Need of Protection and/or Services (CHIPS) cases, and significantly reduce the time required to obtain case files from respective counties. Enhanced access will empower ombudspersons to perform their duties more effectively and better serve their communities. The legislation commits to uphold the integrity of the data within the SSIS CHIPS files, and adheres to the mandates of Minnesota Data Practices (Chapter 13).

The OBFF has also actively participated in the Children's Justice Act Task Force for over 20 years. Three major collaborative projects planned for 2024-2027 include: 1) Continued training for multi-disciplinary child protection team (MDT) members in basic forensic interviewing skills through CornerHouse and First Witness, alongside developing advanced, culturally responsive training options for MDT members statewide. 2) Establishment of a child and youth-centered commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and trafficking (both sex and labor) identification tool for MDT members across Minnesota. 3) Research on successful national programs aimed at attracting attorneys and other legal professionals to accept CHIPS cases, and creating innovative methods to provide accessible court-appointed representation for all participants in CHIPS hearings.

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