

ANNUAL REPORT

YOUTH AND FAMILY OMBUDSMEN OFFICE



CALENDAR YEAR

2025



**Department of
Job & Family Services**

Youth and Family Ombudsmen

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Message from the Ombudsmen

As we reflect on 2025, we are proud to share the fourth Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office Annual Report. This publication offers a detailed summary of our work across all 88 Ohio counties, the individuals we assisted, and various systems we strive to strengthen.

Over the past year, our team resolved **1,096** complaints and responded to **852** general inquiries. Each separate instance represents a real person navigating complex channels and searching for solutions. We are honored to be a trusted resource during circumstances described by many as the most devastating days of their lives.

We are grateful for the continued leadership of Governor Mike DeWine and the many professionals, caregivers, and advocates who share our commitment to Ohio's youth. A special thank-you goes to the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB), whose lived experience continues to shape meaningful change.

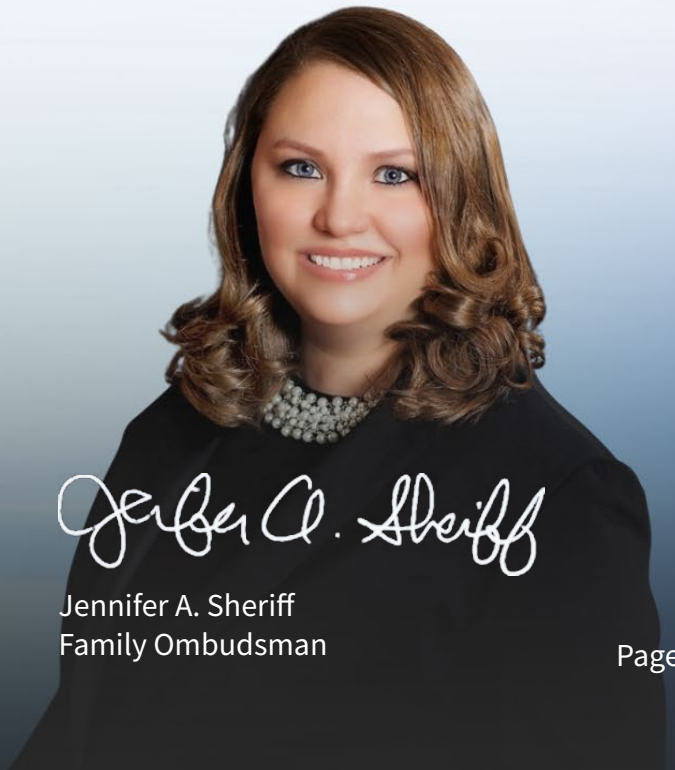
To our colleagues at the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office: Thank you for your dedication, professionalism, and heart for such difficult work. Your teamwork makes solutions possible.

Last, and never least, to the youth and families we serve: Thank you for sharing your invaluable perspectives. We remain committed to incorporating the personal insight we receive from each unique individual to help build a stronger and more responsive system for all.

Sincerely,



Jenny R. Stotts
Youth Ombudsman



Jennifer A. Sheriff
Family Ombudsman

Introduction

Established in 2022, the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office was created to independently review and resolve concerns related to child protective services, foster care, and adoption. The office serves individuals, including youth in children services agency custody, by investigating complaints and offering guidance.

Led by Youth Ombudsman Jenny Stotts and Family Ombudsman Jennifer Sheriff, the office operates independently of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) and is administered through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS).

As required by Ohio Revised Code Section 5101.892, this annual report is submitted to the following recipients:

- Governor Mike DeWine
- Speaker of the House Matt Huffman
- Senate President Rob McColley
- House Minority Leader Dani Isaacsohn
- Senate Minority Leader Nickie J. Antonio
- ODJFS Director Matt Damschroder
- DCY Director Kara Wente
- Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB)

Within 60 days of this report's release, OHIO YAB is required to submit an evaluation to both the Governor and the Youth Ombudsman.

In addition to annual reports offering aggregate observations and complaint profiles, quarterly data snapshots are also published on the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office website.

Community Education and Outreach

Community/General Outreach

5 Events | 1,400 Total Estimated Reach



Assistant Youth Ombudsman Jeff Phillips and Resource Manager Jennifer Moore represented the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office at the 2025 OHIO YAB Leadership and Life Skills Summit in Columbus, sharing resources and supporting the summit's mission to empower current and former foster youth through education and advocacy.

Youth Connections

14 Events | 453 Total Estimated Reach



Resource Manager Jennifer Moore participates in an interactive activity with foster youth leaders during the Southeast Ohio YAB Leadership Retreat, an event held at Hocking College, designed to foster leadership, peer support, and community connections.

From left: Assistant Youth Ombudsman Jeff Phillips, ACTION Ohio Residential Liaison Addison Torrence, Youth Ombudsman Intern and ACTION Ohio Residential Liaison Caidyn Bearfield, and Youth Ombudsman Jenny Stotts attended the July Statewide Youth Advisory Board Meeting, a forum dedicated to amplifying youth voice and strengthening advocacy for Ohio foster youth and alumni.

Community Education and Presentations

12 Events | 593 Total Estimated Reach



Youth Ombudsman Jenny Stotts was featured on Episode 3 of the Youth Navigator Network's Care to Conquer podcast, sharing her journey and commitment to advocating for foster youth.



Youth Ombudsman Jenny Stotts facilitates a workshop focused on building effective communication strategies to support child welfare professionals at the 2025 Public Children Services Association of Ohio Conference.

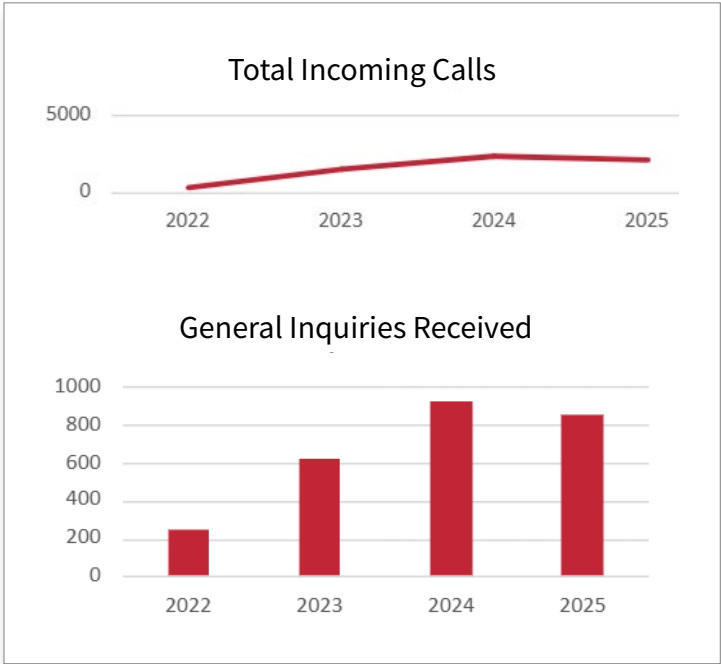


Youth Ombudsman Jenny Stotts leads a workshop for Ohio University teaching candidates on the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and advocating for youth in care.

General Inquiry Data

In 2025, the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office resolved **852** general inquiries from constituents seeking guidance across all 88 Ohio counties.

General Inquiry Origin	
Phone	593
Web	178
Governor’s Office Referral	11
ODJFS Referral	21
Legislator Referral	32
Other	17
	852



A “general inquiry” record is created whenever anyone reaches out directly to the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office.

General inquiries are not processed as formal complaints. The office addresses general questions promptly by sharing information about local and state-level complaint processes, connecting individuals with appropriate resources or organizations, and offering support tailored to their specific circumstances.

- In 2025, most general inquiries were resolved in less than **24** hours.
- Throughout 2025, general inquiries resulted in **553** referrals to other local and state agencies.
- Since launch, the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office has received **6,564** phone calls.
- The office has assisted individuals from **13** other states.

Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office offers two primary options for general inquiry submissions:

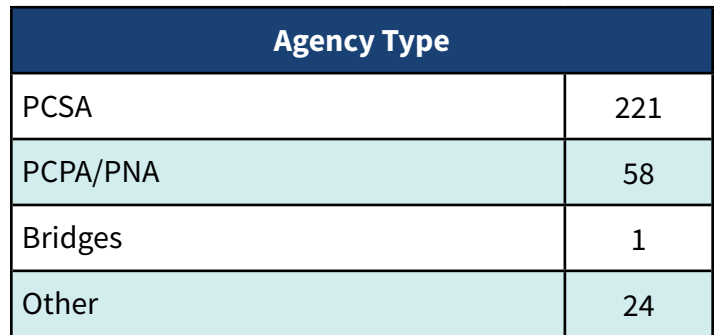
- ☎ (877) OH-YOUTH or (877) 649 -6884
- ✉ yfo.ohio.gov



The Youth Ombudsman resolved **304** complaints between January 1 and December 31, 2025, across **64** Ohio counties.



The Youth Ombudsman accepts complaints directly from youth and from adults on behalf of youth. Of the **304** youth complaints resolved, **60** were submitted directly by youth or recently emancipated young adults. Adults submitted **244** complaints on behalf of youth, including **38** that were transferred by the Family Ombudsman.¹ Of those, **122** of the involved youth were aware that a complaint would be submitted on their behalf. In most instances, the youth themselves had direct contact with the Youth Ombudsman or Assistant Youth Ombudsman during the investigation.²



Current PCSA Involvement	
Temporary Custody	128
No Open Case	67
Permanent Custody of PPLA	48
Voluntary Case	43
Court-Ordered Protective Supv.	13
Other	5

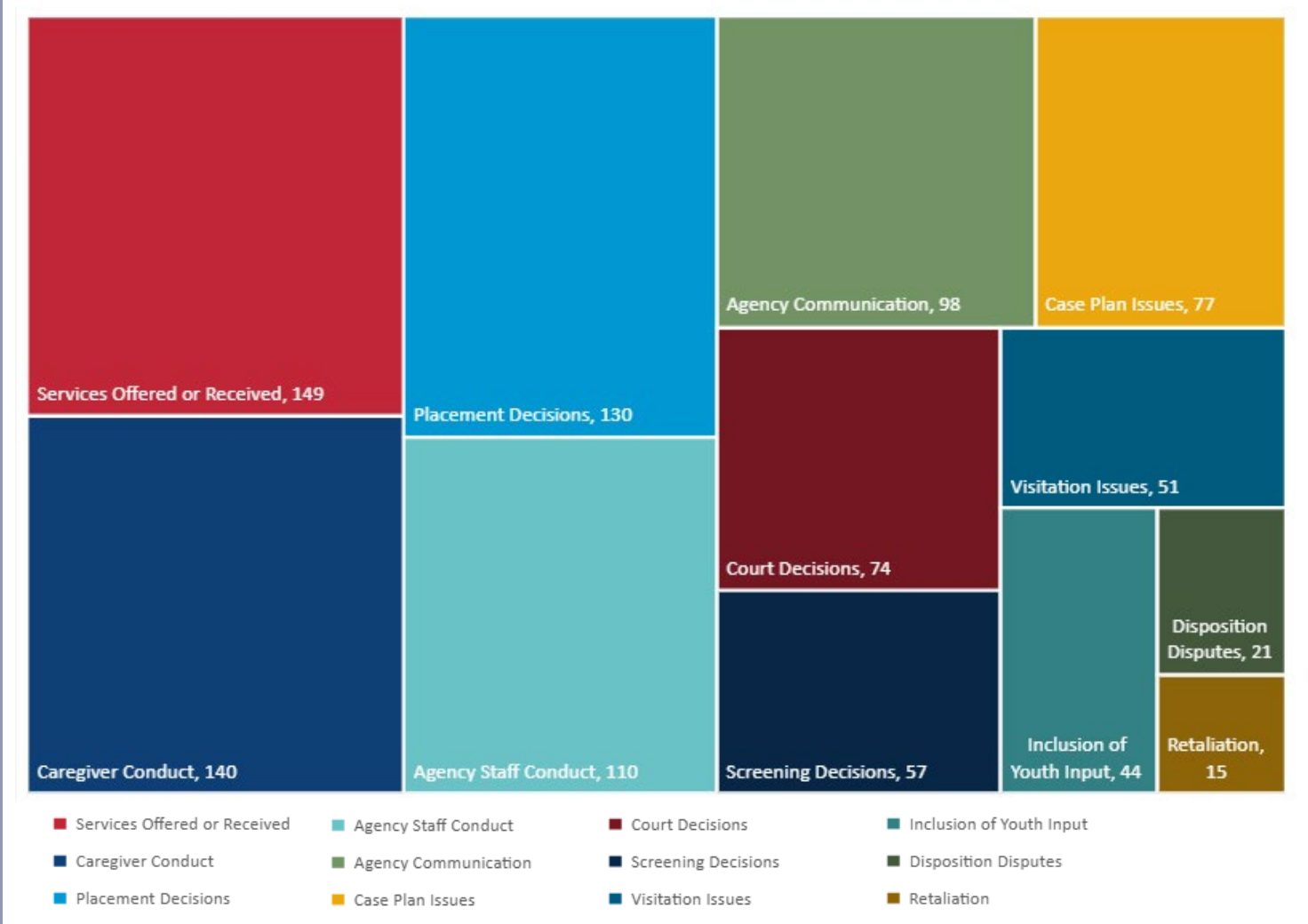
Following a Youth Connections session in a group home, a Youth Complainant reported that they had been restrained by a staff member in the past and that staff member had taunted and teased them about the restraint. The group home administrators were immediately cooperative with the complaint and launched an internal review, as well. The group home accommodated the youth's wishes to no longer have contact with the staff member and arranged a corrective action plan with the employee, requiring additional training and supervision.

¹Adults who submit complaints on behalf of youth are asked to identify their profession and/or relationship to the youth. In 2025, adults self-identified as an attorney, CASA/GAL, caseworker, court personnel, community member, facility staff, foster parent, friend, kinship caregiver, law enforcement officer, legal guardian; medical professional, neighbor; parent/stepparent, relative, school staff, and therapist.

²The current complaint form on the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office website can collect demographic data only from the complaint source. This issue will be corrected in a planned system upgrade.

Youth Complaint Concerns

Among all complaints resolved in 2025, the Youth Ombudsman reviewed **1,009** separate concerns. Multiple concerns were reviewed in **234** complaints, and **85** complaints involved five or more separate concerns.



Of the youth who had direct contact with the Youth Ombudsman or Assistant Youth Ombudsman in 2025 and should have been provided with a copy of the Foster Youth Handbook, as required by the Ohio Administrative Code, **62** reported that they either did not receive the Foster Youth Handbook or did not remember receiving it.

Youth Complaint Profile

A Youth Complainant reported that residential facility staff had been yelling, cursing, and mocking residents. The complaint also reported that staff would slap or kick items. The youth had attempted to report their concerns to the other service providers but did not feel they were being taken seriously. Following onsite interviews and a review of available evidence, the Youth Ombudsman team issued recommendations for corrective action, including additional trauma-informed training for staff. The facility implemented these. It also agreed to post additional flyers and posters about the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and information about reporting concerns to the Youth Ombudsman.

Youth Complaint Outcomes

Each complaint is unique and often requires interviews, onsite visits, communication with involved parties, and review of confidential records. In connection with complaints resolved in 2025, the Youth Ombudsman team conducted over **500** investigative meetings, including **40** in-person site visits. When complaint concerns fall outside the Youth Ombudsman's jurisdiction, constituents may be referred elsewhere. The Youth Ombudsman and the Assistant Youth Ombudsman submitted **14** referrals of abuse or neglect to local authorities.³

The Youth Ombudsman took formal investigative action in **173** of the complaints resolved in 2025. The Youth Ombudsman issued one or more formal recommendations for corrective action at the conclusion of **53** of those investigations. The Youth Ombudsman consolidated multiple complaint submissions into a single investigation on **28** occasions in 2025. In instances where the Youth Ombudsman shared investigative observations without issuing a formal recommendation, **19** agencies took responsive corrective action on their own. Agencies indicated that they had partially or fully implemented the Youth Ombudsman's recommendations **83%** of the time.⁴ On **42** occasions, the Youth Ombudsman referred matters or shared investigative observations and recommendations with other authorities, including the Ohio Department of Children and Youth and the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health.

Referrals Issued by Youth Ombudsman	
PCSA	224
Court (incl. attorney or CASA/GAL)	101
Another State Office (JFS, DCY, etc.)	28
CA/N Referral	14
Law Enforcement	12
Bridges/Independent Living	7
Other	16

Agency Response to Youth Ombudsman Recommendations	
Agency Fully Implemented Recommendations	20
Agency Partially Implemented Recommendations	25
Agency Did Not Implement Recommendations	1
Agency Did Not Respond to Recommendations	8
Youth Ombudsman Did Not Issue Recommendations	66
Observations Only	35

Actions Taken By Agency In Response to Youth Ombudsman Recommendations or Observations	
Agency Reviewed and/or Overturned a Previous Decision	6
Agency Reviewed and/or Revised a Policy or Procedure	15
Agency Addressed a Personnel Matter (staff discipline, case reassignment, training, etc)	17
Agency Incorporated a Case-Level Change (placement, services, communication, etc)	39
Other	7

³All 14 referrals were screened out by the local public children services agencies.

⁴The following agencies fully or partially implemented Youth Ombudsman recommendations on one or more occasions in 2025: Allen County Children Services, Amazing Grace, Auglaize County JFS, Belmont County JFS, Belmont Pines, Better Beginnings for a Brighter Future, Butler County Children Services, Clermont County JFS, Coshocton County JFS, Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services, Erie County JFS, Foundations for Living, Franklin County Children Services, Franklin County Children Services Permanent Family Solutions Network, Greene County JFS, Guiding Path for Boys, Guiding Path for Girls, Hamilton County JFS, Highland County JFS, KJ's Brighter Days, Legacy Residential Homes Inc., Licking County Children Services, Lorain County Children Services, Miami County Children Services, Montgomery County JFS, National Youth Advocate Program, NECCO Inc., Nu Beginnings, Ohio Guidestone, Ohio Guidestone Berea Facility, Keystone Richland Center, Johnson Group Home (OFTA), Portage County JFS, Quality Time with Wisdom Group Home LLC, Reflections Group Home LLC, Scioto County Children Services, Silver Linings Agency, The Buckeye Ranch, The Heritage of Hannah Neil, The Louise Shopshire Corporation, Tuscarawas County JFS, Warren County Children Services, Willow Branches of Healing.

Youth Complaint Profile

A foster parent filed a complaint on behalf of multiple youth living in their home, reporting that the public children services agency caseworker had not visited the home to talk with the youth. The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed confidential case records that raised additional questions and concerns about case activities. The Youth Ombudsman team brought these concerns to the attention of the agency administrator and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth. This resulted in internal corrective action and subsequent visits with the youth, as required.

	2022*	2023	2024	2025
Total Complaints Resolved	111	198	252	304
Individual Complaint Concerns Reviewed	265	322	775	1009
Submitted Directly by Youth	27	24	51	60
Submitted on Behalf of Youth	84	174	201	244
Youth Aware of Submission	n/a	88	134	182
Investigative Action Taken	84	135	163	173
Issued Recommendations or Observations	56	47	79	88
Agency Implementation of Recommendations	64%	74%	82%	83%

*May to December 2022



Youth Ombudsman Observations and Recommendations

While the Youth Ombudsman addresses each complaint individually and works to resolve concerns at the case level, this unique view of Ohio’s children services systems offers an opportunity to observe and analyze recurring themes across a variety of complaint profiles and jurisdictions. The Youth Ombudsman respectfully offers the following observations and recommendations.

Congregate Care Settings

In 2025, the Youth Ombudsman investigated **58** complaints involving congregate care settings, including group homes and certain residential facilities. Complaint investigations included concerns related to the conduct of facility employees, concerns regarding the “Foster Youth Bill of Rights,” and concerns related to the quality of treatment and support available in the setting. The Youth Ombudsman was frequently asked to review allegations related to the use of physical restraints in congregate care settings. In one complaint, the youth reported that a group home staff member routinely lost their temper, yelled, and even kicked an object during an angry interaction.

Investigations revealed variability in the training and supervision of congregate staff across Ohio. For example, one complaint investigation revealed that a private agency had a robust and well-documented training protocol for all staff, including educational sessions with area experts and opportunities for continued professional development. In another investigation, the Youth Ombudsman learned of a scheme in which a group home administrator paid for CPR certificates to be issued to staff, without the staff completing the required life-saving training.

Restrictions on youth communication were commonly reported. Youth sometimes reported that their court-ordered visitation plans were not being followed. While there may be occasions to reasonably restrict communication for safety or therapeutic reasons, numerous complaints revealed that restrictions were being used as a disciplinary measure or as a behavioral reward.

Other complaints reported lapses in therapeutic services during youth stays in group home settings. For example, in one complaint filed on behalf of a youth by their therapist, the group home staff reportedly missed numerous telehealth appointments and routinely required the youth to complete their trauma therapy by phone while sitting in a common area of the facility.

In all instances, these facilities were designated as Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs). Requirements for QRTPs are outlined in Ohio Administrative Code [Rule 5180: 2-4-42](#), including requirements for trauma-informed treatment, staff training, and clinical staff availability. The Youth Ombudsman routinely reports suspected violations of law to the appropriate authorities. This includes suspected violations of the administrative rules governing these facilities.

The Youth Ombudsman’s investigative observations support efforts to standardize the quality of training for group home staff across Ohio.

Sibling Connections

Throughout 2025, the Youth Ombudsman was asked to investigate numerous complaints regarding sibling connections. Siblings may be separated due to placement capacity issues, differences in levels of necessary care, or safety issues. Many public children services agencies (PCSAs) use parent-child visitation as an opportunity for displaced siblings to visit each other. If the parent no longer attends visitation, sibling visitation is often disrupted. Many times, PCSAs rely on resource caregivers to independently arrange sibling visitation. This sometimes works well and allows visits to take place in more natural settings. Sometimes, however, sibling relationships are further disrupted by disagreements or discomfort between the resource caregivers. On multiple occasions, the Youth Ombudsman issued specific recommendations to PCSAs to become more involved in the facilitation of sibling relationships and visitation. The Youth Ombudsman has also recommended that PCSAs address sibling visitation arrangements in case plans filed with juvenile court. While sibling visitation is addressed in administrative rule, the Youth Ombudsman rarely observed sibling visitation plans documented within the case record.

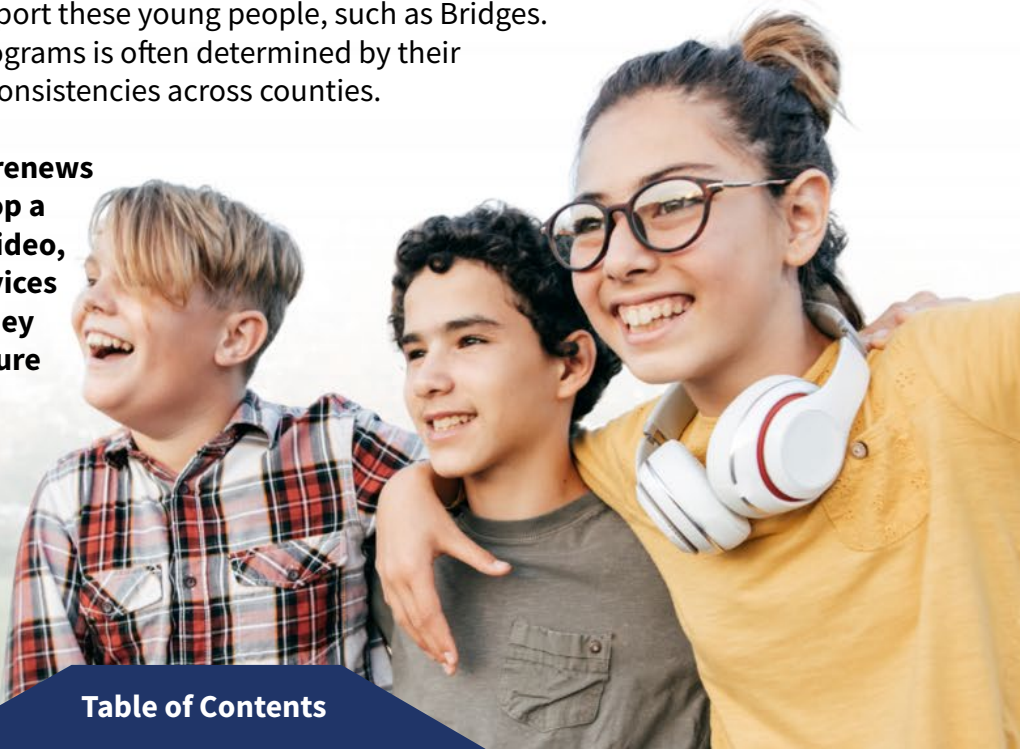
These continued observations support the need for an increased focus on intentional efforts to strengthen and support sibling connections, particularly when siblings are separated and do not have opportunities to be together during court-ordered parental visits.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood

The Youth Ombudsman investigated numerous complaints involving older teens and young adults who had recently emancipated from custody. As detailed in previous annual reports, the Youth Ombudsman observed significant variability in the ways PCSAs approach their role in preparing young people for adulthood. The Youth Ombudsman also observed inconsistencies in the way post-emancipation support is offered. In one investigation, the PCSA completed the required transition plan just days before a teenager turned 18 and left custody. Many of the informal arrangements for that young adult fell apart in the weeks following their birthday, resulting in a period of instability and extreme vulnerability.

Youth aging out of foster care are especially vulnerable. They often enter adulthood with fewer supports and resources than the general population. Young people need trusted adults to turn to when they encounter challenges with important issues, such as post-secondary education, navigating housing agreements, employment issues, or interpersonal relationships. Ohio has developed several programs and initiatives to support these young people, such as Bridges. However, youth awareness of these programs is often determined by their custodial agency, which can lead to inconsistencies across counties.

The Youth Ombudsman respectfully renews previous recommendations to develop a statewide resource, such as a short video, that clearly explains the array of services and supports available to youth as they age out of custody. This will help ensure that young people are consistently and accurately offered important information and guidance.



Personal Belongings

Youth living in a variety of placement settings have turned to the Youth Ombudsman team for assistance regarding the return of their personal belongings. For example, one youth reported that their previous foster parent took their cell phone from them as a disciplinary measure. Upon leaving the placement, the phone was not returned to the youth. The custodial agency did not document the location or status of the phone. In another complaint, a youth was required to surrender their personal belongings, including a deeply meaningful piece of family jewelry, upon admittance to a residential treatment facility. That item could not be located, and the facility did not have documentation of its whereabouts. Across various public and private agencies, there does not appear to be consistent practice regarding the storage and inventory of youths' personal belongings. The Youth Ombudsman has attended numerous youth-centered events, including statewide Youth Advisory Board meetings, where this issue is routinely discussed among youth participants.

The Youth Ombudsman respectfully recommends that public and private agencies develop protocols to inventory, document, securely store, and return youths' personal belongings when they cannot reasonably access them during their placement stay.

Documentation Practices

As previously reported, the Youth Ombudsman continues to observe inconsistency in the documentation of case records across Ohio's PCSAs. The use of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) varies across counties. The Youth Ombudsman encountered numerous instances of duplicate person-specific records, as well as the incorrect categorization of intake records. The accuracy and reliability of this case information are essential to PCSAs' vital work, especially during the intake and investigation stages of any children services involvement.

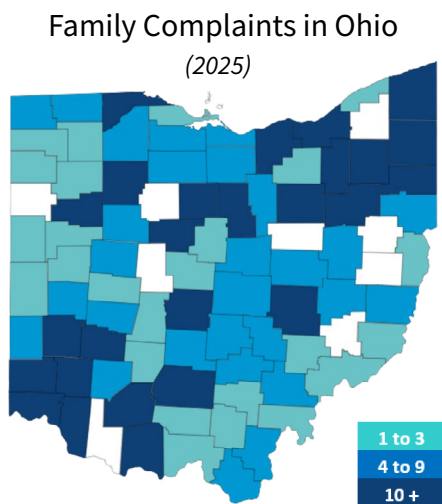
Efforts to improve the consistency of documentation practices across all 88 counties is a meaningful and necessary way to strengthen practice and improve safety.

Family Ombudsman Complaint Data

Family Complaint Overview

Between January 1 and December 31, 2025, the Family Ombudsman received **842** formal complaints for independent review. Of those, **38** were immediately transferred to the Youth Ombudsman because of their child-focused nature.

In 2025, the Family Ombudsman team reviewed formal complaints connected to **79** Ohio counties, compared to **77** counties in 2024.



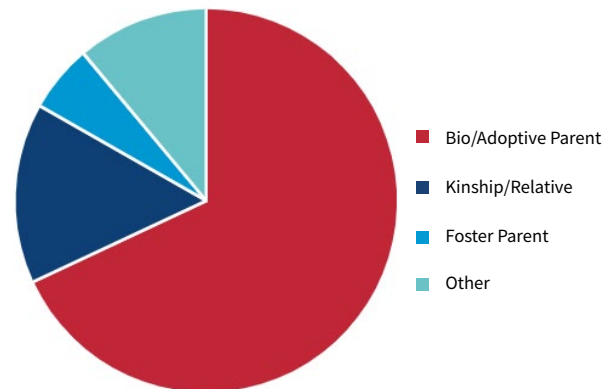
“After raising concerns regarding caseworker conduct and my children's safety, I experienced further communication breakdowns, continued exclusion from decision-making, lack of corrective action. This pattern suggests retaliation for asserting my rights.”

— Biological Parent, 2025

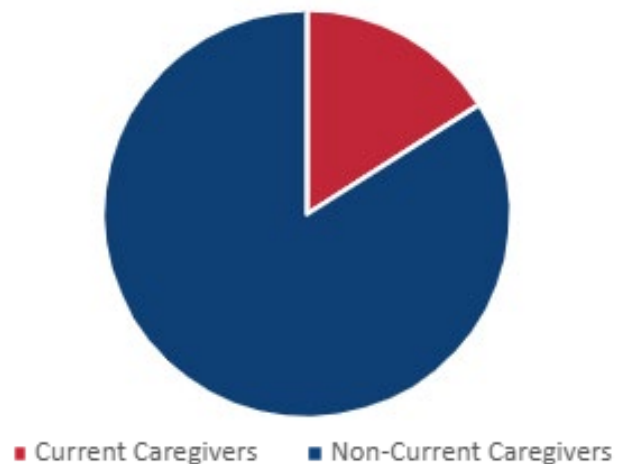


All adult complainants contacting the Family Ombudsman are asked to identify their connection to the Ohio agency and/or specific children impacted by case decisions. In 2025, **68%** of adult complainants were biological or adoptive parents. By comparison, only **15%** of complainants had other kinship relationships to the children involved. Just **6%** were foster parents (past or present) seeking to elevate unmet needs or challenge agency case decisions. Notably, barely **16%** of all 2025 complaints involved potential application of the [Resource Family Bill of Rights](#). This underscores how rarely these issues are reported directly to the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office.

Agency Case Connection



Current Caregivers/Non-Current Caregivers



Family Complaint Concerns

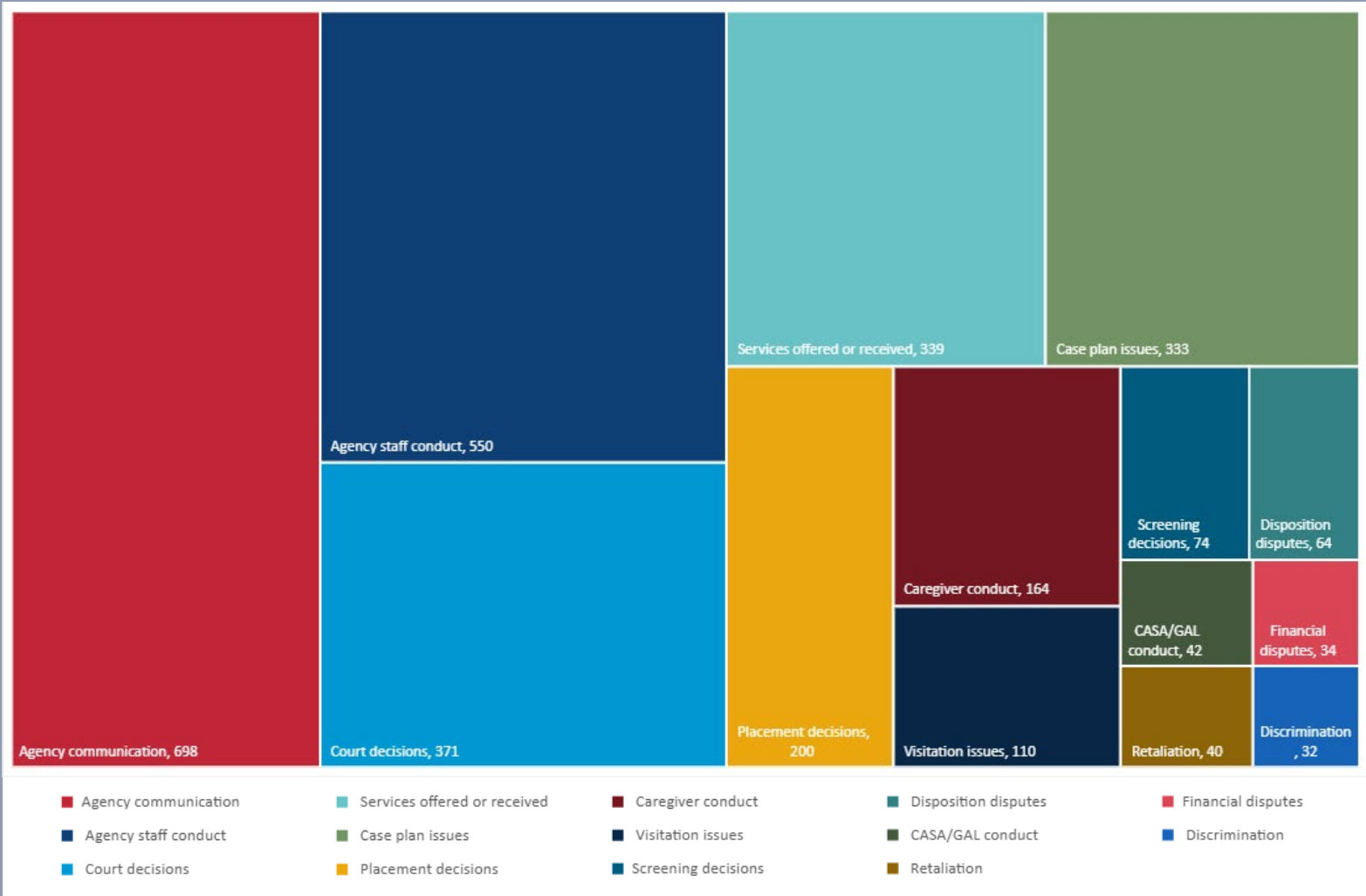
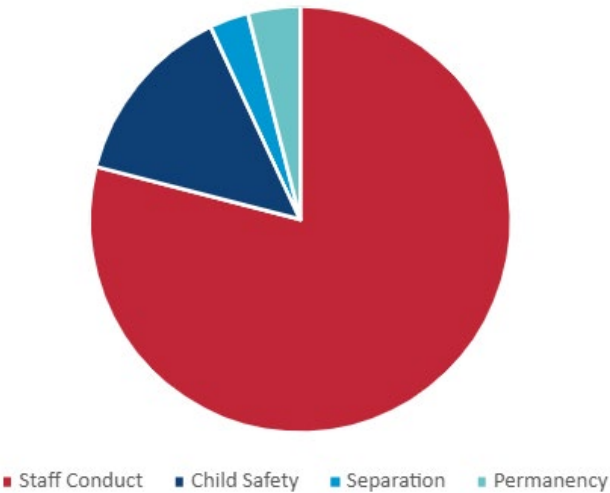
The Family Ombudsman classifies every formal complaint received into one of four categories:

- Agency staff conduct
- Child safety
- Separation of children from their parents or legal guardians
- Permanency or “best interests of the child” considerations

Consistent with previous years, most formal complaints reviewed in 2025 concerned agency staff conduct, making this the leading category of issues investigated by the Family Ombudsman team.

Among all submissions received in 2025, complainants reported over **3,000** distinct unresolved concerns. Of those, **47** formal complaints cited five or more separate issues, revealing the complexity of many agency cases reviewed by the Family Ombudsman team.

Family Complaints Categories



Family Complaint Concerns Continued

In 2025, at least **45%** of complainants were known to already have legal representation. Approximately **77%** of adults seeking formal investigations either raised legal issues (sometimes without realizing it) or explicitly requested legal advice or advocacy, which the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office cannot provide. This data highlights an ongoing challenge to manage expectations and clarify designated roles.

“ I have discussed these issues directly with the caseworker and escalated my concerns and filed two verbal complaints with her supervisor to which I have gotten no response. . . . I originally believed a new caseworker would be best. At this point, I am so afraid of retaliation from the county caseworker and the supervisor, that I do not know what to do. . . . I do still fear of retaliation so I am hesitant to alert the county that I filed a formal complaint. We have another foster child in our home through [Ohio County] whom we will be adopting. I am also afraid they will remove the current placement this complaint is connected to from our care in retaliation. . . . We truly love what we do and I am afraid of what could happen if they found out. However, I felt that a formal state complaint had to be filed.”

— **Biological Parent, 2025**

“ The county has made me feel like I want to quit and that’s not fair because we are so good at this. It’s a tough job that no one appreciates and you have to fight for everything. I’ve known this and I bit my tongue. . . . Threatening to take her away from us because I was doing what the law says is legal was very very hard. This is why the county loses foster homes at such a rapid rate. . . . I have not intervened yet so I have no lawyer right now but I don’t really want to be bullied into not doing that in the future when I know it’s my right.”

— **Foster Parent, 2025**



Family Complaint Outcomes

Under Ohio’s county-administered, state-supervised children services model, the Family Ombudsman team conducts thorough reviews of agency decisions after local authorities have had the opportunity to address issues related to their policies and staff. One key function of a state ombudsman is helping individuals connect with local officials who have the legal authority to grant the remedies they are seeking. Accordingly, each Family Ombudsman complaint investigation begins by examining when and how all concerns were reported to and reviewed by the agency directly involved. Except in compelling circumstances, only confirmed and “ripe” issues or allegations advance to the next stage of investigation.

In 2025, the Family Ombudsman team completed a total of **141** separate investigations, all stemming from formal complaints received that year. Of these, **101** investigations focused primarily on allegations of agency staff misconduct or unprofessional behavior. Another **24** investigations were categorized as “case disposition reviews,” in which the Family Ombudsman was asked to neutrally assess whether a contested finding of child abuse or neglect was supported by the children services agency’s own confidential records.

A particularly noteworthy observation in 2025 was the rise in formal requests from alleged perpetrators seeking “expungement” or removal of their names from the Central Registry. Because the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office does not oversee Central Registry records or agency case dispositions, complainants with unresolved concerns, often related to employment or private custody disputes, are encouraged to contact the Ohio Department of Children and Youth directly.

Among all investigations completed in 2025, the Family Ombudsman team held **485** external meetings with complainants and involved agencies to obtain critical case insights and/or provide guidance. These interactions, initiated at various stages of the Family Ombudsman’s established complaint review process, helped ensure that all internal investigative decisions were well-informed and that complainants seeking solutions understood realistic next steps.

2025 Family Ombudsman Complaint Outcomes	
Completed Investigations Involving Confirmed Agency Corrective Action	16
Complaints Entirely Outside YFO Jurisdiction (e.g., Child Support)	45
Total 2025 Complaint Investigations Carried Over Into 2026	13
Completed Investigations Involving Non-Responsive Agencies	0
Separate Complaints Closed With Non-Responsive Complainants	223

Year-to-Year Comparison

While the Family Ombudsman team strives to understand each individual’s concerns about specific agency decisions or outcomes, the statewide jurisdiction of the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office offers a unique perspective on Ohio’s children services system across numerous agencies and diverse communities. Beyond addressing requests connected to particular cases, this broader view helps identify potential patterns and systemic challenges that impact families statewide.

The following observations, drawn from aggregate complaint data, highlight common conflict resolution obstacles and needs, offering a framework for deeper reflection on agency policies.

Family Ombudsman Investigative Observations (Year to Year)	2023	2024	2025
Total # of New Complaints Received (by Family Ombudsman)	472	806	834
Total # of New Complaints Transferred (to Youth Ombudsman)	34	38	38
Total # of New Complaints Transferred (from Youth Ombudsman)	14	4	1
Overall % of Complainants Pursuing More Government Assistance	47%	54%	57%
Overall % of Complainants Seeking Realistic Remedies (from YFO)	35%	22%	21%
Total # of Case Disposition Review Investigations Completed	27	22	24
Total # of Staff Conduct Review Investigations Completed	91	69	101
Total # of Separate Complaints Reporting Unresolved Visitation Concerns	66	88	110
Total # of Separate Complaints Involving Agency Placement Decisions	261	234	200
Overall % of Closed Complaints With Known Associated YFO General Inquiries	35%	27%	23%

The Family Ombudsman team routinely shares investigative observations with local authorities without issuing formal recommendations or preparing investigative reports. Most often, this independent insight is conveyed during confidential discussions with children services agency directors (or their designees) as part of the final investigative steps before closure notices are issued to complainants.

Of all investigations completed by the Family Ombudsman team in 2025, **11%** included at least one verified issue that warranted corrective action. Notably, nearly **30%** of all 2025 complainants disengaged from the investigative process during the early stages without offering any explanation or additional information. This was slightly less than the **35%** of complainants who disengaged from the investigative process in 2024. This reality has continued to limit the Family Ombudsman’s ability to independently explore concerns or identify unmet needs. Tracking adult complainant engagement serves two critical purposes: It helps identify potential barriers to conflict resolution and helps improve communication practices to better support all Ohio families.

Family Ombudsman Observations and Recommendations

Having carefully considered over three calendar years of statewide complaint data, the Family Ombudsman respectfully offers the following observations and recommendations for future implementation:

Agency Grievance Policy Enforcement

Ohio law requires all public children services agencies to develop written procedures for receiving and resolving formal complaints/grievances related to the services they provide to children and families (see [Ohio Administrative Code \(OAC\) Rule 5180:2-33-20](#)). Ongoing observations documented during numerous Family Ombudsman investigations have revealed that additional steps could be implemented to strengthen statewide consistency, objective fairness, and more convenient accessibility to agency policies and remedies. Thus, the Family Ombudsman recommends the following:

Written Acknowledgment Notice: When an individual expresses dissatisfaction with agency decision-making, agency staff should promptly issue a written confirmation of receipt. The receipt should include a clear summary of any procedural next steps required by policy. At this receipt stage, agency staff should also document when and how this guidance is provided.

Written Closure Notice: At the conclusion of any internal review, whether brief or extensive, designated agency staff should provide written notice that the formal complaint or grievance has been closed, along with any changes made or barriers to the sought outcomes. Offering written closure notices with a rationale promotes transparency across all agency cases.

Implementing these basic procedural steps would not only fulfill existing OAC requirements, but also help agencies build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and ensure that individuals are heard and informed. Clear written communication at both the start and end of the internal agency review promotes transparency, while reducing the risk of repetitive inquiries or premature escalations to the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office and other available grievance outlets.

The Family Ombudsman also strongly encourages prompt written guidance highlighting key agency policy language whenever reasonable questions about case decisions are presented. Throughout numerous confidential interactions with complainants, the Family Ombudsman team has noticed that many adults, both parties and non-parties alike, are understandably confused about where to report unresolved issues. Some complainants have expressed confusion about which actively involved individuals are considered a “party” for ongoing agency case management purposes. For these reasons and more, supplying standardized **written** guidance serves at least two critical aims:

1. It ensures that every constituent, regardless of which Ohio county is involved, receives definitive, consistent information they can later reference or share as they choose.
2. It equips any third-party professionals required to review the same concerns with a more concrete context to inform decisions, thereby reducing ambiguity and promoting accountability.

Ohio Resource Caregiver Empowerment

Ohio law requires all public children services agencies to inform and educate every resource caregiver about the “Resource Family Bill of Rights,” including their right to report issues and submit formal grievances or complaints “without fear of reprisal” (see [OAC Rule 5180:2-42-20](#)). However, statewide data tracked over three consecutive years confirms that relatively few caregivers providing day-to-day care for children seek assistance from the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office. In fact, among all formal complaints submitted in 2025, almost none referenced the “Resource Family Bill of Rights” or raised concerns about known violations. Instead, many foster parents and kinship caregivers explicitly expressed their fear of retaliation.

To address this gap in statewide data and strengthen enforcement of legal rights, the Family Ombudsman recommends that all Ohio public children services agencies integrate **ongoing** education about the “Resource Family Bill of Rights” into routine interactions with foster families and kinship households. Proactively initiating transparent dialogue, especially when a new formal complaint or grievance is received, will bolster each agency’s ongoing commitment to accountability. Additionally, prompt documentation of reported concerns will ensure that all Ohio resource caregivers, regardless of which Ohio county is involved, have fair access to any available remedies.

Family Complaint Profile

A former foster parent with a long history of providing consistent care—even during periods when court-ordered separation was unnecessary—contacted the Family Ombudsman in 2025 to share recent local developments. Two years earlier, this same resource caregiver had requested an independent investigation into how county agency staff responded to proactive child advocacy efforts.

At that time, the reported concerns included a perception that a legal motion to intervene was met with agency staff “outrage” and interpreted as the complainant’s unwillingness to support family reunification efforts. The caregiver’s frustration deepened after reportedly overhearing agency staff remark that foster parents should “stay in their lane” rather than question case decisions. Such experiences illustrate how temporary caregivers can feel disregarded or undervalued when their years of service appear overshadowed by reasonable disagreement over unmet needs.

Family Case Plan Focus

Ohio law grants every resource caregiver the right to “actively work with the agency toward the permanency goal identified in the family case plan,” among other responsibilities pursuant to rules (see [OAC Rule 5180:2-42-20](#)). Throughout multiple investigations, the Family Ombudsman team observed firsthand that resource caregivers' expectations often did not align with the case plan goal. In some situations, resource caregivers may need additional support to help manage their own expectations from the start of their participation in a custody case. Doing so protects the emotional well-being of both caregivers and the children living with them.

When individuals open their homes and hearts to foster children or relatives in crisis, they may naturally form deep bonds, even when the primary agency case plan goal is family reunification. Without clear, consistent communication and guidance, sincere motives and hopes can lead to strained relationships and unnecessary tension with other case participants. By setting realistic expectations early, and reinforcing them often, agency staff not only uphold the integrity of the children services system, but also ensure that caregivers remain focused on providing stability and support, rather than on future adoption outcomes that may never occur.

Agency Case Record Improvement

Ohio law requires all public children services agencies to enter specific types of information into SACWIS, including case notes documenting “the activities and statements of persons involved in the case” (see [OAC Rule 5180:2-33-70](#)). The Family Ombudsman team has observed significant inconsistencies in agency record-keeping practices. Use (or lack thereof) of SACWIS and other record management systems varies widely from county to county. During various 2025 investigations, the Family Ombudsman team encountered multiple situations in which agency staff activities were either left in unapproved draft form or not documented at all. Immediate and unobstructed access to relevant case information (such as new pivotal developments) is essential for both PCSA staff and state authorities responsible for conducting independent reviews or policy compliance evaluations. Maintaining consistent and complete records is vital not only for improving outcomes for families receiving services, but also for protecting children and promoting public confidence in existing policies created to guide efforts.



System-Wide Observations and Recommendations

After analyzing data compiled during previous reporting periods, the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office offers renewed recommendations regarding local grievance processes and recurring constituent concerns related to fears of retaliation.

Improving the Accessibility of Local Grievance Procedures and Remedies

Adults who have concerns about their experiences with the children services system are encouraged to first seek resolution directly with the agency involved. The Ohio Administrative Code requires all PCSAs to maintain a policy and process for receiving and resolving grievances. However, these policies are often not easily accessible or publicly available.

PCSA Grievance Accessibility ⁵	2022	2023	2024	2025
Grievance materials are accessible on public website	10	16	19	20
Grievance materials provide information about YFO	0	6	6	7
Grievance materials include a blank complaint form	4	32	43	49
Constituents are required to first request the policy or form from PCSA staff	83	70	70	66

In many cases, constituents must request the grievance policy from their assigned caseworker. However, they may not be aware such a policy exists. Additionally, constituents frequently report concerns about potential retaliation when they must obtain information about the grievance process from the same service team that may be the subject of their complaint. The Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office respectfully renews previous recommendations to improve the accessibility of local grievance processes. PCSAs are encouraged to make their policy documents available on their public websites and in public areas of their physical buildings.

Youth are encouraged to attempt to resolve concerns directly with the agency or their caseworker; however, most agency policies do not provide youth-specific pathways for reporting or addressing grievances. Currently, only one PCSA in Ohio has confirmed the use of a dedicated policy and process for youth to report concerns. Regardless of any pending local grievance, youth may contact the Youth Ombudsman directly to initiate the complaint resolution process.

Ongoing Retaliation Concerns

Reported fear of retaliation remains a significant barrier to the complaint process. These concerns persisted throughout 2025 and continue to influence whether individuals feel comfortable reporting issues.

"I am afraid to advocate for the child in my care or report concerns because I know the county case worker will retaliate."

— Foster Parent, 2025

In 2025, **56** complainants reported concerns regarding retaliation. Such concerns are reported by adults, youth, and agency representatives, who fear that raising issues could negatively affect services, placements, or professional relationships.

Retaliation fears remain a frequently cited reason for delayed complaint filing and for disengaging from the complaint process. Ohio law currently has no provisions explicitly prohibiting retaliation in connection with the complaint process.

Conclusion

The Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office offers a unique perspective on Ohio's children services system, informed by diverse stakeholder input. The data, analyses, and recommendations in this report are provided to support and strengthen the transformative work already underway.

As agencies continue collaborating to better serve youth and families, the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office renews its earliest recommendation based on statewide complaint data: **Improve access to local grievance procedures and remedies.** A practical first step is for all public children services agencies to post current written policies covering the submission, review, and resolution of formal complaints and case disposition appeals on their websites and in visible areas within agency offices.

Together, these efforts will help ensure that families and youth can easily navigate processes and access the support they need.



Complaint Profiles

Youth Ombudsman Complaint Profiles

Youth Complaint Profile A

A youth reported that their group home required them to attend religious services. The youth alleged that this was a violation of the “Foster Youth Bill of Rights.” The Youth Ombudsman team engaged with the youth’s custodial agency, which agreed to help advocate on the youth’s behalf. The group home agreed to make alternative arrangements for the youth so they would no longer be required to attend the services. The Youth Ombudsman team followed up with the youth, who confirmed that they were no longer required to participate.

Youth Complaint Profile B

A service provider filed a complaint on behalf of the youth complainant, alleging that the youth was overmedicated in the group home setting. The Assistant Youth Ombudsman completed an investigative site visit and observed discrepancies between the youth’s statements about their medication and staff reports. There were also discrepancies with medication logs. Based on documentation, it appeared that an “as needed” medication was regularly administered regardless of observed symptoms. Group home staff later advised that this was a clerical error. During this investigation, it was also revealed that the group home did not have a written protocol for documenting or safely disposing of unused medication, which further contributed to the uncertainty of this youth’s medication intake. The youth moved to a new placement during the pendency of the complaint investigation. The Youth Ombudsman issued recommendations for corrective action. The licensing authority was also notified.

Youth Complaint Profile C

The Youth Ombudsman investigated a complaint alleging that a group home administrator required staff to pay cash for CPR certificates without completing the necessary training. It was confirmed that the administrator had advised staff in writing that they had identified a provider who would issue certificates without training. The group home’s licensing authority was alerted. The American Red Cross and law enforcement were also notified.

Youth Complaint Profile D

The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed a complaint involving the separation of two biological siblings into separate adoptive homes. While the PCSA is ultimately responsible for placement decisions, the Youth Ombudsman team recommended that the agency to make reasonable efforts to facilitate a working relationship between the families to foster a meaningful sibling connection. The PCSA elected not to implement the Youth Ombudsman’s recommendations.

Youth Complaint Profile E

A resource caregiver filed a complaint on behalf of two siblings in the custody of a PCSA, but living in separate homes. The caregivers previously facilitated visitation but had a falling out in their relationship that effectively ended visitation between the siblings. The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed confidential children services records and determined that sibling visitation was not included in the case plan. The PCSA implemented recommendations to add sibling visitation to the case plan, which was later filed and adopted by the juvenile court.

Youth Complaint Profile F

A court official filed a complaint to provide post-closure feedback regarding the experience of a former foster youth who is a human trafficking survivor. The complainant expressed concern that the youth may not have been treated fairly by their custodial agency during the case. The youth raised objections to the PCSA's placement plan because the proposed placement was near the alleged trafficker. These concerns were reportedly dismissed, and the youth was informed that no alternative options were available. Additionally, the youth reported that the caseworker asked questions perceived as insensitive, which compounded their trauma. The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed the matter and offered additional feedback and recommendations to the PCSA. The PCSA engaged with the local human trafficking task force for guidance and support. The feedback also prompted enhanced training for staff and increased information-sharing within the jurisdiction to strengthen identification and response to human trafficking concerns.

Youth Complaint Profile G

Multiple Bridges participants filed complaints regarding a housing provider. The complainants reported that their Bridges liaisons encouraged them to sign housing agreements with the provider, as there were reportedly few other options. The Youth Ombudsman team found that the housing agreements left the young adults vulnerable to immediate evictions without cause or judicial oversight. The Youth Ombudsman shared investigative observations with the Bridges provider and recommended that participants be offered realistic guidance and information about tenant rights prior to signing such agreements. The complainants were also offered information regarding Legal Aid services to further explore remedies that might be available to them.

Youth Complaint Profile H

The youth complainant and their adult supporter reported concerns that they were not receiving independent living services. The Youth Ombudsman team investigated and found that the youth had not been involved in the development of a transition plan, did not have permanent post-emancipation housing secured, and had not been referred to Bridges or other post-emancipation support services. Upon turning 18, the youth complainant entered a temporary housing arrangement, and the PCSA closed their case. Within days, the young person became homeless. Their adult supporter stepped in to assist in arranging services and supports, including a referral to Bridges.

Youth Complaint Profile I

The Youth Ombudsman investigated a complaint alleging that a foster parent took away a youth's personal property as punishment. When the youth moved to a new placement, the property was not returned and was suspected to have been thrown away. Neither the foster care agency nor the PCSA had a record or inventory of the youth's personal belongings. The Youth Ombudsman recommended that the foster care agency replace the item or financially compensate the youth for the loss. The agency agreed to replace the item.

Youth Complaint Profile J

The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed a complaint reporting concerns about the way a PCSA handled previous intake reports. The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed confidential children services records, including screening decisions and case activity logs, and met with agency representatives. While intake reports were screened out with notes indicating that the ongoing casework team would review the issues, there were no activity logs that documented efforts to resolve the concerns. The Youth Ombudsman team issued formal recommendations for corrective action to the PCSA regarding screening practices and documentation standards. The PCSA did not respond to the formal recommendations or indicate if they planned to take any corrective action to address the issues identified by the Youth Ombudsman. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth was also notified.

Youth Complaint Profile K

An adult filed a complaint on behalf of a youth regarding screening decisions by the PCSA. The Youth Ombudsman team reviewed confidential children services records and met with agency representatives. In response to the Youth Ombudsman's issuance of formal recommendations, the PCSA indicated that they were taking immediate internal corrective action to review the relevant screening decisions and had since incorporated additional procedural safeguards to further strengthen local screening practices.

Family Ombudsman Complaint Profiles

Family Complaint Profile A

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Policy Compliance, Preventable Hardship*

A prospective adoptive parent, who was also a relative of the children involved, requested an independent review of the county agency's adoption subsidy negotiation policy. The specific issues reported to the Family Ombudsman included a perception that the policy did not provide adequate time to request mediation or escalate unresolved disputes to a state hearing. This complainant also raised legitimate questions and concerns regarding limited access to essential adoption documents prior to adoption finalization, including the adoptive placement agreement.

In accordance with the agency's policy, all prospective adoptive parents are required to obtain a court date for adoption finalization prior to negotiating any related financial agreements under Title IV-E. As a result, this resource caregiver was required to re-file supporting case documents and vacate proceedings, which increased costs and burdens associated with adoption steps.

After reviewing available adoption case records, the Family Ombudsman team proactively explored the agency's willingness to postpone further re-filing requirements until after pending subsidy negotiations were substantially resolved. Additionally, because agency case records stored in confidential databases did not confirm whether specific documents had been provided to the complainant, the Family Ombudsman team also encouraged agency leadership to implement measures to ensure adoption documentation is uploaded promptly and that all prospective adoptive parents consistently receive copies for their own personal records.

Family Complaint Profile B

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Alleged Retaliation, Unconfirmed Agency Case Details*

A network foster parent requested a neutral review of several county agency case decisions, citing concerns about alleged retaliation and a lack of transparent communication. The Family Ombudsman team's exploration of confidential records confirmed that this complainant was not notified of allegations within the mandatory timeframe outlined in [OAC Rule 5180:2-36-04](#).

The Family Ombudsman team also noted that multiple agency case activity logs had remained in draft status for several months, apparently due to an internal agency policy requiring supervisory approval prior to record finalization. In this instance, no explanation was provided to account for the extended delay. As a related issue, the agency's designated grievance officer could not confirm whether the complainant had ever received procedural guidance on how to initiate a formal written grievance regarding perceived agency retaliation or staff misconduct. After alerting agency leadership to these observations, the Family Ombudsman team next confirmed this former resource caregiver's intent to pursue a local remedy since the grievance officer had already expressed willingness to further review concerns reported at the state level.

Family Complaint Profile C

Case Disposition Review | *County-Administered, State-Supervised Model*

A biological parent submitted a formal complaint requesting removal from the Central Registry. Although this complainant was timely notified of the “substantiated” neglect finding and informed of the procedure for initiating a formal dispositional review, no appeal was pursued at that time.

During an independent review of available agency case records, the Family Ombudsman team learned that the child abuse and neglect report was initially screened in for an alternative response. However, the case pathway was later switched, resulting in an “alleged perpetrator” status, creating possible lifelong consequences. Following multiple requests for clarification of past agency decision rationale, the Family Ombudsman issued specific recommendations directly to current agency leadership to encourage improved case management and documentation practices.

Family Complaint Profile D

Hotline Report Review | *Agency-Specific Practices, System-Wide Transformation*

A school therapist, concerned about a student’s safety, asked the Family Ombudsman to neutrally review screening pathway decisions made by the PCSA in that county. This professional also shared an opinion that agency decisions may have been influenced by limited resources or insufficient staff training requirements. Although this grievance encompassed broader issues related to statewide screening practices, the Family Ombudsman team primarily focused on the documented intake history for a specific Ohio household. Notably, while some allegations appeared to meet criteria for a traditional screen-in, all were processed through alternative response pathways and later closed without any recommended services for the family. This approach ultimately led to repetitive referrals, requiring duplicative resources for recurring assertions. Before closing the investigation, the Family Ombudsman team shared key observations with the Ohio Department of Children and Youth. DCY confirmed a known training need and ongoing efforts to provide additional support.

Family Complaint Profile E

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Valid Non-Party Concerns, Confidentiality Requirements*

A concerned relative requested an independent review of county agency staff conduct during a prior child safety assessment and related case disposition review process. Although the formal appeal ultimately resulted in a favorable outcome for the alleged perpetrator (by changing the original finding from “indicated” to “unsubstantiated”), this complainant continued to seek visible accountability for errors that reportedly caused personal harm. During examination of confidential agency records, the Family Ombudsman team discovered that revised notification letters reflecting the appeal decision had still not been sent to the primary case participants. Accordingly, agency leadership was encouraged to take appropriate corrective action, which was initiated without delay.

Family Complaint Profile F

Full Case Review | *Concerns Without Remedies, Offices Without Jurisdiction*

A biological parent submitted a formal complaint requesting a written apology and future reimbursement of legal fees, alleging violations of parental rights and inadequate legal protections for individuals with disabilities. Given the serious nature of so many different concerns raised during an intake meeting, the Family Ombudsman team conducted a comprehensive review of confidential agency records, including case activity logs spanning several years. Ultimately, during a scheduled closure meeting, the complainant received practical guidance on accommodation requests and was also encouraged to contact the Ohio Department of Children and Youth for additional information about Ohio Administrative Code requirements.

Family Complaint Profile G

Disrupted Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Retaliation Fears, Unripe Allegations*

Foster parents submitted a formal complaint involving two separate Ohio agencies. They requested the reassignment of a caseworker who had previously alleged that the foster parents were not supporting reunification efforts. The complainants also asked for an independent review of specific local communication barriers. During the Family Ombudsman's standard preliminary review, which includes questions to verify whether unresolved issues are ready for formal investigation at the state level, the complainants renewed their fear that agency staff would discover their allegations. They also specifically cited worry about possible disruption of a separate child's adoption. After initial engagement, these resource caregivers discontinued all communication with the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office and did not respond to written supplemental requests necessary to advance the review process. Consequently, the Family Ombudsman issued a written closure notice, which included an open invitation to reconnect.

Family Complaint Profile H

Deferred Full Case Review | *Perceived Punishment, Reinforced Guidance*

A foster parent who had already requested assistance from the Family Ombudsman earlier in the year submitted a new formal complaint raising more concerns while revisiting prior issues. During a confidential intake meeting, the Family Ombudsman team learned that private legal counsel was already pursuing the complainant's preferred child custody outcome. Notably, this resource caregiver also expressed adamant belief that the agency's support for an available kinship placement was a retaliatory response to known past escalations. The complainant further alleged that the local ombudsman "always sides with" agency leadership to insinuate that reporting new concerns to local authorities would be futile. The Family Ombudsman team reiterated the importance of following established agency policies—even if a particular complainant's trust in the process is limited—and directed this adult to the agency's website for additional guidance and resources, including review of the "Resource Family Bill of Rights" and the "Foster Youth Bill of Rights." The written closure notice also supplied renewed guidance about jurisdiction limitations, including a reminder that the Family Ombudsman cannot interfere with any court proceedings in any case.

Family Complaint Profile I

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Changing Circumstances, Moot Remedies*

A licensed nonprofit adoption agency initiated a formal complaint alleging, among other concerns, that a county agency had failed to respond to their written communication (submitted on behalf of adoptive parents) regarding the denial of Title IV-E Adoption Assistance. This formal complaint also conveyed a family's frustration over a sudden reversal of subsidy approval after finalization, noting that the resource caregivers were experiencing significant emotional distress after relying on agreements signed in good faith. The complainant emphasized that families pursuing adoption make life-altering commitments to ensure children receive long-term stability. Shortly after an intake meeting was held, the complainant informed the Family Ombudsman team that the adoptive parents had been approved for subsidies without the need to escalate disputes to a state hearing. As a result, no further investigative action was required.

Family Complaint Profile J

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Shared Goals, Stronger Connections*

A concerned grandparent submitted a formal complaint alleging past medical neglect and urging the Family Ombudsman to take corrective action to prevent other foster children from experiencing similar harm. The complainant also reported perceived dishonesty by assigned county agency staff, citing concerns about attempts to "cover up" past mistakes. During a confidential meeting following a thorough review of available case records, agency leadership voluntarily shared their perspective that this complainant may have received mixed information due to multiple caseworkers being involved during different case stages. They also affirmed that the complainant's goal of child safety aligned with the agency's own priorities. This investigation concluded with agency leadership agreeing to arrange a family team meeting, as recommended by the Family Ombudsman team, to strengthen local communication channels and create more opportunities for transparent dialogue.

Family Complaint Profile K

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Delayed Appeals, Defined Limits*

An alleged perpetrator reported ongoing difficulty obtaining records, some dating back more than two decades, related to past case dispositions from the county agency that made those decisions. The formal complaint also requested a formal appeal opportunity and alleged that agency staff were not responding to repeated phone calls and written requests. As an initial step, the Family Ombudsman reviewed confidential agency records in SACWIS, confirming that the most recent child abuse and neglect investigation occurred several years ago. However, no local appeal documentation was found. After conferring with agency leadership, the Family Ombudsman team confirmed that the complainant's request for a formal appeal would be granted if not already resolved. Closing guidance emphasized that the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office does not oversee local appeal policies or timelines. The complainant was therefore encouraged to present any unresolved questions directly to local authorities responsible for records requests and case disposition appeal outcomes.

Family Complaint Profile L

Case Disposition Review | *Rigid Rules, Rational Exceptions*

An alleged perpetrator, represented by legal counsel, submitted a formal complaint seeking to appeal a “substantiated” physical abuse disposition, asserting that all available administrative remedies at the local level had been exhausted. The complainant further alleged that the county agency involved had provided neither notice of the “finding” in question nor any guidance on how to initiate a timely appeal. During further internal agency review, prompted by investigative requests from the Family Ombudsman team, agency leadership was unable to locate the disposition notice they believed had been generated in SACWIS and sent. Due to this lack of corroborating documentation, administrators ultimately agreed to allow the complainant to initiate a formal appeal process, even though this step fell outside standard policy parameters. Agency leadership also confirmed a plan to contact the attorney involved to schedule a meeting. Notably, the Family Ombudsman did not issue recommendations regarding the merits of the contested disposition to avoid any appearance of influencing the local appeal outcome.

Family Complaint Profile M

Agency Staff Conduct Review | *Finding Facts, Moving Forward*

A biological parent requested expanded visitation parameters prior to upcoming child custody litigation. The complainant further alleged that the current kinship caregiver was deliberately engaging in alienation, and that the county agency had unfairly limited previous visits to one hour under watchful supervision. From this party’s perspective, the lack of meaningful contact with the children over an extended timeframe—more than a year of case plan services—had directly contributed to the absence of a bond. While reviewing the specific concerns related to permanency planning, the Family Ombudsman team also examined when and how agency staff responded to past written requests, which had been directed to a caseworker no longer employed by the agency. Initially, agency leadership stated that the complainant had been notified of the caseworker’s unavailability. However, when asked to provide a courtesy copy of that notification, agency leadership confirmed that no such communication had been sent. During the same meeting, agency leadership also expressed surprise upon learning that the newly assigned caseworker had not yet contacted the complainant, an issue expressly highlighted by the Family Ombudsman team after noting that available case activity logs stored in SACWIS reflected no outreach. At a separate meeting with the complainant, the Family Ombudsman team reiterated that the Youth and Family Ombudsmen Office could not interfere with upcoming court proceedings and encouraged continued cooperation with legal counsel.



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