



Fiscal Year 2018

Issued December 20, 2018

Published March 21, 2019

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Oregon Foster Care Ombudsman

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Introduction

In 2013, Oregon's foster youth worked collectively for the passage of Senate Bill 123 which resulted into Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 418.200. As part of this legislation, the creation of the Foster Children's Bill of Rights occurred and became effective January 1, 2014. Subsequently, the Department of Human Services (DHS) amended their Rights of Children and Young Adults rule under Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 413-010-0170 to reflect the Rights entitled to all Oregon foster children in the legal custody of DHS. In March of 2014 Oregon hired their first Foster Care Ombudsman whom was embedded in the Governor's Advocacy Office and dedicated specifically for foster care matters. By May of 2014 the Youth Empowerment and Safety (Y.E.S.) line was activated in concert with Foster Care Awareness month.

The Ombudsman's authority to investigate matters is statutorily detailed in ORS 182.500. Similarly, this same statute details the prompt cooperation of all public bodies and those that contract with public bodies to provide all information requested by the ombudsman. Furthermore, the Governor's Advocacy Office is under the direction of the Children's Advocate as detailed in ORS 417.805 which provides the authority to receive and investigate constituent complaints.

In August of 2014, the Foster Care Ombudsman hosted the first Foster Care Ombudsman advisory group. The group is comprised of current and former foster youth, foster parents, CASA, Judicial, CW caseworkers, Certifiers, Oregon Foster Youth Connection, Central Office Program staff, HealthShare, 211 Info, Juvenile Dept., Kinship House, Lines for Life, HeadStart, Grand Ronde Tribe, and Legislative Staff. The group meets on a quarterly basis and is open to all. The group affords the Ombudsman an opportunity for review of outreach documents, reports, staffing difficult cases, and overall feedback. The support, guidance and passion of this group empowers the ombudsman through difficult terrain.

2018 Updates

This report contains information gleaned over the 2018 fiscal year. As the role of the Foster Care Ombudsman continues to evolve, so do the reporting metrics. The reader should note that some metrics have been added in recent quarters at the request of members of the Foster Care Ombudsman Advisory Group as well as achieving high reporting standards of the Governor's Advocacy Office. The comparison data should be viewed with caution as representation of data may reflect other dynamics such as promotional efforts by the Foster Care Ombudsman as well as other community partners.

Oregon's Foster Care Ombudsman investigates all calls of concern or complaint received by his office pertaining to services involved in foster care. The ombudsman advocates for the interests and rights of foster children and youth, and, when contacted, conducts fact-finding inquiries that may span the foster care system. Finding solutions is the aim, but in the search for accountability, areas for potential improvement may surface. Examples of such instances are boxed and highlighted throughout this report.

Please contact the Foster Care Ombudsman at 503-945-5897 if you have any questions or need clarification regarding this report.

Who reached out to the Foster Care Ombudsman?

When someone contacts the Foster Care Ombudsman, a “case” is opened. This number does not include cases that are re-opened. For example, if the Foster Care Ombudsman receives new concerns from the reporter or other party after a case has been closed, it will be re-opened if it is within 30 days of closure. After a case has been closed 30 days, it will be opened as a new case.

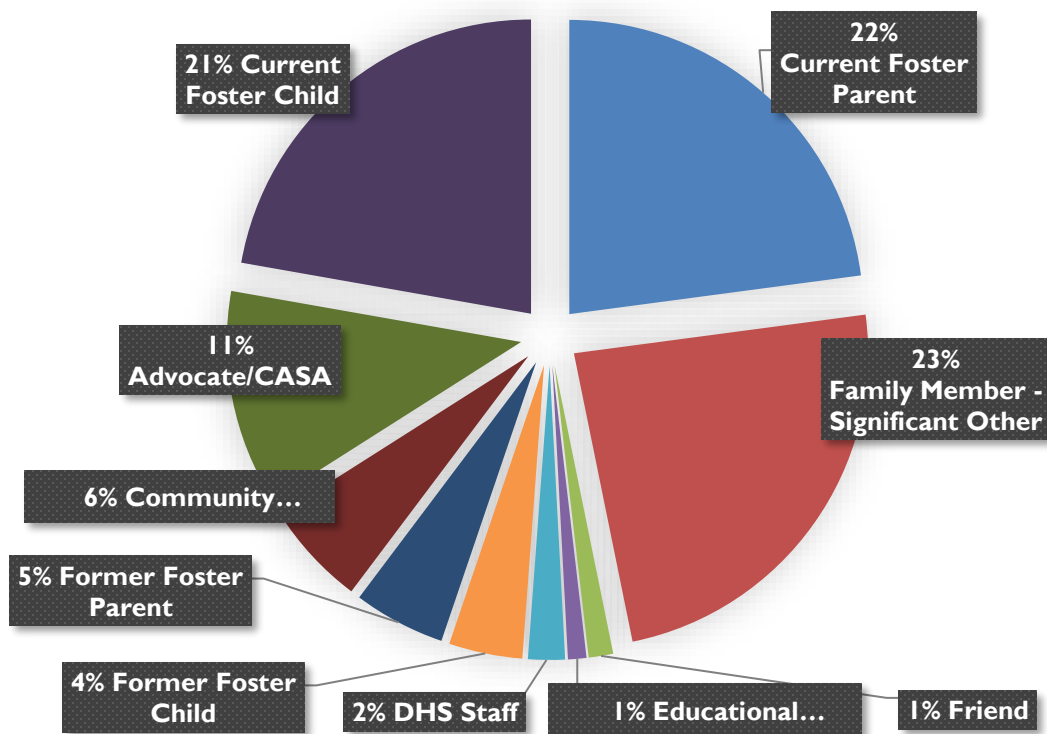
Overall Case Management	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	FY 18 Total
Cases Opened	85	80	81	82	328
Closed Cases	76	66	68	97	307

The person that contacts the Foster Care Ombudsman is identified as the “reporter.” For FY 2018 the population with most contacts to the Foster Care Ombudsman was foster parents, specifically “Current/Former Foster Parent to child.”

Role of Reporter	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Current/Former Foster Parent to child	25	14	20	24	83
Family Member/Significant Other	16	23	11	21	71
Current Foster Child	13	13	17	23	66
Advocate/CASA	10	8	8	9	35
Community Partner	3	3	5	6	17
Former Foster Child	3	2	3	4	12
DHS Staff/Agency Business	0	0	1	5	6
Friend	2	0	1	1	4
Educational Personnel	0	1	0	2	3

Biological Parent	0	0	2	0	2
Neighbor	0	2	0	0	2
Medical Staff/Professional	2	0	0	0	2
Therapist/Counselor/Social Services Provider/Client*	1	0	0	1	2
Attorney	0	0	0	1	1
Legislator	1	0	0	0	1
Contractor	0	0	0	0	0
Guardian	0	0	0	0	0
Anonymous	0	0	0	0	0
Total	76	66	68	97	307

Figure 1: Role of reporter (cases with > 2 contacts)



Demographic information

The Foster Care Ombudsman tracks certain demographic information in order to observe trends and understand the populations served. This information is taken directly from Child Welfare's case management system OR-Kids. When the case with the Foster Care Ombudsman is about more than one child, such as a sibling group, the information for the oldest child is reported.

SIBLING VISITS *The biologic mother of a son in foster care contacted the Foster Care Ombudsman with concerns that her child was not seeing his siblings regularly. Under the Foster Children's Sibling Bill of Rights, which was passed by the legislature in 2017, foster children must be able to maintain contact with siblings while in substitute care placements, including being able to have transportation to those visits. After the caseworker and foster parents were made aware of the need to establish this routine, regular visits among the siblings were scheduled.*

Age of Foster Child	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
0 - 4	16	12	11	14	53
5 - 8	10	8	9	12	39
9 - 12	10	13	10	13	46
13 - 15	19	15	17	23	74
16 - 21	18	14	12	31	75
22 +	3	2	4	1	10
Unknown	0	2	2	0	4
Not applicable*	0	0	3	3	6
Total	76	66	68	97	307

**Not applicable might pertain to a case that does not involve a specific child or former foster child who contacted the FCO with historic or other concerns not specific to their age.*

Gender of Foster Child	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Female	42	33	47	43	165
Male	34	33	18	52	137
Unknown	0	0	2	1	3
Transgender	0	0	1	1	2
Total	76	66	68	97	307

Race of Foster Child	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
White	60	52	51	81	246
Unknown	5	4	2	7	16
American Indian	5	2	7	3	16
Black/African American	4	8	7	4	23
Hispanic	0	0	0	2	2
Asian	1	0	0	0	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0	1	0	2
Total	76	66	68	97	307

**Unknown pertains to a case where the specific data is not listed in the Child Welfare case management system ORKIDS.*

How are complainants contacting the Foster Care Ombudsman?

Most complainants reach the Foster Care Ombudsman through the YES line, which stands for Youth, Empowerment and Safety, a direct phone line to the ombudsman (1-855-840-6036). This line is published on

IMMUNIZATION NEED The Foster Care Ombudsman was contacted by an out-of-state relative who was providing foster care for a child from Oregon. She was prevented from enrolling the child at a day-care facility due to the child's missing immunization history. As a result, the foster parent wasn't able to go to her job. The Ombudsman was able to assist the caseworker, helping to expedite transfer of the immunization records, which allowed the child to qualify for admission to day care.

the Foster Children's Bill of Rights poster that is provided to all DHS foster children.

What are contacts to the Foster Care Ombudsman about?

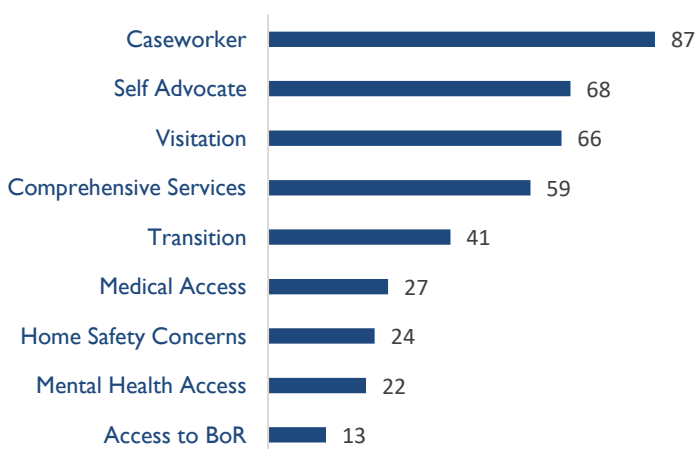
The Foster Care Ombudsman tracks the overall concerns reported by the reporter, which are divided into subcategories. Cases can have more than one concern.

Services	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Self- Advocate	13	16	18	21	68
Comprehensive	19	11	8	21	59
Transportation	0	0	5	0	5
Involved	0	3	1	0	4
Total	32	30	32	42	136
Separation/Unification	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Visitation	17	14	13	22	66
Transition	13	4	12	12	41
Belongings	1	4	0	3	8
Continuation of Services	0	0	1	6	7
Notification of Change	2	0	1	1	4
Current Caretaker Status	0	0	1	0	1
Separation/Unification	0	0	0	0	0
Adoption	0	0	0	0	0
Total	33	22	28	44	127
Child Welfare	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Caseworker	19	20	20	28	87

Certifier	0	1	1	1	3
Supervisor	0	0	2	0	2
ICWA	0	0	1	0	1
Total	19	21	24	29	93
Abuse/Neglect	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Home Safety Concern	10	7	3	4	24
Neglect	2	2	2	3	9
Physical	2	1	2	2	7
Emotional	2	1	2	1	6
Sexual	0	1	3	1	5
Allegation	0	0	1	0	1
Closed at Screening	0	0	0	1	1
Exploitation	0	0	0	1	1
Total	16	12	13	13	54
Medical/Dental	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Medical Access	8	8	4	7	27
Dental Access	2	1	3	3	9
Medical Refusal	0	1	0	0	1
Dental Refusal	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	10	7	10	37
Mental Health	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Access	5	2	4	11	22
Crisis	1	2	0	1	4
Refusal	1	0	0	2	3
Other	0	0	0	1	1
Suicidal	0	0	0	1	1
Alcohol/Drug	0	0	0	0	0
Self- Harm	0	0	0	0	0
Total	7	4	4	16	31

Rights	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Access to	5	4	0	4	13
Receipt of	0	1	0	2	3
Notice of Court/CRB	1	0	0	0	1
Retaliation for issuing	1	0	0	0	1
Total	7	5	0	6	18
Education	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Support	0	2	3	3	8
Placement	2	0	3	2	7
Information	1	0	0	0	1
Total	3	2	6	5	16
Finance	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Opportunities	0	0	2	1	3
Support	2	0	0	1	3
Maintain	0	0	0	2	2
Credit	1	0	0	0	1
Support/Bank	1	0	0	0	1
Total	4	0	2	4	10
Rec./Activities/Employment	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Support	1	0	2	0	3
Access	0	0	1	1	2
Total	1	0	3	1	5

Figure 2: Frequency of top 9 concerns, FY 2018



MEDICAID COVERAGE

The Foster Care Ombudsman was contacted by a former foster youth who reported her social security payments had been reduced due to a sudden deduction for Medicaid coverage. Under the Affordable Care Act, states must provide young adults under the age of 26 with free health care if they were in foster care at age 18 or older.

Previously, this former foster youth had coverage with Medicaid that included payment for medication. The Ombudsman was able to facilitate reimbursement for this lost medical benefit.

Where is the foster child residing?

Current Placement Status	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Non-Relative Foster Care	31	23	30	37	121
Behavioral Rehabilitative Services	13	11	12	20	56
Relative Foster Care	14	11	8	17	50
Not Applicable	8	11	10	17	46
Detention/Hospital*	3	3	4	3	13
Treatment Foster Care	3	3	2	2	10
Hotel/Office*	3	2	1	0	6
IDD Foster Care	1	1	1	1	4
Guardianship	0	1	0	0	1
Homeless	0	0	0	0	0
Total	76	66	68	97	307

*Placements added to case management system beginning January 2017

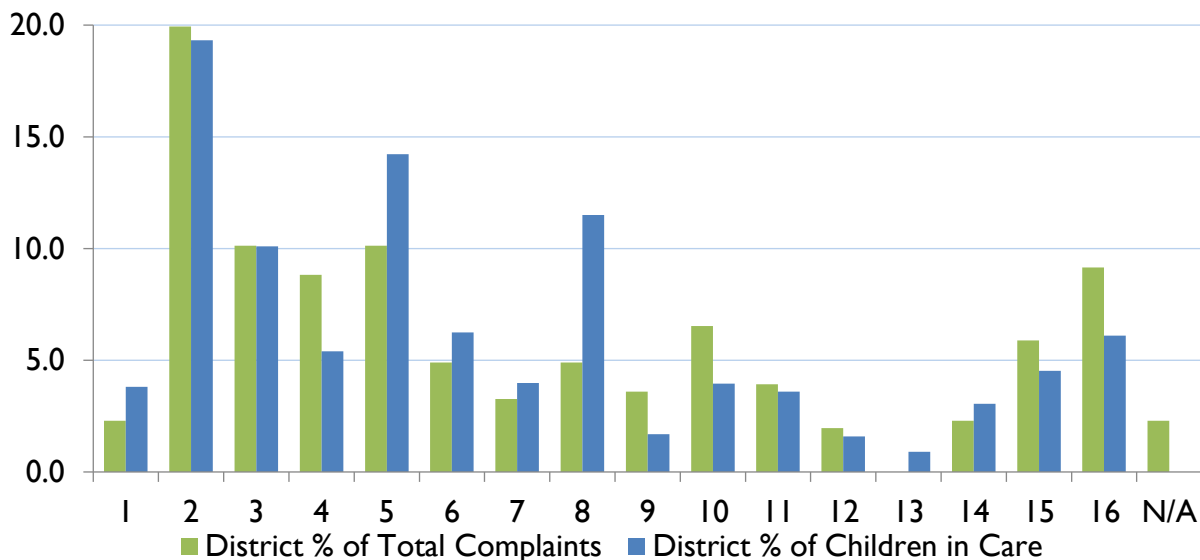
DHS Child Welfare Branch Location

DHS District / Counties	FCO Cases	District % of Total FCO Cases	Children in Care on 9/30/17*	District % of Children in Care
1 Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook	7	2.3	303	3.8
2 Multnomah	61	19.9	1537	19.3
3 Marion, Polk, Yamhill	31	10.1	803	10.1
4 Linn, Benton, Lincoln	27	8.8	430	5.4
5 Lane	31	10.1	1132	14.2
6 Douglas	15	4.9	497	6.2
7 Coos, Curry	10	3.3	317	4.0
8 Jackson, Josephine	15	4.9	915	11.5
9 Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler	11	3.6	135	1.7
10 Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson	20	6.5	314	3.9
11 Klamath, Lake	12	3.9	286	3.6
12 Morrow, Umatilla	6	2.0	127	1.6
13 Baker, Union, Wallowa	0	0.0	72	0.9
14 Grant, Harney, Malheur	7	2.3	243	3.1
15 Clackamas	18	5.9	360	4.5
16 Washington	28	9.2	485	6.1
N/A	7	2.3		
Total	306		7956	

*Data courtesy the [Child Welfare Data Book](#).

Figure 3 compares the number of Foster Care Ombudsman cases for FY 2018 to the number of youth in care as of September 30, 2017. While this is not an apples-to-apples comparison, we use this data to assess the representation of the foster youth population in the Foster Care Ombudsman's work. As you can see, the number of cases has a close relationship to the number of foster youth in each county.

Figure 3: Comparison of % of complaints per district to % of children in care, FY 2018



What happened next?

Once the Foster Care Ombudsman opens a case, there are many different courses of action taken, which will reflect the unique nature of each concern. Generally speaking, the ombudsman will listen, educate, research and review concerns shared with this office. Once this review has concluded, the ombudsman will follow up with appropriate agency staff and management to better understand and resolve specific and global concerns.

When the Foster Care Ombudsman closes a case, the ombudsman writes up a findings narrative and chooses a closing resolution.

OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES *The CASA volunteer contacted the Foster Care Ombudsman with concerns that a boy in foster care wasn’t engaged in extracurricular physical activities – a basic entitlement under the Oregon Foster Children’s Bill of Rights. Under HB 2890, which was passed by the Oregon legislature in 2015, foster children and youth by law are allowed to participate in at least one ongoing extracurricular activity, based on the availability and the interest of the child. The ombudsman reached out to the caseworker, who confirmed the boy wasn’t engaged in an outside activity. After the ombudsman’s explanation and encouragement, the boy was enrolled in a martial arts program.*

Resolution	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	Total
Consultation	29	23	26	35	113
Valid/Resolved	24	22	27	31	104
Not Valid	19	15	9	21	64
Valid/Not Resolved	3	3	3	5	14
Unable to Contact	1	0	2	4	7
Inquiry	0	3	0	1	4
Forwarded to Program Office	0	0	0	1	1
No Action Taken	0	0	1	0	1
Total	76	66	68	98	308*

*a case in June 2018 had two resolutions

Findings may fit in two categories, educating the public or resolutions that follow an investigation:

Educating the Public Findings

Categories that do not result in an investigation.

- *Inquiries*- Not about a DHS program, non-jurisdiction issues and child custody matters.
- *Consultation*- Provide policy education, assist complainant in problem solving solutions to their concerns.

DAY CARE SUBSIDY

The Foster Care Ombudsman was contacted by foster parents who wished to use a state-provided subsidy to help pay day-care costs. However, the foster parents were unable to use the subsidy at the child-care center of their choice. Such subsidies are restricted to child-care providers approved by the Department of Human Services. The ombudsman was able to assist the foster parents and the caseworker navigate the procedures necessary to obtain state help to pay for day care.

Case Resolution Findings

- *Valid/Resolved*- complaints are those that the Ombudsman has determined have merit, and changes have been or are being made by the Department.
- *Valid/Not Resolved*- complaints that the Ombudsman has determined have merit, but have not been resolved for the following reasons:

- Action cannot be undone-The issue could not be resolved because it involved an event that had already occurred.
- Dept. disagrees with Ombudsman-The Department disagreed with the Ombudsman's recommendation and would not make changes.
- Change not in the client's best interest- Making a change to correct a policy or practice violation is not in the client's best interest.
- Lack of Resources- the Department agreed with the Ombudsman's recommendation but could not make a change because no resource was available.
- *Not Valid*-Complaints are those that the Ombudsman has reviewed and has determined that the Department was or is following policies and procedures.
- *Ongoing*- Investigation and resolution is pending at the time of data collection.

Recommendations

The Foster Care Ombudsman may also make recommendations to agency administration or staff based on the findings of the office. Though this is already happening on an informal basis, the Foster Care Ombudsman and Governor's Advocacy Office are working to improve our methodology for recommendations and will publish recommendations in future reports.

Appendix A: Comparison to prior years' reports

Foster Care Comparison	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Cases Opened	237	289	328
Closed Cases	125	289	307

Current Placement Status	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Behavioral Rehabilitative Services	45	32	56
Detention/Hospital	3	5	13
Guardianship	0	1	1
Homeless	0	1	0
Hotel/Office	0	2	6
IDD Foster Care	8	4	4
Non-Relative Foster Care	98	147	121
Not Applicable	6	41	0
Relative Foster Care	47	47	50
Treatment Foster Care	7	9	10
Total	225	289	307

Role of Reporter	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Advocate/CASA	20	28	35
Anonymous	0	1	0
Attorney	2	3	1
Biological Parent	14	6	2
Community Partner	2	2	17

Contractor	1	1	1
Current Foster Child	71	108	66
Current Foster Parent	48	48	
DHS Staff	2	3	6
Educational Personnel	5	1	3
Family Member/Significant Other	38	48	71
Former Foster Child	10	19	12
Former Foster Parent	16	16	
Friend	4	4	4
Guardian	0	1	0
Legislator	0	0	1
Medical Staff	2	0	2
Neighbor	2	1	2
Therapist/Counselor	0	1	2
Total	237	289	307

Gender of Foster Child	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Female	54	173	165
Male	58	103	137
Transgender	1	5	3
Unknown	1	8	2
Total	114	289	307

Abuse/Neglect	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Emotional	4	4	6
Exploitation	0	1	1
Home Safety Concern	16	36	24
Neglect	1	11	9
Physical	0	11	7
Sexual	0	5	5
Total	21	68	54

Child Welfare	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Caseworker	21	40	87
Certifier	1	5	3
ICWA	0	0	1
Supervisor	1	1	2
Total	23	46	93

Education	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Information	3	7	1
Placement	3	1	7
Support	3	2	8
Total	9	10	16

Finance	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Credit	1	0	1
Maintain	0	2	2
Opportunities	0	0	3
Support/Bank	1	0	1
Total	2	2	10

Medical/Dental	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Dental Access	6	5	9
Dental Refusal	0	0	0
Medical Access	11	20	27
Medical Refusal	0	0	1
Total	17	25	37

Mental Health	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Access	5	4	22
Alcohol/Drug	0	0	0
Crisis	3	0	4
Other	1	2	1
Suicidal	0	0	1
Total	10	6	37

Recreation/Activities/Employment	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Access	0	3	3
Support	0	0	2
Total	0	3	5

Rights	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Access to	13	9	13
Notice of Court/CRB	0	0	1
Receipt of	1	2	3
Retaliation for issuing	0	1	1
Total	14	12	18

Separation/Unification	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Continuation of Services	0	5	7
Separation/Unification	1	10	0
Transition	20	33	41
Visitation	24	30	6
Adoption	0	3	0
Total	45	81	114

Services	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Comprehensive	28	38	59
Involved	1	4	4
Self- Advocate	22	12	68

Transportation	0	3	5
Total	51	57	136

Age	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
0-4	41	54	53
5-8	26	47	39
9-12	33	33	46
13-15	49	46	74
16-21	67	80	75
22+	11	5	10
Unknown	1	14	4
Not Applicable	9	10	6
Total	237	289	307

Race	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
American Indian	6	17	16
Asian	2	3	1
Black/African American	13	13	23
Hispanic	1	11	2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	2	2
White	82	196	246
Unknown	10	47	16
Total	114	289	307

Method of Complaint	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
E-Mail	56	72	75
In Person	3	2	12
Mail/Fax	4	5	7
YES Line	174	210	213
Total	237	289	307

Resolution	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Consultation	74	117	113
Inquiry	2	3	4
Not Valid	51	75	64
No Action Taken*	-	-	1
Forwarded to Program*	-	-	1
Pending	67	0	0
Unable to Contact	3	7	7
Valid/Not Resolved	5	14	14
Valid/Resolved	31	73	104
Total	233	289	308

**Resolutions not reported in prior years*