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May 5, 2025

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FROM: Oscar Valdez
Auditor-Controller

Robert G. Campbell
Assistant Auditor-Controller / Chief Audit Executive

SUBJECT: **OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPs SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2024**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Ombudsperson for Youth in Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (ST RTPs)¹ (Ombuds) Program activities for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2024.

Summary of Activities

The Ombuds conducted in-person outreach to **200 youth**, ages **8 to 20**, during **83 site visits** at **37 agencies** and **1 school district**. This includes **54 STRTP sites** that housed youth placed by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), as well as Community Treatment Facilities (CTFs), non-contracted Group Homes (GHs), and schools. In addition, we were able to incorporate visits to **3 Transitional Shelter Care Facilities (TSCF)** and **1 Juvenile Hall**. We conducted **1 (1%)** of the visits to STRTP and

¹ STRTPs are residential facilities that provide an integrated program of specialized and intensive care and supervision, services and supports, and treatment to youth and non-minor dependents. STRTPs must adhere to federal Qualified Residential Treatment Program (also known as “Q RTP”) requirements.

CTF sites in partnership with the California (CA) Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO).

We also addressed **148 requests for assistance (RFAs or requests)** received during our outreach (i.e., in-person and over the phone) and via our helpline (i.e., phone calls, web submissions, and e-mails). We identified common occurrences within these requests which fell in the categories of Preparing for Adulthood and Money Management, Family and Social Connections, Education, and Personal Rights. We collaborated with child welfare partners to identify and apply best practices for addressing these issues in our service to the youth.

Background

In October 1998, the Board of Supervisors (Board) established the Office of the Children's Group Home Ombudsman (now known as the Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs) at the recommendation of the Grand Jury and Commission for Children and Families, to provide advocacy and a confidential, independent, and informal process to help youth under DCFS oversight resolve issues while in group home (GH) placement. To ensure independence from DCFS as the placing agency, since its inception the Ombuds has resided in the Department of Auditor-Controller (A-C).

How We Connect With Youth

One of the primary responsibilities of the Ombuds is to engage with youth under the care of DCFS, whether placed in STRTPs, including CTFs, or non-contracted GHs. This engagement involves discussing their rights, providing a platform for them to express any concerns or needs they may have, and ensuring they are aware of the Ombuds as a resource to support them.

Upon DCFS notifying the Ombuds of a youth placement or re-placement in congregate care, our Career Development Intern, who has lived experience with the child welfare system, calls each youth to inform them about our office and to summarize their rights under the CA Foster Youth Bill of Rights (FYBOR) (Attachment I). We also ask the youth if they need help with anything else, or if they have any questions or concerns. This outreach leads to some immediate RFAs, and increases their awareness and understanding of the Ombuds as a resource. When we conduct in-person outreach visits, many youth have commented that they remember the phone call with our office when they were first placed, and this helps us build rapport with placed youth.

We plan site visits, which we typically schedule but may be unannounced, at each agency site at least once every six months. In cases where an agency does not have any DCFS youth at the time of a scheduled visit, proactive measures are taken to reconnect before the end of the reporting period concludes, ensuring comprehensive coverage. We

verbally provide youth and STRTP staff with information about the Ombuds function and FYBOR. We also distribute age-appropriate materials (i.e., FYBOR handbooks, coloring books, and/or highlighters) complete with the Ombuds helpline contact details and a Quick Response (QR) code linking directly to our webpage for assistance requests.

The Ombuds also conducts visits to youth placed by DCFS in non-County contracted GHs and STRTPs, and we rely on a list provided by DCFS to identify such placements. DCFS utilizes some of these non-County contracted GHs to place youth who have developmental disabilities. These youth tend to be non-verbal or have limited communication skills. Some non-County contracted GHs are approved as service providers by the Regional Centers, which are community-based, non-profit agencies that contract with the CA Department of Developmental Services to provide or coordinate services and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. For these visits, we speak to those who can communicate and leave materials for all youth under DCFS supervision. Other times, DCFS utilizes non-County contracted GHs when other County-contracted placement options have been exhausted or to place youth in substance use treatment programs.

We also visited youth at certain schools that have several students placed in STRTPs. We continue to evaluate additional schools and districts that can be incorporated into our future visit schedule. Frequent and consistent interactions are essential for rapport-building with the youth, as well as to help them retain information about their rights and exercise them.

We expanded our outreach to include resource tables at community events for youth, such as the Youth Commission's Youth Listening Sessions. Being present at such events for youth provides us another time and place to connect with youth and their supporters about their rights and our office as a resource.

How We Assist Youth With Their Concerns

Upon receiving an RFA, the Ombuds interviews the youth/requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombuds categorizes RFAs based on the initial information shared by the youth/requester. The Ombuds' goal is to be accessible and to assist all youth and other requestors, and accordingly, presumes all requests to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

To effectively handle and resolve requests under the jurisdiction of the Ombuds, we coordinate with key personnel in various functional areas within DCFS. This includes, but is not limited to, collaborating with Children's Social Workers (CSWs) and Supervising Children's Social Workers (SCSWs), and utilizing resources such as the Child Protection Hotline (CPH), Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD), and Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section (OHCIS). We also interact with the Contracts Administration Division (CAD), Education Section, Youth Development Services Independent Living

Program (ILP), and the Public Inquiry Unit as necessary. In addition, we work closely with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombuds and the Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance Unit to address and resolve issues that arise.

Our efforts may also involve reaching out to legal representatives, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and personnel from facilities such as STRTP/CTF/GH and their management, Community Care Licensing (CCL), OFCO, school staff, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). When required, we extend our collaboration to include other counties to ensure we effectively address the requests and concerns of youth in these facilities.

We inform youth once we have discussed their request with the appropriate parties. Time frames for follow-up vary as the requests may be part of a larger or more complex issue that is not wholly within the Ombuds' purview, but all requests regardless of the duration to resolve them, receive follow-up.

Outreach Activities

During this reporting period, the Ombuds conducted **83** in-person **outreach visits to 200 youth** in STRTPs, CTFs, non-contracted GHs, schools, and juvenile hall. The youth ranged in age from **8 to 20** years old. In total, this comprised outreach to **76 sites** (7 sites were visited twice), operated by 37 agencies and 1 school district as follows:

- **54 STRTP and 2 CTF sites** operated by 29 agencies
- **14 GH sites** operated by 8 non-contracted agencies
- **2 school sites** in one school district
- **3 TSCF sites**
- **1 Juvenile Hall**

We conducted **1 (1%)** of the visits to STRTP and CTF sites in partnership with the OFCO.

200 Youth Visited

76 STRTP, CTF, GH, School, and SYTF Sites
Visited at Least Once

7 Sites
Visited 2 Times

29 STRTP and CTF
Agencies Visited

8 Non-Contracted GH
Agencies Visited

1 School District Visited

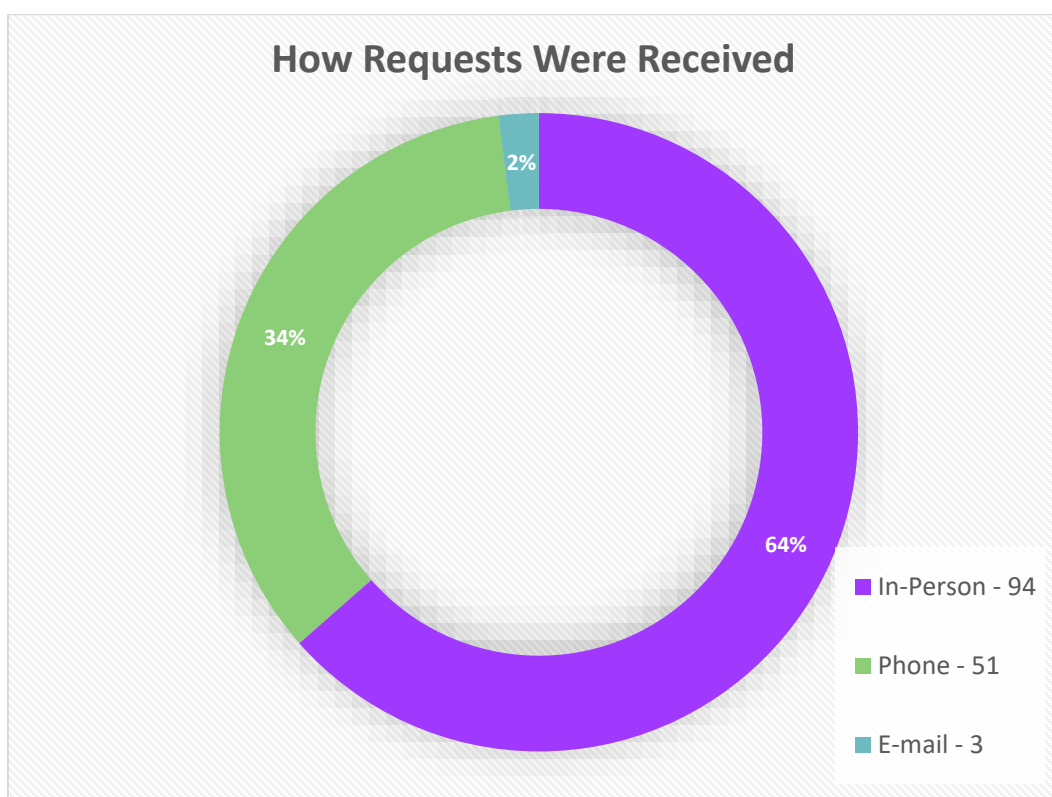
We conducted in-person outreach visits to all the STRTP, CTF, and group home agencies in Southern California housing youth under the care of DCFS. There were two youth placed in non-contracted STRTPs outside of Southern California (Lompoc and Fresno), and we conducted outreach to them via phone.

Attachment II details the summary of Outreach Visits Conducted.

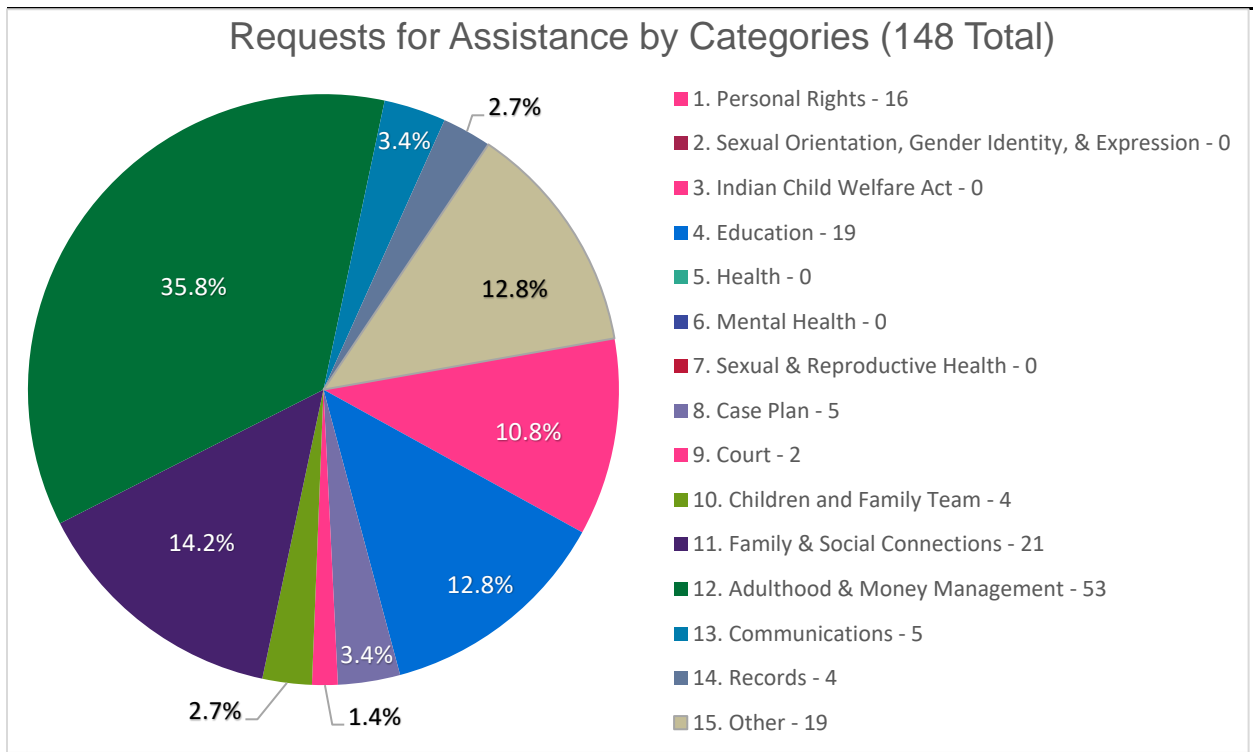
Request for Assistance Activities

The Ombuds received a total of **148 RFAs**. In speaking with youth about their rights during our outreach phone calls and visits, some requests were prompted by a new or better understanding of their rights. We received RFAs via the following channels:

- 94 via in-person outreach (64%)
- 51 by phone (34%)
- 3 via e-mails (2%)



The chart below indicates the number of RFAs received in each category:



The categories associated with the FYBOR with the most RFAs were:

\$ Preparing for Adulthood and Money Management - 53 (35.8%) Requests
In this category, examples of requests included:

Needing Vital Documents	Opening a Bank Account	Referral to a Job Program
ILP Funding	Status of Transitional Housing Application	Connection with ILP

We received 53 requests related to Preparing for Adulthood and Money Management, with 26 focused on obtaining vital documents such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, and identification (ID) cards. This theme carried over from prior reporting periods, as many youth need these documents to secure employment, but without them, they cannot exercise their right to “work and develop job skills at an age-appropriate level,” as

outlined in the FYBOR. In addition, 18 requests pertained to youth wanting to be referred for job programs.

While DCFS revised the memorandum of understanding with STRTP providers on September 4, 2024, to begin obtaining vital documents for youth at age 13, this change did not cause a large impact in this reporting period, since it was mid-period when it was issued. In addition, while providers are required to initiate this sooner, the practice does not appear to have caught up to the policy.

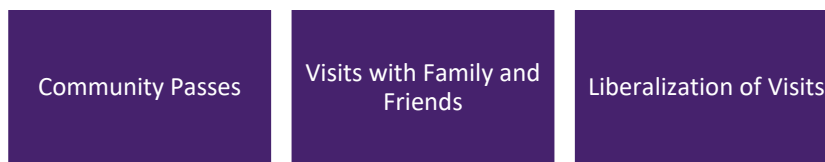
We continue to recommend amending the electronic Needs and Services Plan in DCFS' Provider Management Information System to collect vital document information along with data on barriers, and interventions for youth aged 13 and up, as it currently only collects the information for youth aged 15 and up. Additionally, we emphasized the importance of including an assessment of youths' interest and ability to open a bank account. However, DCFS indicated that they have not yet implemented this change due to resource constraints.

On July 1, 2024, DCFS issued a "For Your Information" document outlining how staff should assist youth in obtaining vital documents, but advises starting this process at age 16. We have requested that this guidance be updated to reflect the legal right of youth to begin working and developing job skills at age 14, as stated in CA Welfare and Institutions Code 16001.9(a), and that the process begin at age 13. DCFS committed to including this information in an updated and re-published "FYI" in the next couple of months.



Family and Social Connections - 21 (14.2%) Requests

In this category, examples of requests included:



There were 21 RFAs about Family and Social Connections, many of which pertained to youth wanting visits and/or greater frequency and length of visits with family members and/or non-relative extended family members (NREFMs). In many of these requests, youth reported that they were waiting for their CSWs to "approve" or "clear" relatives or friends for visits. Maintaining social and familial connections is vital for the well-being and mental health of youth in out-of-home care.

The FYBOR affirms that youth have the right "to visit and contact siblings, family members, and relatives privately, unless prohibited by court order," as well as "to have social contacts with people outside of the foster care system, including, but not limited to, teachers, coaches, religious or spiritual community members, mentors, and friends." As

previously reported, DCFS has a policy requiring background checks and home inspections for family members or friends identified for potential placement. These clearances are sometimes also applied to adults with whom the youth wants to visit. However, such clearances are not legally required for visitation purposes. Requiring these adults to undergo background checks or home assessments sometimes delays the youth's ability to maintain important relationships or results in missed visits with family during holidays and other significant occasions.

For instance, with only two days remaining until the holiday, one 17-year-old youth requested assistance because she wanted to visit with friends and the father of her baby for Thanksgiving. The youth reported she made the request to her CSW two weeks prior, yet had not received a response. Reportedly, this delay was due in part to the CSW being newly assigned and hesitancy by the CSW and STRTP to allow such a visit when the CSW was not very familiar with the youth or her case. DCFS also expressed discomfort in approving a visit over multiple days with a friend they did not know, yet when listing the information they required, they ultimately only wanted the name, address, and phone number of the friend.

While this visit was ultimately approved the evening before Thanksgiving, it demonstrates the lack of clarity around what is legally required for youth to exercise their rights. While DCFS expressed a need to "know" the friend and receive "information," it does not provide clear guidance to youth on what information should be shared, beyond the name, address, and phone number, to help expedite the request.

In this example, the STRTP also could have allowed the youth to go on this visit utilizing the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS), yet refused to make a determination and ceded decision-making authority to DCFS. The law only encourages, rather than requires, STRTPs and caregivers to consult with the CSW about such matters, yet many are hesitant to exercise this authority leading to delays and missed opportunities for youth to make important connections with family and friends.

These types of decisions compound over time and erode youths' ability to develop and maintain strong support systems, which is imperative to their success when they age out of foster care.

We have discussed this issue with DCFS on numerous occasions and their policy section is working to incorporate the laws and guidelines for staff in their Quality of Life in Out of Home Care policy to address the varying practices and understanding among staff.

Community Passes

Some requests (12) in this category involved youth seeking community passes, which is a theme continued from prior periods. Some youth continue to be erroneously told by the placement site or DCFS staff that their CSWs have to approve community passes.

We discussed the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard with agencies and CSWs, including during our presentations at the DCFS Regional Offices' general staff meetings. We emphasized agencies' ability and authority to approve or deny community passes based on their own assessment without DCFS approval, though the law encourages consultation with the CSW. As mentioned above, some agencies expressed hesitation to allow youth to have community passes without CSW approval, further delaying access for youth who should have it based on their circumstances.

As in prior reporting periods, some youth facing barriers in exercising RPPS also encounter challenges in initially gaining community pass privileges due to concerns about responsibility and trustworthiness. Requests for passes often result in extended waiting periods in new placements, as agencies require time for youth to demonstrate responsibility and trustworthiness or want to wait for approval from DCFS, which is not required. The law merely states that agencies are "encouraged to consult" with DCFS.

Our discussions with agencies focused on expediting this assessment process through consultation with the youth's team and building incremental privileges, aiming to issue passes more promptly. One readiness criterion involves youth not leaving placement without permission, but frustration with the inability to engage in activities like going to the store or spending time with friends often leads to unauthorized absences, reinforcing the denial of passes. Implementing processes allowing gradual build-up of community pass privileges for both time and location could reduce unauthorized absenteeism, benefiting many youth.

We continue to collaborate with STRTP management and DCFS staff to ensure a comprehensive understanding of RPPS and the authority to grant community passes. During our advocacy efforts, we continue to search for solutions that maximize youths' ability to exercise their rights.



Education - 19 (12.8%) Requests

In this category, examples of requests included:

Attending School of Origin or New School	Education Rights Holder Information or Change	General Educational Development Testing	School Attendance
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Youth made 19 requests relating to education, which included a variety of topics. Of these, 11 of the requests were from youth wanting to attend their School of Origin (SOO) after their placement changed.

Other requests from this category included wanting to attend a specific school that was not an SOO, needing to know who their Education Rights Holder (ERH) is, needing General Educational Development information and testing, and wanting to attend school even if morning transportation was missed.

With each of these requests, the Ombuds informed youth about their education rights, their ERH, and the related processes and approvals needed to change schools or remain in SOO. We explained the ERH's role and authority over education decisions so they could have informed conversations about their education or school placement. When necessary, the Ombuds contacted youths' attorneys from the Children's Law Center and/or their CSWs to discuss these concerns so that they could also follow up in court hearings or team meetings respectively, to ensure the youths' concerns were considered.

In addition, our work on the above RFAs prompted us to review the amount of school days youth missed when they changed placements. To gather and review this data, we partnered with the Office of Child Protection (OCP) and LACOE to compare the dates youth were placed to the dates they were disenrolled from SOO and re-enrolled in a new school. The sample included 36 youth with current school enrollments and placed in congregate care in October and November 2024. Of those, 28 youth (78%) had a change in school enrollment. We also evaluated the average school days between placement and a new enrollment (11.5 days), as well as the average school days between disenrollment from SOO to enrollment in a new school (19.0 days).

The number of days youth are missing school is alarming, and our office is working with OCP, LACOE, and DCFS to find themes in the reasons for these gaps and delays in order to address them.



Personal Rights - 16 (10.8%) Requests

In this category, examples of requests included:

Hygiene Products and
Haircare of Choice

Clothing Allowance

Being Treated with
Respect

Staff taking youth
belongings

A recurring concern expressed by youth who requested assistance in this area is their treatment by staff/employees at their out-of-home placements. While agencies typically offer trauma-informed care, there were seven reported instances of lapses in these practices. Youth reported incidents where staff made disparaging comments about them, used profanity towards them, or caused physical or emotional harm. Such actions can disrupt the environment and compromise the youths' emotional safety.

Our office reported allegations to the CPH, CCL, and DCFS per established protocols and followed up with agencies to track outcomes. In four (57%) of the seven instances, staff were terminated or resigned during, or as a result of, the investigation. A couple of cases remained under investigation by CCL and/or the CPH. We continue to monitor these cases closely to ensure appropriate resolutions.

Some of the allegations against the staff were found to be inconclusive by CCL and/or DCFS, because there was not always enough evidence to prove the allegations, especially when the only evidence was the youths' statements. However, there was also no reason to doubt the youth's report that they felt they were not being treated with respect by the staff.

In reviewing DCFS records about the above incidents, we also became aware of two additional incidents not reported to us but investigated by DCFS and CCL. One incident found that a staff transported youth while intoxicated. That staff was subsequently terminated, as well as two other staff who were aware and did not intervene. In another incident, a staff person at an agency hit a youth. The agency reported the incident to local police and a report was taken. DCFS also reported that the agency terminated the employee and retrained all their staff.

Other Requests

There were 19 (12.8%) requests that were not related to the FYBOR. Examples of these requests included:

- Request to change their CSW
- Wanting contact with their CSW
- Wanting to move to a lower level of care

In five instances, youth expressed feeling unsupported by their CSWs and sought to change them. While our office lacks the authority to make such changes, we relayed their requests and reasons they felt unsupported. We notified DCFS Public Inquiry, prompting a review by the regional office. Depending on the case, a new CSW may be assigned, or the existing one may receive guidance and coaching to better engage with the youth. A positive relationship between youth and their CSW significantly influences their experience in care, as well as their transition out of care.

Four requests pertained to youth wanting to transition to a lower level of care. While certain youth expressed a general desire to transition out of a STRTP, others had specific homes where they wanted to move, such as resource parents or relatives. We attended some of the youths' CFT meetings at their request to discuss the youth's preferred transition with their team. In other requests, we followed up with members of the youths' teams such as their CSWs and attorneys to ensure the youth received information about their transition plans.

Transitional Housing

Occasionally, we received requests from youth with closed DCFS cases in Transitional Housing Programs overseen by DCFS' Housing Section. These programs house youth ages 18-26 who were formerly in a DCFS placement. When we receive requests from youth in this program, we make every effort to address their concerns as advocates and problem-solvers.

During this reporting period, two youths in closed-case transitional housing programs contacted our office with specific concerns about the physical conditions of their apartments and issues with case management from the agency contracted to provide housing services. Our office worked with DCFS' Housing Division to resolve these issues and ensure the youths' concerns were addressed.

Attachment III lists all the RFAs Received by Type.

Requests Seeking Information Only

There were a few contacts made to our office from individuals seeking information not related to the Ombuds function. For those, we documented the requests, provided an answer, or directed the requester to an appropriate party to address their inquiry. These requests are only noted here, and not included in the statistical data.

Youth Voice

Each youth residing in an STRTP, CTF, or GH has a unique personal experience. Their requests may be reflective of a challenge they are facing in their life, in their current placement, at school, in the child welfare system, or related to something else.

During a few visits, youth requested cell phones through the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) LifeLine program, which is administered by Maximus. This program provides a free smartphone with unlimited voice, text, high-speed data, and hotspot capability to current and former foster youth residing in California.

In response to these requests, we have consistently recommended that DCFS develop a policy or procedure requiring CSWs to assess the appropriateness of a cell phone for youth 13 and older who are eligible for this program. The lack of a formal policy has led to inconsistencies in linking youth under the age of 18 to the program, as access depends on the discretion of their CSW. We believe that CSWs should be required to either refer a youth aged 13 and older in out-of-home care to the cell phone program, document that the youth already has a cell phone, or explain in a documented assessment why a cell phone is not appropriate for the youth at that time.

Regular referrals are crucial, as access to a cell phone allows youth to maintain communication with friends and family, as well as provides a confidential means for reporting any issues or concerns about their placements.

The FYBOR protects youths' right to "make, send, and receive confidential telephone calls and other electronic communications... unless prohibited by a court order." Youth with their own cell phones can easily exercise this right. However, youth without cell phones must make and receive calls through the residential agency's phone, which can compromise their ability to communicate confidentially. Therefore, these RFAs regarding cell phones are critical to ensuring their ability to fully exercise their rights.

Collaboration for Improved Practices

Since Ombuds work is specialized, strengthening partnerships with those in the same field is invaluable. We continued to expand awareness of our Ombuds Program by reaching out to child welfare partners inside and outside the County. We met with individuals from the following agencies to learn and discuss ways to collaborate and better serve youth in STRTPs:

Alliance for Children's Rights	California Alliance of Caregivers	California Community Care Licensing Division	California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson	California Youth Connection
Children's Law Center	Court Appointed Special Advocates Los Angeles	DCFS' CAD, Education Section, Executive Team, ILP, OHCIS/MD, Public Inquiry, Policy Institute, and Training	Department of Youth Development	Education Coordinating Council
LACOE's Assembly Bill 130 and Regional Learning Network Teams	LGBTQ+ Commission	Office of Child Protection	Opportunity Youth Collaborative	Poverty Alleviation
Probation Department	Rize Credit Union	Simply Friends	Strength Based Community Change	Youth Commission

We continued to regularly communicate with the OFCO to address specific or overlapping requests and discuss themes in our work. On a broader scale, we also continued to participate monthly in the United States Ombudsman Association's (USOA) Children and Families Chapter meetings. This forum provides an opportunity to learn about ombuds work with child welfare agencies across the country, and increase knowledge about best

practices, trends, tracking, and reporting, etc., that we consider incorporating into our work. In addition, our office co-hosted the USOA Annual Conference with OFCO which was the largest conference in the history of the organization with over 220 attendees from all over the country, including a few attendees from outside the United States. Participating in and co-hosting this conference allowed us additional opportunities to learn from and connect with other ombuds offices to improve our practices and service to youth.

Our office also continued to facilitate a subgroup of child welfare ombuds from the USOA that conduct in-person outreach to youth, since not all the child welfare ombuds offices conduct outreach visits to youth. This forum allows us to exchange strategies and ideas with other ombuds offices who conduct such outreach, as well as talk through issues we encounter.

Index of Attachments

- Attachment I:** Foster Youth Bill of Rights
Attachment II: Outreach Visits Conducted
Attachment III: Requests for Assistance Received by Type

Acknowledgment

We thank management and staff from the various STRTP, CTF, and GH agencies, schools, the Probation Ombuds, OFCO, DCFS, LACOE, CLC, and other child welfare partners, for their cooperation and assistance in helping us address the needs of youth served by the Ombuds.

If you have any questions or need additional information please call us, or your staff may contact Michelle Lucarelli-Beltran, Ombudsperson, at (213) 342-5755 or via e-mail at mlucarelli-beltran@auditor.lacounty.gov.

OV:CY:RGC:GH:MLB

Attachments (3)

c: Fesia A. Davenport, Chief Executive Officer
Edward Yen, Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Brandon T. Nichols, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Lisa H. Wong, Psy.D., Director, Department of Mental Health
David J. Carroll, Director, Department of Youth Development
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Guillermo Viera Rosa, Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department
Armand Montiel, Interim Executive Director, Commission for Children and Families
Tiara Summers, Executive Director, Youth Commission
Akemi Arakaki, Supervising Judge, Juvenile Division, Los Angeles Superior Court
Luciana Svidler, Director of Policy and Training, Children's Law Center of California
Dawyn R. Harrison, County Counsel
Dennis Smeal, Executive Director, Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc.
Charity Chandler-Cole, Ed.D., Executive Director, CASA of Los Angeles
Special Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Probation Ombudsman
California Office of Foster Care Ombudsperson
Countywide Communications



Personal Rights

You have the right to live in a safe, comfortable home where you are treated with respect and to have:

- enough clothes and healthy food
- clothing, grooming, and hygiene products that respect your culture and ethnicity
- a private place to keep your things
- a phone you can use to make private calls (unless a judge says you cannot)
- a caregiver that has special training on trauma and ways to help you

You have the right to:

- go/not go to religious services and activities of your choice
- participate in cultural, racial, ethnic, personal enrichment, and social activities
- fair and equal access to all available foster care services, placements, care, and benefits

No one can:

- lock you in a room or a building (unless you are in a community treatment facility)
- make you stay in juvenile hall because they can't find you a home
- use law enforcement as a threat or retaliation
- abuse you physically, sexually, emotionally, or exploit you for any reason
- punish you by physically hurting you for any reason
- look through your things unless they have a reasonable or legal reason
- treat you unfairly because of your race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, mental or physical disability, HIV status, or membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe



Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE)

You have rights to protect your SOGIE. You have the right to:

- live in a home or STRTP based on your gender identity
- be called by your chosen name and gender pronouns
- see a doctor or counselor who is gender affirming
- have clothing, grooming, and hygiene products that respect your gender identity and expression
- have a caregiver, social worker/probation officer, and lawyer that have been trained on SOGIE and how to care for LGBTQ+ youth
- keep your SOGIE information private



Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

Are you a member, or could you be a member, of a federally recognized Indian tribe?

You have the right to:

- live in a home or STRTP that maintains the social and cultural standards of your Tribe and tribal community
- live in a home of your relatives or extended family or a home that is licensed, approved, or specified by your Tribe
- live in an Indian foster home that is licensed or approved, or a facility that is approved by your Tribe or an Indian organization that meets your needs
- live in a place that reflects and keeps you connected to the cultural and social standards of your Tribe and/or tribal community
- contact your ICWA advocate and have them attend court
- contact your Tribe, tribal members, and Indian community
- have a social worker/probation officer, and lawyer who is trained in ICWA
- participate in traditional Native American religious practices
- get help becoming a member of an Indian tribe or Alaskan village
- get all the benefits that come from being a member of an Indian tribe or Alaskan village
- be free from discrimination and be recognized for your relationship with an Indian Tribe or Alaskan village
- have protections for your tribal relationship in your case plan



Education

You have school rights. You have the right to:

- go to school every day
- get help with school
- stay at your same school if it's best for you
- enroll right away at a new school
- get partial credits for all classes you were passing if you change schools
- go to after-school activities
- have priority enrollment in pre-school and after-school programs
- have priority enrollment at California State Universities and community colleges
- access information about college and career education programs



Health

You have health rights. You have the right to:

- see a doctor, dentist, eye doctor, or talk to a counselor when you need to
- see a doctor who is gender affirming
- refuse to take any medicines, vitamins, or herbs, and no one can punish you for it
- keep your medical records private
- have the risks/benefits of treatment explained to you in a way that is easy to understand



Mental Health

You have mental health rights too. You have the right to:

- keep your mental health records private
- get gender affirming mental health treatment
- work with your doctor to safely stop taking psychotropic medication
- refuse to take psychotropic medication, and no one can punish you for it
- know about your diagnosis and understand treatment options
- get help with an alcohol or drug problem without permission
- get mental health services in a place that meets your needs
- if you are 12 years or older, choose your own doctor or counselor and make decisions about your mental health treatment



Sexual & Reproductive Health

You have sexual health rights too. You have the right to:

- get information about your sexual health in a way that you understand
- use or refuse services for birth control, condoms, other types of protection, and pregnancy care, including abortion, without telling an adult
- get healthcare services for sexual assault without telling an adult
- if you are 12 years or older, choose your own doctor or counselor and make decisions about preventing, testing, or treating STIs and HIV without permission from any adult



Case Plan

You have the right to:

- help create your case plan
- have a case plan within 60 days of being in foster care
- have your case plan updated at least every 6 months
- be told of any changes to your case plan
- get a copy of it if you are age 10 and older
- have your Tribe involved in case plan decisions

Your case plan will have:

- health and education plans
- the best place for you to live
- the services you need
- a long-term plan for where you will live
- gender-affirming healthcare plans
- plans for visitation with your parents and siblings
- transition to independent living plan (TILP), if you are 16 or older



Court

You have rights at court too. You have the right to:

- be told about court hearings in writing
- go to court and talk to the judge
- tell the judge what you want to have happen in your case
- tell the judge how you feel about your psychotropic medications
- ask the judge for visits with your siblings
- request a hearing if you feel like your lawyer is not acting in your best interest
- ask for people to be in the courtroom or ask for people to leave
- keep your court records private (unless the law says otherwise)
- tell the judge how you feel about your family, lawyer, and social worker/probation officer
- a lawyer, separate from your parents and the county

Your lawyer must:

- keep what you tell them private
- have special training on ICWA and SOGIE
- make sure you are safe and have the services and supports you need
- tell the judge what you want to have happen
- answer questions you have about court, foster care, and other laws



Children and Family Team (CFT)

You have the right to a CFT. You have the right to:

- request CFT meetings
- have support people at your CFT meeting
- talk about your needs in the CFT meeting
- a CFT meeting within 60 days of entering foster care
- a CFT meeting every 6 months
- a CFT meeting at least every 90 days if you are in an STRTP or in a therapeutic foster home
- a CFT meeting at least every 90 days if you are getting certain types of services
- a CFT meeting when any changes are going to be made to your case plan



Family and Social Connections

You have the right to:

- visit and contact your parents, siblings, and other family members in private (unless a judge says you cannot)
- contact people who are not in the foster care system (like friends, church members, teachers, and others), unless a judge says you cannot



Preparing for Adulthood and Money Management

You have the right to do some things on your own. You have the right to:

- have an allowance
- your own bank account (unless your case plan says you cannot)
- learn job skills for your age
- work (unless the law says you are too young)
- earn, save, and manage your money (unless your case plan says you cannot)
- go to Independent Living Program (if you are old enough)
- beginning at age 14, get a credit report every year from 3 major reporting agencies and have help fixing any issues



Communications

You have the right to:

- use a phone to make and get confidential (private) calls
- use a computer and the internet
- privately use email, text messages, or other electronic communication
- send and receive unopened mail

These rights can be changed if there is a safety concern. Only a judge can take these away or stop you from communicating with certain people.

You have the right to contact the following people in private, and no one can stop you or punish you for speaking with them:

- your social worker/probation officer
- your lawyer
- service providers
- foster youth advocates and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)
- Education Rights Holder
- Tribe (if you have one)
- Office of Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO)
- Community Care Licensing Division (CCL)



Records

You have the right to see and get a free copy of the following until you are 26:

- medical records
- child welfare records
- juvenile court records
- educational records

LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPs
OUTREACH VISITS

July 1 through December 31, 2024

Agency Visited	NC	JO	SCH	Site Location(s) Visited
1st Supervisorial District				12
Pacific Horizon	X			•Montebello
Eggleston Youth Center ¹				•Baldwin Park (2)•Pomona
Garces Residential Care				•Claremont
Hillsides Home for Children				•Los Angeles
Hope House	X			•El Monte (2)
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn				•Walnut
San Gabriel Childen's Center				•Azusa (2)
St. Anne's Family Services ¹				•Los Angeles
2nd Supervisorial District				22
Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems				•Los Angeles (4)
Dream Home Care, Inc.				•Carson (2)
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care				•Carson •Gardena •Hawthorne
Humanistic Foundation, Inc. dba New Concept ¹				•Los Angeles
I am Safe ²	X			•Los Angeles
Mindful Growth Foundation				•Los Angeles (3)
One Care ¹	X			•Compton
Virtuous Woman, Inc./Project Destiny Home of Hope				•Los Angeles (2)
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services STRTP				•Los Angeles
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services Community Treatment Facility				•Los Angeles
Wayfinder Family Services ²	X			•Los Angeles (3)
3rd Supervisorial District				5
Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall ¹				•Sylmar
BNI Treatment	X			•Agoura Hills
Optimist Boys Home & Ranch, Inc. STRTP ¹				•Woodland Hills
Optimist Boys Home & Ranch, Inc. TSC ¹				•Woodland Hills
Rancho San Antonio				•Chatsworth
4th Supervisorial District				5
Dream Home Care, Inc.				•Torrance
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care				•Long Beach
Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc.				•San Pedro •Torrance
Starview Adolescent Center Community Treatment Facility				•Torrance
5th Supervisorial District				17
Anything is Possible				•Palmdale
Blair Middle School			X	•Pasadena
Bourne, Inc.				•Altadena •Pasadena
Five Acres STRTP				•Altadena (2) •Pasadena
Five Acres TSC				•Altadena (2)
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care				•Lancaster (3)
Hathaway-Sycamores Child & Family Services dba The Sycamores				•Altadena
Hillsides Home for Children GH	X			•Pasadena
McKinley Children's Center/McKinley Boys Home ¹		X		•San Dimas
Pasadena High School			X	•Pasadena
Zoe International dba Zoe Home for Youth				•Acton

Agency Visited		NC	JO	SCH	Site Location(s) Visited
Out of County	County				17
Mary's Shelter dba Mary's Path	Orange				•Santa Ana (2)
Alpha Connection	San Bernardino	X			•Apple Valley (4)
Blissful Living	San Bernardino	X			•Upland
Boys Republic	San Bernardino				•Chino
Eggleston Youth Center	San Bernardino				•Upland
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services	San Bernardino				•Rancho Cucamonga •Upland
Fred Finch Youth Center	San Diego				•Lemon Grove
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn	San Bernardino				•Chino
Rite of Passage	Orange				•Costa Mesa
Shirley's Home	San Bernardino	X			•Ontario
Trinity Youth Services	San Bernardino				• Apple Valley •Yucaipa

TOTAL **78**

Footnotes:

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency/Regional Center Providers

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson

SCH = School Outreach Visit

¹ Visited twice or more

² Includes distribution of materials even if youth unavailable to meet/non-verbal

LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPs
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY TYPE

July 1 through December 31, 2024

Foster Youth Bill of Rights (FYBOR)

	1. Personal Rights	16
	2. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE)	0
	3. Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)	0
	4. Education	19
	5. Health	0
	6. Mental Health	0
	7. Sexual & Reproductive Health	0
	8. Case Plan	5
	9. Court	2
	10. Children and Family Team (CFT)	4
	11. Family and Social Connections	21
	12. Preparing for Adulthood and Money Management	53
	13. Communications	5
	14. Records	4
	FYBoRs Total	128
	15. Other	19
	Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson	148

**Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.*