

Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

Program Overview	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families monitors compliance with the law when entities—including certain state agencies, county social service agencies, or district courts—make child protection and out-of-home placement decisions for children of color. The office reviews complaints about child protection decisions and may conduct investigations into entities' decisions or actions described in a given complaint. In its effort to improve child protection outcomes, the office has three ombudspersons, each of whom works with one of the following: African American families, Asian Pacific families, or Spanish-speaking families.
Evaluation Questions	How effectively has the Office of Ombudsperson for Families fulfilled its statutory duties? How well has the office handled complaints?
State Resources <i>Low</i>	The Legislature appropriated \$845,000 to the Office of Ombudsperson for Families for Fiscal Year 2025.
State Control <i>High</i>	Minnesota law establishes the Office of Ombudsperson for Families and defines the office's powers and duties. The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage, the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, and the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (each created by state law) appoint the ombudsperson for their respective communities.
Impact <i>Medium-High</i>	In calendar year 2022, 32,047 children were allegedly victims of maltreatment, and 11,235 children were in out-of-home placements. Children of color in Minnesota continue to be disproportionately represented in the child protection system. The Office of Ombudsperson for Families can play an important role in holding agencies accountable and protecting the interests of families of color. The office received 540 complaints or inquiries and conducted 33 investigations in calendar year 2023.
Timeliness <i>Medium</i>	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families has retained similar duties and powers under state law since it was established in 1991. However, there does not appear to be a pressing need to evaluate the office at this time.
Feasibility <i>Medium</i>	OLA could evaluate the Office of Ombudsperson for Families using standard evaluation methods, such as interviews and document reviews. OLA may need to use translation services to communicate with some families who have made complaints to the office.
Balance <i>High</i>	OLA has never evaluated the Office of Ombudsperson for Families. OLA's last financial audit of the office occurred in 2003.
Discussion	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families can help ensure that agencies are following child protection laws by monitoring agency actions, conducting investigations, and making recommendations. This is important work that OLA has never evaluated.