
Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Program Evaluation Description

July 2025

BACKGROUND

When there are concerns about a child’s welfare, the government may step in to help protect the child’s safety. Government interventions may include connecting the child’s family with services or removing the child from the care of their parent(s). Children across Minnesota are involved in the child protection system; however, children of color are over-represented in the system.

Established by the Legislature in 1991, the Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF) works to ensure that families of color are treated fairly and appropriately in issues of child protection and placement. The office has three ombudspersons, each of whom works with one of the following communities: African and African-American families, Asian-Pacific families, or Spanish-speaking families. Statutes establish community-specific boards that are responsible for advising and assisting the ombudspersons in fulfilling their duties.

The ombudspersons are responsible for monitoring whether various entities—such as certain state agencies, courts, and county social service agencies—comply with child protection and placement laws as they affect children of color. The ombudspersons also may address complaints about matters pertaining to child protection or placement for children of color, and they may make recommendations to address identified issues.

Statutes also direct OBFF to work with local courts. For example, OBFF is to help ensure that certain individuals involved in child protection are trained in cultural diversity and that court advocates include experts from the appropriate communities.

EVALUATION ISSUES

1. To what extent has the Office of Ombudsperson for Families fulfilled its statutory duties?
2. How well does the Office of Ombudsperson for Families address complaints?

DISCUSSION

For this evaluation, we will review statutes to understand OBFF duties, expectations, and oversight. We will then assess how the office’s efforts align with direction in law. In addition, we will compare these aspects of the office to best practices, as applicable, and to a selection of other independent state ombudsperson offices in Minnesota.

To assess the extent to which the office has fulfilled its statutory duties and addressed complaints, we will seek the perspectives of stakeholders who work with the ombudspersons, such as through taskforce or board membership. We will also gather the perspectives of key stakeholders, including individuals and community-based organizations, involved in child protection and child welfare in Minnesota. We will ask these stakeholders about their perceptions of OBFF’s duties and efforts.

To evaluate OBFF’s efforts to address complaints, we will review a small sample of recent complaints. Doing so will help us better understand and assess complaint-related decisions and actions.

This evaluation is scheduled to be completed in early 2026. For additional information, contact Caitlin Badger, evaluation manager, at 651-297-1917 or Caitlin.Badger@state.mn.us.