

# Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Program Evaluation  
Released January 29, 2026

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## Key Findings

Individuals expressed need for an office like OBFF

- Broad duties in law, relatively limited resources
- Do not fulfill all required duties
  - Spending time on activities that are not required
- Office's impact is unclear
- Significant issues with complaint handling
- Inadequate oversight and accountability

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State of Minnesota  
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## Ombudsperson Role

- Help ensure that government agencies respect citizens' rights
- Typically, ombudspersons address complaints



Receive Complaint



Investigate Complaint

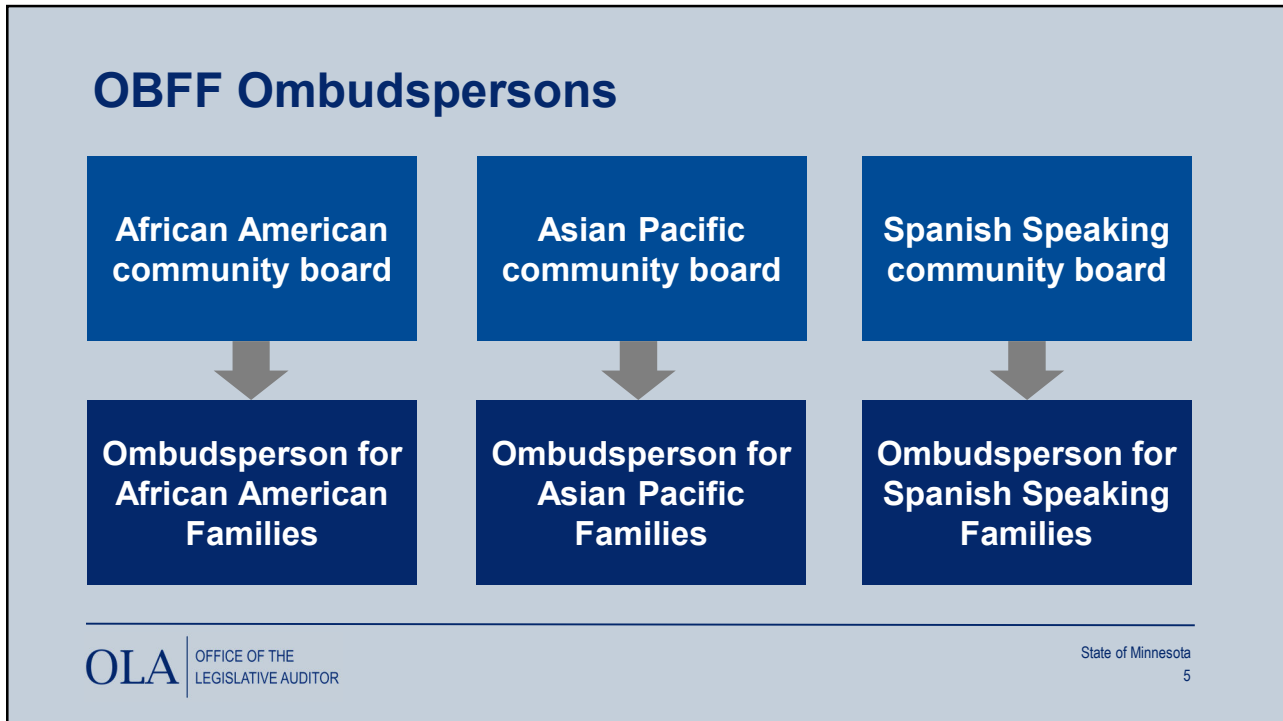


Make Recommendations

## OBFF Overview

Established to ensure fair and appropriate treatment of children and families of color in child protection

African American or Hispanic children are **2 times** more likely than white children to be in out-of-home care  
—DCYF, 2025



- ### OBFF Duties in Law
- OBFF must:**
    - Monitor “agency” compliance with all child protection laws
    - Work with state courts
  - OBFF may:**
    - Investigate decisions, acts, and other matters of an agency, program, or facility providing protection or placement services
- OLA OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR State of Minnesota 6

## Broad Duties

Duties in law are broad (p. 7)

**OBFF must:** Monitor **agency** compliance with all child protection laws

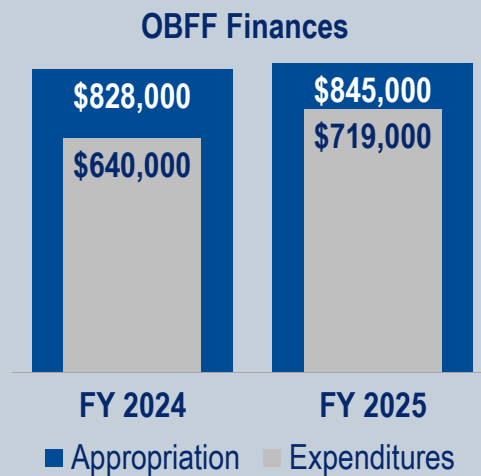
**Agency:**

- Individual, service, or program providing services
- District courts or a county social service agency
- DHS
- MDH

## Staffing and Funding

Current OBFF Staff (7 FTE):

- 3 Ombudspersons
- Deputy Ombudsperson
- Investigator
- Intake Specialist
- Office Manager



## OBFF Duties in Law

The ombudspersons:

- Did not fulfill all duties required by law
- Spent time on activities that are not required (pp. 26–27)
  - Public policy development
  - Workgroups and taskforces
  - Investigations

## OBFF Impact

OBFF's impact in recent years is unclear

Key accomplishments according to OBFF:

- Child protection-related accomplishments:
  - Policy changes
  - Workgroups
- Administrative activities
  - Revise letterhead
  - Update website

## OBFF Impact

- Lack of familiarity with OBFF and its work (pp. 29–30)
- Individuals expressed interest in expanding OBFF’s duties in law
- Individuals thought OBFF should both:
  - Assist individual families
  - Seek broader changes to child protection system (pp. 28–29)



I have seen [the ombudsperson] engage very actively in workgroups. ... Beyond this, it is unclear how the office is fulfilling its statutory duties.

— Survey respondent

## Recommendations

The Legislature should:

- Amend statutes, as necessary, to ensure that OBFF’s duties align with the Legislature’s policy priorities
- Align those duties with the office’s resources

OBFF should:

- Fulfill all duties required by law

## Complaint Handling

- Significant deficiencies in complaint-related documentation and data posed issues
- OBFF’s current complaint handling activities are limited
  - *How* they investigate
  - *What* they investigate

OBFF reported conducting **33** complaint investigations in 2023 — *OBFF, 2024*

## Complaint Handling

OBFF:

- Did not adequately document complaint handling work
- Did not maintain adequate data on complaint handling
- Has few complaint handling policies or procedures
- Did not handle complaints consistently
- Did not follow complaint handling best practices

\* See pp. 20–21 and p. 24 for recommendations regarding OBFF’s complaint handling

## Community Boards

- Primary oversight and accountability entities
- Law requires the boards to advise the ombudspersons



## Community Boards

Boards have not provided adequate oversight

- Most do not meet in accordance with law
  - Attendance issues
- Rarely fulfill duties in law

A blue box on the left contains the text 'Joint Board'. To its right, a light gray box contains a list of requirements for the Joint Board.

- Must meet 4 times per year
- 15 members, by law
- Must “advise the ombudspersons on overall policies, plans, protocols, and programs for the office”

## Recommendations

OBFF's boards should:

- Meet in accordance with law
- Ensure consistent attendance among members
- Fulfill duties as required by law

*\* See pp. 48–49 for recommendations regarding OBFF's community boards*

## Organizational Structure

Lacks clear lines of authority and accountability

- OBFF has no designated leader
- Ombudspersons share responsibilities for:
  - Managing office operations and planning
  - Human resources
  - Budgeting
- Structure is unique among ombudsperson offices we reviewed

## Recommendation

Legislature should amend law to establish a single leader of OBFF

***Office of Ombudsperson for Families***

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