

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Mental Health Ombudsman

January 2024 - December 2024



MISSION, VISION AND STANDARDS



Mission

The Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman helps promote and protect the health, wellbeing, and rights of consumers in Mental Health Facilities, State Hospitals, and Behavioral Health Programs in West Virginia.

Vision

The Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman, through independent, impartial, and confidential investigations, envisions to help consumers find a resolution to their complaints through accountability, communication, understanding, and kindness.

Standards

The Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman follows the four defined standards set forth by the United States Ombudsman Association.

Independence

The Ombudsman's office, in structure, function, and appearance, should be free from outside control or influence. This standard enables the Ombudsman to function as an impartial and critical entity that reports findings and makes recommendations based solely on a review of facts and law, in the light of reason and fairness.

Impartiality

The Ombudsman should receive and review each complaint in an objective and fair manner, free from bias, and treat all parties without favor or prejudice. This standard instills confidence in the public and agencies that complaints will receive a fair review and encourages all parties to accept the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations.

Confidentiality

The Ombudsman should have the privilege and discretion to keep confidential or release any information related to a complaint or investigation. This standard balances the need to protect sensitive information so that a complainant can come forward, and witnesses and subjects can speak openly, with the need to disclose information as a part of an investigation or public report.

Credible Review Process

The Ombudsman should perform his or her responsibilities in a manner that engenders respect and confidence and be accessible to all potential complainants. This standard is necessary for the work of the Ombudsman to have value and to be accepted by all parties to a complaint.

■ Patient Grievance Appeals ■ Public Requests



During 2024, the Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman responded to a total of 989 contacts with clients, including 428 patient grievance appeals from state hospitals and 561 public requests for assistance. The growing volume of contacts reflects the Ombudsman's growing role as a trusted and credible resource and demonstrates the Office of Inspector General's commitment to addressing the needs of those it serves.

STATE HOSPITAL GRIEVANCE APPEALS



The chart below reflects the number of patient grievance appeals received from each State Hospital for the past five years. This year saw a 145% increase in patient grievance appeals to the Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman. Efforts that have contributed to increased patient grievance appeals include distribution of educational materials on patient units of the facilities, informing patients about their rights to file an appeal, and collaborating with advocates working within the facilities to further support and assist patients.

TOTAL APPEALS					
Facility	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sharpe	0	0	6	137	383
Bateman	0	0	0	38	45
Total	0	0	6	175	428

The chart below shows the number of patient grievance appeals received each month and quarter throughout calendar year 2024.

2024											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
14	24	60	16	63	68	39	74	22	25	11	12
Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3			Quarter 4		
98			147			135			48		

STATE HOSPITAL GRIEVANCE APPEALS



Patient grievance appeals are categorized into 12 different themes described below. This categorization better helps the patient understand their grievance and assists all parties in responding to the grievance or appeal.

Categories of Grievances	
Term	Definition
Abuse/Neglect	Defined in W. Va. Code R. §64-59-1, <i>et seq.</i>
Communication	Includes sending and receiving mail, phone use, and visitation.
Discharge/Transfer	Patient wants to leave the hospital.
Environment	Includes temperature and weather-related complaints.
Exercise	Patient not receiving outdoor, recreation, or music time.
Food	Issues with receiving food or the dietary department.
Items	Patient not receiving clothing, canteen, or other items.
Living area	Patient not happy with bedroom, bathroom, or unit area.
Other Patients	Problem with another patient.
Rights	Related to Patient's Rights by law that may be violated.
Staff/Doctors	Includes changing physicians, medication, or a medical decision.
Treatment Team/Groups	Issues in groups or doesn't like treatment team decision.

2024 Total Appeals	
Abuse/Neglect	298
Communication	85
Discharge/Transfer	62
Environment	92
Exercise	64
Food	35
Items	53
Living Area	51
Other Patients	117
Rights	201
Staff/Doctors	248
Treatment Team / Groups	176

Total Average Appeal Response Rate	
Year to Date	1.8 Days

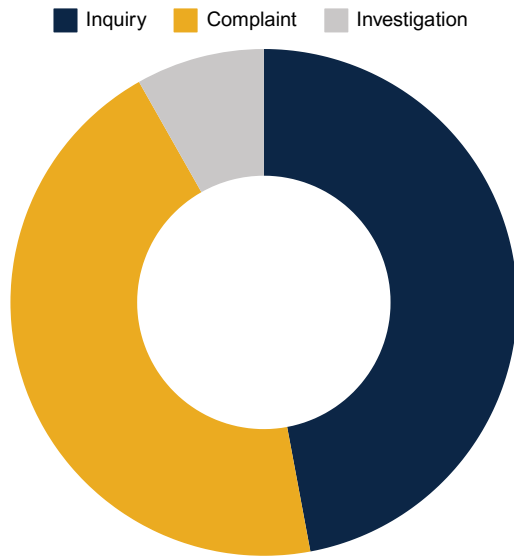
Result of Appeals YTD	
Approved	130
Denied	298

To the left is a breakdown of all patient grievance appeals by theme, with patients selecting the themes themselves. Some grievance appeals may fall under multiple themes. The most common themes are abuse/neglect, patient rights, and staff/doctors. On average, patient grievance appeals were resolved within 1.8 days during 2024. These appeals led to 130 approvals and 298 denials.

PUBLIC REQUESTS



2024 Contacts by Category



The Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman received a total of 561 public requests. Public requests are categorized into three types: inquiries, complaints, and investigations.

Inquiries: Inquiries involve providing education, context, and referrals to other entities, people, or resources that do not require follow-up.

Complaints: Complaints involve interactions with four or fewer contacts, facilitating communications.

Investigations: Investigations involve interaction with five or more contacts, and may require non-routine, systemic, or more intensive/on-site review.

Request Count by Month and Quarter for 2024

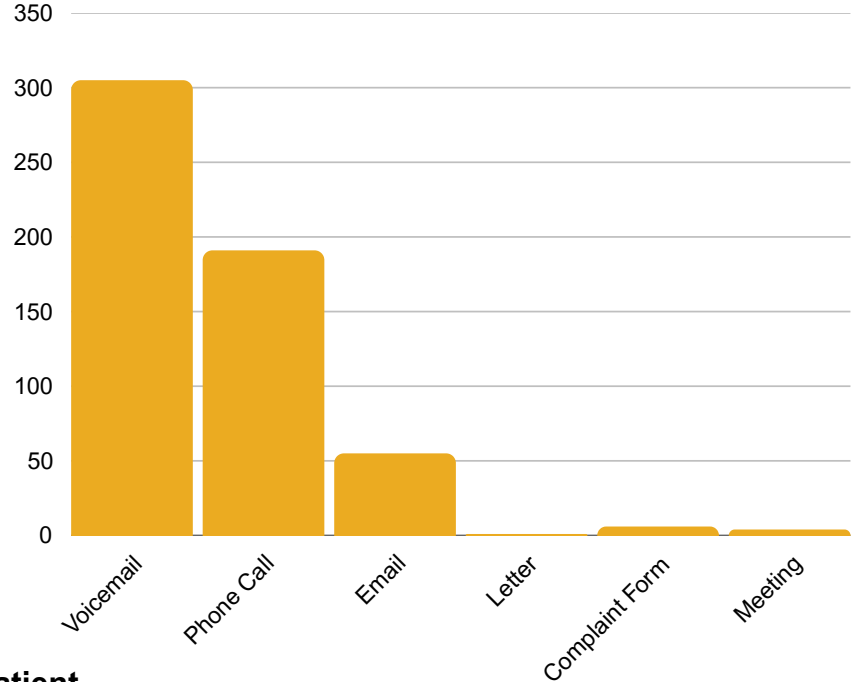
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	8	16	15	48	84	82	92	99	45	37	34
Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3			Quarter 4		
26			147			273			116		

PUBLIC REQUESTS

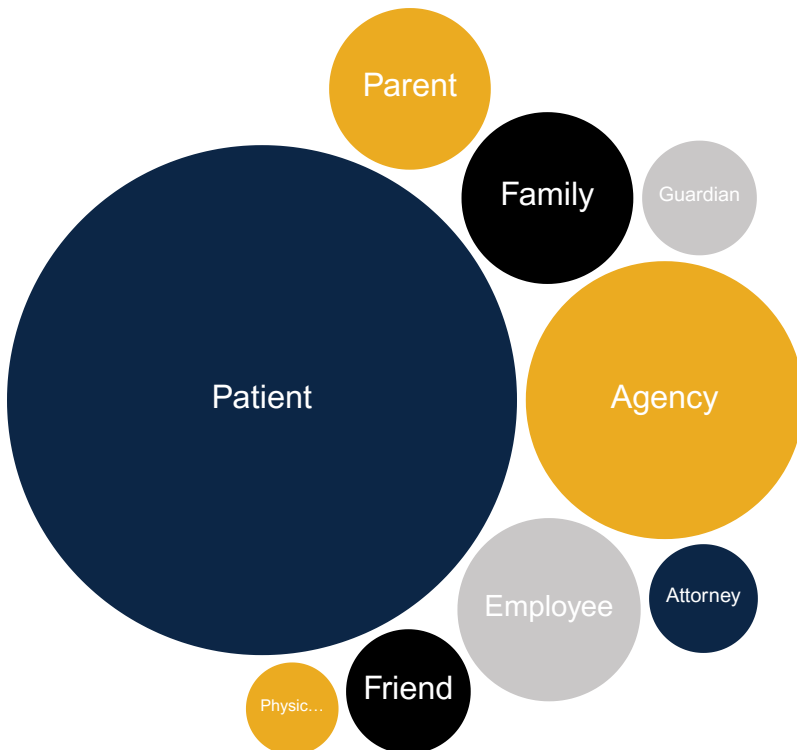


Public requests are able to be made with the Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman in a variety of ways including, phone calls, email, online complaint form, letter, or during outreach meetings. During 2024, the most popular method of receiving public requests is through phone calls and voicemail messages.

2024 Contacts by Method



2024 Contacts by Relationship to Patient



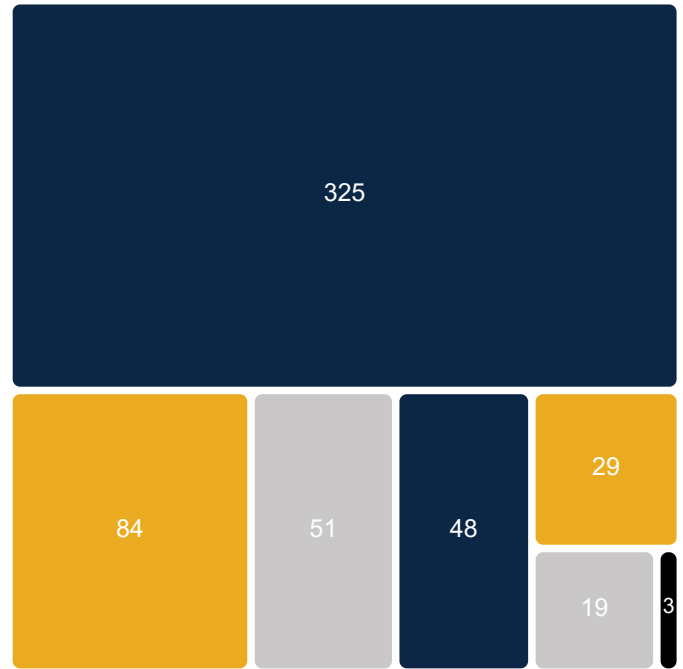
Public requests may be made by anyone. The majority of public requests come from patients themselves at Mental Health Facilities, State Hospitals, and Behavioral Health Programs.

PUBLIC REQUESTS

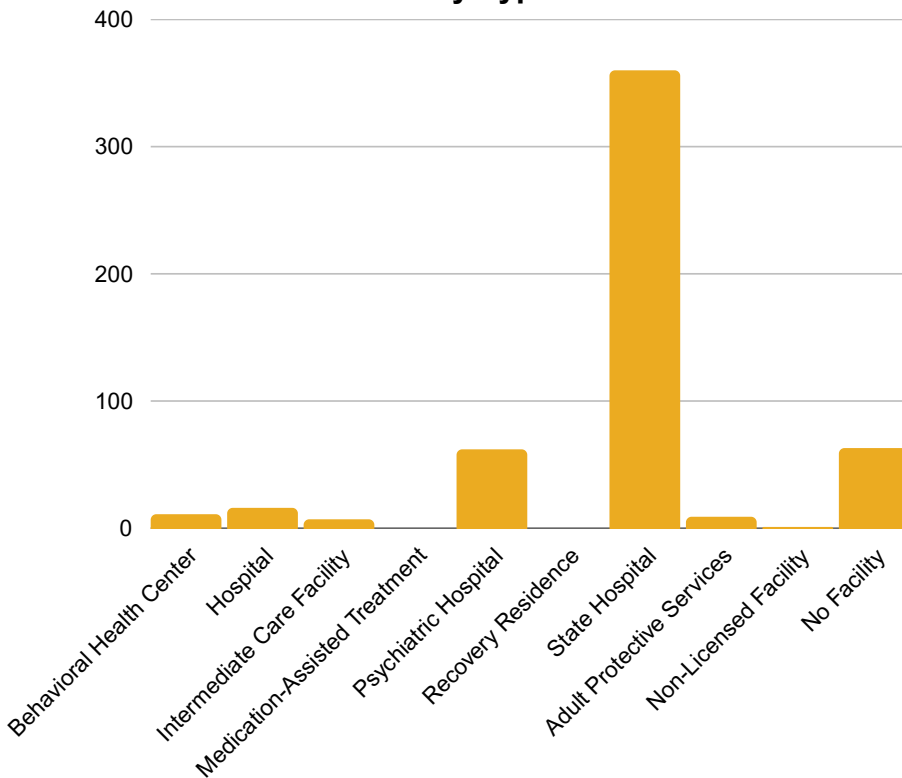


Public Requests by Theme

Public requests are also categorized by theme. During 2024, the Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman received public requests for the following themes: 325, patient request, 84 medical treatment, 51 communication, 48 abuse/neglect, 29 patient rights, 19 mental hygiene, and 3 employee action.



Facility Type



The Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman's scope includes Mental Health Facilities, State Hospitals, and Behavioral Health Programs, which can include various different facility types. During 2024, public requests covered the facility types as shown to the left.

THANK YOU



Contact Us

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