

# FIRST QUARTER REPORT

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**Foster Care Ombudsman**

July 2024 - September 2024





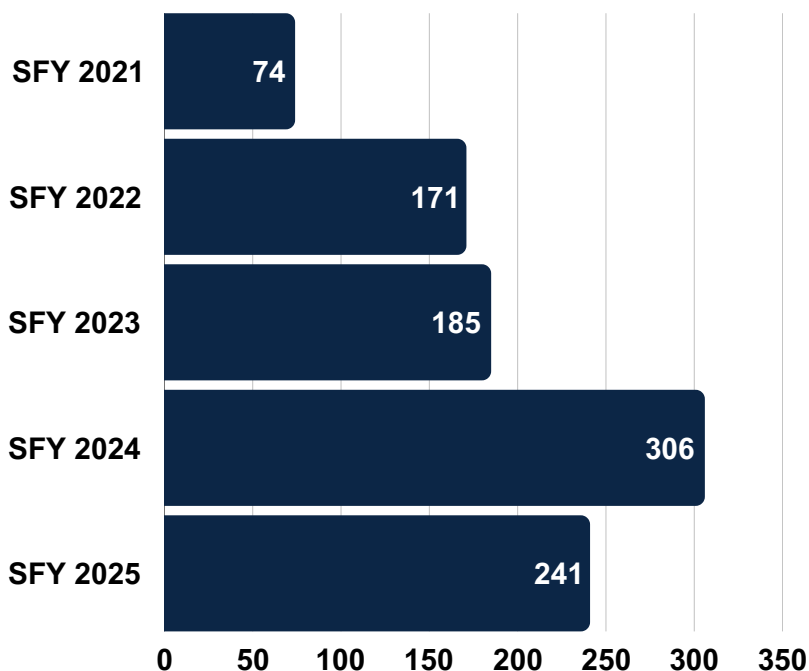
The Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO) division operates under the Office of Inspector General. Its mission is to receive and investigate concerns and complaints from foster children, foster parents, kinship caregivers, and other stakeholders regarding the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Based on its findings, the FCO makes recommendations for systemic reform.

### Complainant Count by Month and Quarter

In the first quarter of the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025, the FCO received requests for assistance from 241 individual complainants. The data below reflects the number of complainants by month and quarter for SFY 2025. Unless otherwise specified, the complaint data in this report pertains to complaints that were closed and completed as of September 30, 2024.

Client Count by Month and Quarter SFY 2025												
2024						2025						
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	SFY End Running Total
81	95	65	114	89	83							
Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3			Quarter 4			Total
241												241

### First Quarter Contacts Per SFY



The bar chart on the left compares the number of individuals who received assistance during the first quarter of each SFY. In both SFY 2024 and 2025, the FCO division exhibited in several events: the Student Success Summit in July, Youth Services System annual Celebrate Youth Festival in August, and Handle with Care conference in September 2023.

Additionally, in SFY 2024 there was a presentation for county school district in the northern region, several direct referrals from the legislature, and three media reports concerning abuse and neglect. These factors may have contributed to an increase in call volume to the FCO.



### Complaint Count by Complaint Theme

The FCO categorizes requests for assistance into several groups based on the type of complaint, the level of intervention required, and the resolution achieved. Complaints that fall into the "Not Applicable" category usually involve situations where the complainant could not be contacted after their initial request for assistance, or where the complainant withdrew their case after reaching a resolution, prior to the Ombudsman's investigation or involvement.

When individuals contact the FCO, they often submit multiple complaints. In this quarter, the FCO division received assistance requests from 241 individual complainants. However, a total of 389 specific complaints were actually investigated by the FCO division, categorized under the primary, secondary, or tertiary complaint themes.

Complaint Count by Complaint Theme		
Complaint Theme	Q1	Percent
Action/Inaction of Agency/Employee	66	17.0%
Decision of Agency Employee	25	6.4%
Financial Issue/Reimbursement	31	8.0%
Information and/or Referral (Education)	49	12.6%
Lack of Communication	72	18.5%
Placement of Children	72	18.5%
Policy/Regulation Issue	18	4.6%
Removal of Children	16	4.1%
Rude/Unfair Treatment	22	5.7%
Threat/Retaliatory Treatment	8	2.1%
Not Applicable	10	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Complaint Count by Closure Type

The FCO has effectively addressed all assistance requests, organizing them based on the type of resolution achieved. The information provided on the right outlines the characteristics of complaints at the time they were closed. Complaints that involved intervention or investigation by the FCO are classified as either substantiated or unsubstantiated.

This quarter, the FCO substantiated 69 out of the 389 complaints reviewed. Cases may be substantiated if there are significant delays in the child's case processing and procedures, or if there is a deviation from applicable policies, procedures, or laws.

Finally, the three cases classified as "Declined by the FCO" are in accordance with the W. Va. Code §16B-16-2(c). The FCO may decline to take on various cases when they have already conducted thorough investigations into similar cases, and there is no new information available to alter the original case determination.

Complaint Count by Closure Type		
Closure	Q1	Percent
Declined by FCO	3	0.8%
Information & Referral (Education)	119	30.6%
Research Only	0	0%
<b>Substantiated</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>17.8%</b>
Unable to Contact	21	5.4%
Unable to Determine Substantiation due to Lack of Information	6	1.5%
Unsubstantiated	161	41.4%
Withdrawn by Complainant	10	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>100%</b>



### **Complainant Count by the Bureau for Social Services (BSS) Program**

The Complainant Count by BSS Program data shows the number of complaints related to specific BSS programs. Complaints categorized as "Not Applicable" involve issues that do not pertain to BSS. In future reports, the FCO division plans to introduce more detailed categories to better capture additional complaints within this dataset. For instance, the three complaints classified as Non-BSS complaints include one regarding a Child Placing Agency and another regarding a child who was not in BSS custody.

### **Complainant Count By Bureau for Social Services (BSS) Case County**

The Foster Care Ombudsman gathers data during the intake process, which includes information about the complainant's county. Additionally, data is collected on the case county, which refers to the county where the child's Bureau of Social Services (BSS) case is based. When analyzing the total number of complaints by county, it is crucial to recognize that each county has unique characteristics, including its population, demographics, and the number of child abuse and neglect petitions filed.

These five counties included in this quarterly report account for 35% of the overall cases and investigations handled by the FCO division. These counties with the highest complaint numbers this quarter do not necessarily indicate systemic issues.

<b>Complainant Case Count by BSS Program</b>		
<b>Bureau for Social Services Program</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Adoption	6	2.5%
Child Protective Services	178	73.9%
Homefinding	17	7.1%
Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children	7	2.9%
Institutional Investigative Unit	4	1.7%
Legal Guardianship	4	1.7%
Post-Adoption	7	2.9%
Youth Services	5	2.1%
Centralized Intake (Abuse & Neglect Hotline)	0	0%
Not Applicable	10	4.1%
Non-BSS	3	1.24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: The federal Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children regulates the placement of children in other states. The Institutional Investigative Unit within BSS is responsible for investigating cases of child abuse and neglect in residential facilities, schools, and foster homes.

<b>Counties with Highest Complaint Count</b>		
<b>County</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Kanawha	33	13.7%
Marion	16	6.6%
Mercer	13	5.4%
Cabell	11	4.6%
Wood	11	4.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>34.9%</b>



This data may represent past or ongoing outreach efforts from the FCO division, which could have enhanced educational awareness about the FCO's role and functions within that county. As a result, this may have led to an increase in the number of complaints filed by stakeholders or families in those areas.

The numbers listed below indicate the number of cases handled by the FCO division from each county during this quarter, presented in alphabetical order.





Complaint Count by BSS Case County		
County	Q1	Percent
Barbour	3	1.20%
Berkeley	5	2.10%
Boone	3	1.20%
Braxton	2	0.80%
Brooke	0	0%
Cabell	11	4.60%
Calhoun	1	0.40%
Clay	2	0.80%
Doddridge	1	0.40%
Fayette	9	3.70%
Gilmer	3	1.20%
Grant	0	0%
Greenbrier	3	1.20%
Hampshire	4	1.70%
Hancock	2	0.80%
Hardy	0	0%
Harrison	8	3.30%
Jackson	4	1.70%
Jefferson	8	3.30%
Kanawha	33	13.70%
Lewis	7	3.00%
Lincoln	1	0.40%
Logan	4	1.70%
Marion	16	6.60%
Marshall	0	0%
Mason	2	0.80%
McDowell	2	0.80%
Mercer	13	5.40%
Mineral	0	0%

Complaint Count by BSS Case County		
County	Q1	Percent
Mingo	5	2.10%
Monongalia	6	2.50%
Monroe	1	0.04%
Morgan	0	0%
Nicholas	9	3.70%
Ohio	2	0.80%
Pendleton	0	0%
Pleasants	0	0%
Pocahontas	2	0.80%
Preston	9	3.70%
Putnam	6	2.50%
Raleigh	1	0.40%
Randolph	6	2.50%
Ritchie	4	1.70%
Roane	2	0.80%
Summers	2	0.80%
Taylor	7	2.90%
Tucker	1	0.40%
Tyler	1	0.40%
Upshur	2	0.80%
Wayne	2	0.80%
Webster	1	0.40%
Wetzel	4	1.70%
Wirt	0	0%
Wood	11	4.60%
Wyoming	1	0.40%
Not Applicable	7	2.90%
Out of State	2	0.80%
Statewide	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100%</b>

# THANK YOU



## Contact Us

-  304-558-1117
-  Request for Assistance Form
-  FosterCareOmbudsman@wv.gov
-  OIG Foster Care Ombudsman