

FOURTH QUARTER REPORT

Foster Care Ombudsman

April 2024 - June 2024





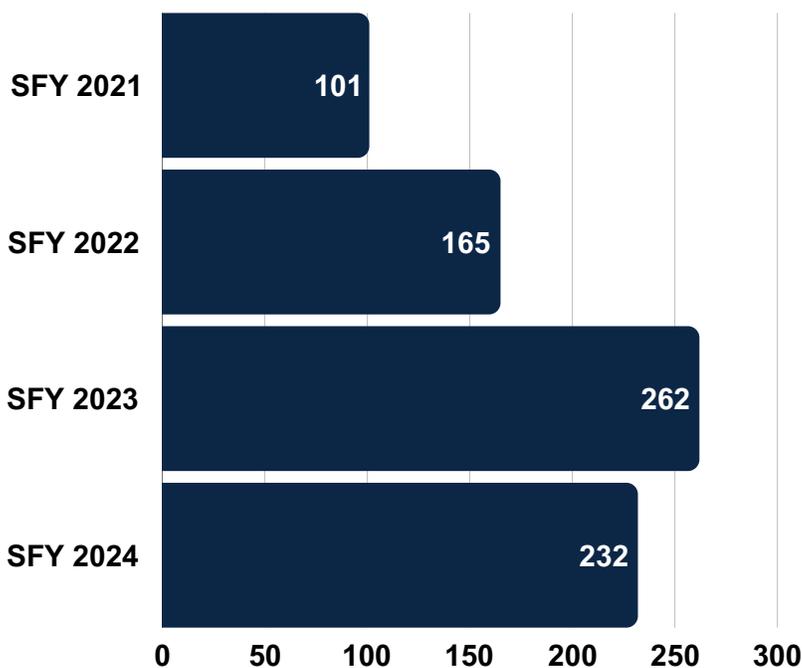
The Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO) division operates under the Office of Inspector General. Its mission is to receive and investigate concerns and complaints from foster children, foster parents, kinship caregivers, and other stakeholders regarding the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Based on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

Complainant Count by Month and Quarter

-In the third quarter of the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024, the FCO received requests for assistance from 232 individual complainants. The data below reflects the number of complainants by month and quarter for SFY 2024. Unless otherwise specified, the complaint data in this report pertains to complaints that were closed and completed as of June 30, 2024.

Complainant Count by Month and Quarter SFY 2024												
2023						2024						
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	SFY End Running Total
93	82	131	101	73	68	72	99	106	69	81	82	1057
Quarter 1			Quarter 2			Quarter 3			Quarter 4			Total
306			242			277			232			1057

Fourth Quarter Contacts Per SFY



The bar chart on the left compares the number of individuals who received assistance during the fourth quarter of each SFY. There has been a steady increase in the number of individuals receiving assistance each year.

The fourth quarter for SFY 2023 denotes a slight increase above this quarter's numbers. This could be contributed to the PATH conversion where the FCO division received an increase of payment calls that quarter.



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 232 individual complainants.

Complaint Count by Complaint Theme						
Main Complaint Theme	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Percent
Action/Inaction of Agency/Employee	55	57	58	46	216	20%
Placement of Children	73	41	37	44	195	18%
Financial Issue/Reimbursement	56	30	40	28	154	16%
Lack of Communication	34	37	39	35	146	14%
Policy/Regulation Issue	23	14	7	2	46	4%
Decision of Agency Employee	20	15	20	11	66	6%
Not Applicable	15	12	7	6	40	4%
Removal of Children	15	17	14	17	63	6%
Rude/Unfair Treatment	9	10	15	6	40	4%
Threat/Retaliatory Treatment	6	9	7	4	26	2%
Information and/or Referral to Resources	0	0	33	32	65	6%
Total	306	242	277	232	1057	100%

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 involve intervention or investigation by the FCO are classified as either substantiated or unsubstantiated.

This quarter, the FCO substantiated 41 out of the 232 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.

Complaint Count by Closure Type						
Closure	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Percent
Declined by FCO	1	1	1	0	3	0.3%
Information & Referral to Resources	102	106	112	99	419	39.6%
Research Only	33	0	2	5	40	3.8%
Substantiated	67	61	69	41	238	22.5%
Unable to Contact	17	8	11	17	53	5.0%
Unable to Determine Substantiation due to Lack of Information	3	2	4	2	11	1.0%
Unsubstantiated	74	52	59	45	230	21.8%
Withdrawn by Complainant	9	12	14	8	43	3.8%
Total	306	242	277	232	1057	100%

Finally, the one case 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.



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 Case Count by Bureau for Social Services Unit						
Bureau for Social Services Unit	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Percent
Adoption	13	11	4	0	28	2.6%
Centralized Intake (Abuse & Neglect Hotline)	2	3	3	2	10	0.9%
Child Protective Services	227	179	183	169	758	71.7%
Homefinding	7	8	11	1	27	2.6%
Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children	1	0	7	3	11	1.0%
Institutional Investigative Unit	1	2	2	5	10	0.9%
Legal Guardianship	18	7	16	12	53	5.0%
Post-Adoption	13	11	9	5	38	3.6%
Youth Services	6	5	9	3	23	2.2%
Not Applicable	18	16	33	32	99	9.4%
Non-BSS	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	306	242	277	232	1057	100%

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.

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 29.7% 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.

Counties with Highest Complaint Count in 4th Quarter		
County	Q4	Percent
Kanawha	29	12.5%
Mercer	12	5.2%
Marion	10	4.3%
Monongalia	10	4.3%
Harrison	8	3.4%
Total	69	29.7%



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	Q2	Q3	Q4	SFY Total	Percent
Barbour	7	6	11	4	28	2.60
Berkeley	10	8	5	8	31	3.00
Boone	4	1	6	4	15	1.40
Braxton	5	3	4	5	17	1.60
Brooke	2	1	1	1	5	0.50
Cabell	8	7	8	5	28	2.60
Calhoun	0	8	0	1	9	0.80
Clay	2	5	0	0	6	0.60
Doddridge	1	0	0	2	3	0.30
Fayette	9	3	12	6	28	2.60
Gilmer	0	0	3	0	3	0.30
Grant	2	0	2	2	6	0.60
Greenbrier	1	2	2	4	9	0.90
Hampshire	4	1	0	1	6	0.60
Hancock	4	5	2	3	13	1.20
Hardy	0	0	0	2	2	0.20
Harrison	18	14	7	8	45	4.30
Jackson	10	4	10	7	31	3.00
Jefferson	6	1	0	1	7	0.70
Kanawha	27	30	32	29	118	11.20
Lewis	3	5	4	4	16	1.50
Lincoln	3	2	0	3	8	0.80
Logan	4	3	2	3	12	1.10
Marion	15	9	14	10	48	4.60
Marshall	8	6	3	3	20	1.90
Mason	3	4	5	3	15	1.40
McDowell	0	0	0	5	5	0.50
Mercer	5	4	4	12	25	2.40
Mineral	4	0	2	0	6	0.60

Complaint Count by BSS Case County						
County	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	SFY Total	Percent
Mingo	8	3	5	7	23	2.20%
Monongalia	12	5	12	10	37	3.50%
Monroe	0	0	1	0	1	0.10%
Morgan	2	0	2	1	5	0.50%
Nicholas	11	4	6	1	22	2.10%
Ohio	5	9	15	7	36	3.40%
Pendleton	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Pleasants	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Pocahontas	3	0	2	0	0	0%
Preston	9	11	2	7	29	2.80%
Putnam	3	4	4	2	13	1.20%
Raleigh	6	4	14	6	30	2.90%
Randolph	9	6	5	2	20	1.90%
Ritchie	0	3	0	1	4	0.40%
Roane	3	7	2	2	14	1.30%
Summers	1	1	1	2	5	0.50%
Taylor	7	3	5	2	16	1.50%
Tucker	1	1	2	0	4	0.40%
Tyler	1	0	0	1	2	0.20%
Upshur	5	8	3	2	18	1.70%
Wayne	6	0	2	1	9	0.90%
Webster	3	1	2	1	7	0.70%
Wetzel	9	2	9	3	23	2.20%
Wirt	3	0	1	0	4	1.40%
Wood	9	7	9	8	31	3.00%
Wyoming	3	1	2	3	9	0.90%
Not Applicable	19	30	1	4	11	11.00%
Out of State	2	0	4	0	6	0.60%
Statewide	1	0	0	0	1	0.10%
Total	306	242	277	232	1057	100%

THANK YOU



Contact Us

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