



OFFICE *of* COLORADO'S  
**CHILD PROTECTION  
OMBUDSMAN**



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
FISCAL YEAR 2022-23

**LISTEN**

**INVESTIGATE**

**RESOLVE**

**IDENTIFY TRENDS**

**LASTING CHANGE**

# LETTER FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

Dear friends and community partners,

I am honored to present the Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman's Fiscal Year 2022-23 Annual Report. The Colorado General Assembly created the CPO to provide a unique service to the citizens of Colorado. Unlike any other agency in the state, the CPO is specifically designed to serve as an impartial, free and creative resource for the children, families and professionals involved with the child protection system. Our charge is broad. In addition to helping citizens one-on-one address their concerns and questions, this agency is also tasked with studying and improving systemic issues impacting children and families in Colorado. While this agency has only existed in its current form for seven years, the demand for our services continues to grow and our impact continues to reach new depths.

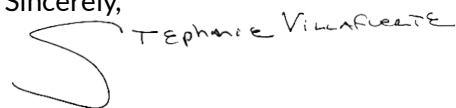
The CPO transitioned into an independent state agency only seven years ago. Since that transition, we have grown from three employees to 11 full-time employees, two contract positions and multiple program areas. This growth has been necessary to meet the steady increase in the number of cases coming into the CPO, as well as the increasing systemic projects and programs brought to the CPO. In fact, the CPO had its fourth consecutive record-setting year. During the past fiscal year, the CPO opened an unprecedented 1,119 cases – a 14 percent increase from the previous year and 94 percent increase from the agency's first fiscal year as an independent agency.

During this fiscal year, in addition to continuing the agency's focus on customer service, we have continued to prioritize our outreach to youth in Colorado. The CPO was contacted by youth a record 72 times during FY 2022-23. Additionally, we have obtained funding and assistance to expand our direct youth outreach efforts and we will continue to work with youth directly and community partners to ensure youth in Colorado who need our services are easily able to access them. We have also continued to expand and refine our work to address questions and concerns regarding systems that closely interact with the child welfare system, including behavioral health services, residential services, early childhood services and others. Much of this work is highlighted in this report.

Our ability to dig into more than 1,000 cases a year gives us a lens into the child protection system that no other state agency has. Through this lens, we are able to identify issues impacting how services are delivered. Through our position in state government, we are able to take innovative and inclusive approaches to addressing such concerns. The CPO's Policy Collaborative for Children & Families has continued to serve as a unique space in Colorado to address long-standing issues. This year we were proud to house the Mandatory Reporting Task Force (established through House Bill 22-1240) and the Timonhy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Youth from Running from Out-of-Home Placements (established through House Bill 22-1375). These multidisciplinary task forces are each composed of dozens of stakeholders and will address a collective 28 directives—each with the potential to reform and/or improve practices that have existed for decades. These two task forces are emblematic of our dedication to fostering inclusive and smart conversations regarding child protection in Colorado.

The CPO's success is due to the efforts and ingenuity of a strong and diverse team, and the continued support and guidance of the CPO Advisory Board. As we reflect on the past fiscal year—and look forward to the work ahead—we know there is much to be done. However, we are confident that we will continue to refine our skills and expand our reach so that every citizen who contacts this agency receives thorough and thoughtful services.

Sincerely,

STEPHANIE VILLAFUERTE

Stephanie Villafuerte

Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman











# Connecting with the Community

**Our agency's expanded outreach capacity, resources and strategy have opened up new opportunities for engaging youth, families, populations overrepresented in child protection systems, rural communities, professionals and stakeholders across Colorado and beyond.**



## Youth Outreach

Utilizing the youth focus groups and surveys facilitated by the CPO during FY 2021-22, our agency took unprecedented steps towards making youth with experience in Colorado's child protection systems a central component of our work. We designed new outreach campaigns based on the feedback the survey provided on existing agency materials. These concepts were then used in our first digital marketing campaign with youth-related promotions reaching Colorado individuals Googling words and phrases similar to what a youth seeking our services would search for.

After securing funding for FY 2022-23, we began laying the foundation for the Tori Shuler Youth Voice Program (YVP) which will directly engage Colorado youth through focus groups, policy initiatives and special projects. Involving youth voice from the start of a policy initiative is a key priority for the CPO. To continue developing the YVP, we met with Tori Shuler at Fostering Great Ideas, youth on the Lived Experts Action Panel (LEAP) operated by the Office of the Colorado Child's Representative and AmeriCorps' VISTA program. We will continue to develop this program throughout FY 2023-24.



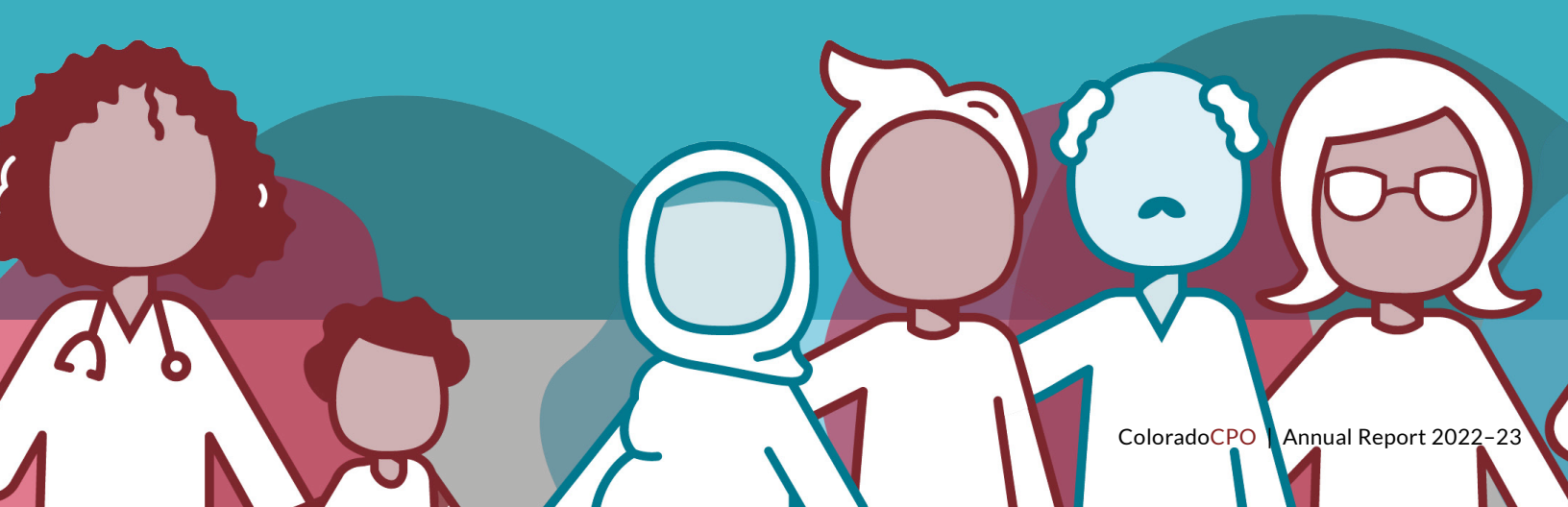
## Targeting Communications and Increasing Accessibility

The CPO serves diverse clients with unique concerns and circumstances. In recognizing this diversity, and after auditing the agency's communication practices and materials, our agency developed a new outreach strategy to connect with youth, caregivers, professionals and communities with messaging, mediums and information specific to these diverse groups. This included our 11-day digital marketing campaign that reached youth, caregivers and professionals in every region of the state. To increase inclusion in our outreach materials, we commissioned the design of new family icons reflecting youth and families of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities and cultures. We also began to improve the accessibility of both our print and digital marketing assets by reducing the complexity of text to recommended grade levels and developing a new website that is compliant with current accessibility standards such as color contrast.



## National Presence

The CPO is widely recognized by ombudsman offices and child protection stakeholders across the United States as an innovative leader in this work. During FY 2022-23, we were invited to participate in critical conversations—nationally and globally—as well as provide consultation to other states seeking to use our agency as a model. Ombudsman Stephanie Villafuerte conducted presentations at the Kempe Center's International Virtual Conference, Global Oneness Summit and the United States Ombudsman Association Conference. Deputy Ombudsman Jordan Steffen also presented to the West Virginia Foster Care Ombudsman Office, New Mexico General Assembly and other states working to establish children and family ombuds offices. Additionally, Director of Client Services Amanda Pennington provided insight on our agency's work at the American Bar Association / Kids in Need of Defense Unaccompanied Immigrant Children's Service Provider Training.



# ADVISORY BOARD

The CPO Advisory Board is an independent, nonpartisan board of 12 members. Four members are appointed from each branch of government and all members serve for a period of four years. Each position on the Board requires a certain set of experience or expertise. The Board was established to provide a mechanism of oversight for the Child Protection Ombudsman, however, its role is much broader. The CPO team routinely relies on the expertise of its Board to expand and guide its work. Members have decades of experience and include child welfare professionals, judges, doctors, attorneys, county commissioners, human service directors, foster parents and advocates.

## ABOUT

### OUR MISSION

We ensure Colorado child protection systems consistently, fairly and equitably deliver services to every child, youth and family across our state.

### CASE SUPPORT

- Guide youth, families and community members in navigating complex systems
- Review cases to ensure the highest attainable standards of care
- Work with people and agencies to resolve concerns and disputes at the ground level

### SYSTEMS CHANGE

- Engage communities across Colorado in addressing local and statewide problems
- Collaborate with stakeholders and lawmakers to improve services, policies and laws

### CPO STAFF

**Stephanie Villafuerte**, *Child Protection Ombudsman*

**Jordan Steffen**, *Deputy Ombudsman*

**Karen Nielsen**, *Director of Administrative Services*

**Amanda Pennington**, *Director of Client Services*

**Michael W. Teague**, *Director of Public Affairs*

**Claire Hooker**, *Senior Client Services Analyst*

**Brittany Cornelius**, *Client Services Analyst*

**Abbey Koch**, *Client Services Analyst*

**Tiffany Lewis**, *Client Services Analyst*

**Wendy Oldenbrook**, *Client Services Analyst*

**Meredith Sullivan**, *Client Services Analyst*

### CPO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Ann Roan**, *Board Chair*

**Benjamin Rounsborg**

**Hon. Amanda Hopkins**

**Hon. Kenneth Plotz**

### Governor Appointments

**Judith Martinez**, *Vice Chair*

**April Lane**

**Aaron Miltenberger**

**Jerene Petersen**

### Senate President Appointment

**Charles Tedesco**

### Senate Minority Appointment

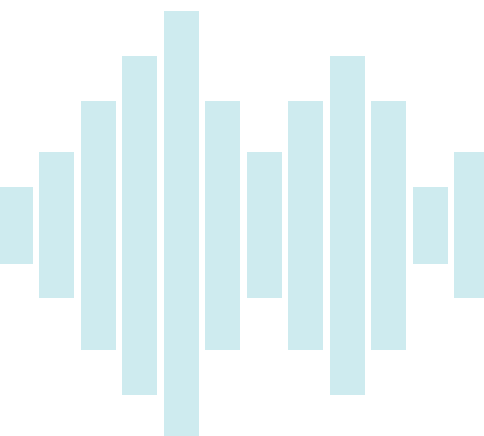
**Wendy Buxton-Andrade**

### Speaker of the House Appointment

**Dr. Coral Steffey**

### House Minority Leader Appointment

**Brian Bernhard**





## CONTACT INFORMATION



1300 Broadway, Suite 430, Denver, CO 80203



720-625-8640



[coloradocpo.org](http://coloradocpo.org)



[linkedin.com/company/cocpo](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cocpo)

Sign up for our newsletter and read our latest blog posts at [coloradocpo.org](http://coloradocpo.org)