



Child Welfare Services
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To: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

From: Child Welfare Services Administration

Subject: Child Welfare Services' (CWS) Implementation Plan in Response to California Center for Rural Policy's (CCRP) Assessment of the Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson

Humboldt County Child Welfare Services (CWS) has received the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report dated May 2025 and reviewed it in full. Humboldt County CWS values the impartial and thorough examination of the Office of the Ombudsperson that was conducted by CCRP.

On June 28, 2024, the HCCGJ released the *HCCCGJ 23-24 Report: Humboldt County Child Welfare Services- Office of the Ombudsperson* which included findings and recommendations related to the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson. On September 10, 2024, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors (BOS) released a response to the HCCGJ report which noted that CCRP had been contracted to provide an assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson, and that CCRP's assessment would be relevant to implementation decisions related to the HCCGJ's recommendations #3, 4, 6 & 10 in their report.

As stated above, as of May 2025, the assessment of the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson conducted by CCRP has now been completed and can be considered when assessing recommendations #3, 4, 6 & 10 from the HCCGJ's June 28, 2024 report. The full assessment from CCRP is being provided to the BOS. This memo provides a summary of Humboldt County CWS's plans to implement the recommendations in CCRP's *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report. Since it was noted in the BOS response that the assessment by CCRP would be relevant to implementation decisions for recommendations 3, 4, 6 & 10, this memo also provides a summary of the specific findings from CCRP's assessment that relate to those specific HCCGJ recommendations.

Humboldt County CWS recognizes the responsibility the agency has to assess and apply feedback from the community regarding all services rendered and this includes recommendations related to the agency's complaint procedure, as well as recommendations provided from the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury (HCCGJ).



Report Child Abuse
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Behavioral Health
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Public Health
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Social Services
phone: (707) 476-4700
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Below is a summary of key findings from CCRP's Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services report:

There is no statewide mandate that requires county-level child welfare services to operate an Office of the Ombudsperson.

The 2018 Attorney General Stipulated Judgment only required Humboldt County CWS to “create a complaint procedure that can be easily understood by and publicized to the community.” The standards for an “Office of the Ombudsperson” were not required by the Judgment and are not required by California law or by the California Department of Social Services. Only eight of fifty-eight California counties operate an ombuds office at the county level. Based on a review of the 58 counties, and seeing that only eight (all of which are significantly larger in population than Humboldt County) have an ombuds office, county-level child welfare ombuds offices are few and far between, are not resourced, and are not mandated by California law. As an example, Contra Costa County, with a population of over 1 million people, handles complaints through an ombudsperson’s office that covers the following programs: CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, General Assistance, In-Home Supportive Services, Adult Protective Services and Children & Family. The scope of the ombuds function varies by county for the eight counties that have one.

Analysis of the 2023-2024 data provided by the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson revealed that less than half of the calls received (126) were classified as complaints, for a total of 57 complaints received in the last two-year period.

In a review of calls received, the community need is for the following:

- 1) Information about Child Welfare Services and its’ functions and/or rules
- 2) Case-level complaints from individuals who report that communication with their assigned CWS staff person is not meeting their expectations
- 3) Case-level complaints from individuals who disagree with decisions made or services offered by Child Welfare Services related to investigation, placement, visitation, and reunification

Detailed information about the full set of **findings** from the CCRP assessment can be found in the full report.



Below is a summary of recommendations from CCRP's *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report, along with Humboldt County CWS's implementation plan to each recommendation.

Recommendation from CCRP	Humboldt County CWS Implementation Plan
<p>CWS continue to implement a complaint policy and procedure but it should not be called an "Office of the Ombudsperson."</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will rename the dedicated office that provides Complaint and Information Services. The office will no longer be called an Office of the Ombudsperson and will include Complaint and Information Services in the name of the office.</p>
<p>CWS continue to provide a single point of contact: A dedicated phone line for the public to call for information and/or complaints. This line should reach a person who is not directly involved in case management, since many complaints received relate to individual cases and should be reviewed and categorized by someone outside of that process. It is also recommended that the person tracking calls is able to quickly refer and access information and/or resources within CWS to assist callers.</p> <p>Data from calls received by the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson suggest that the primary community needs are: 1) information requests, 2) an option to ask for assistance when standard communication channels with CWS are ineffective and 3) an option to express disagreement with decisions related to investigation, placement and reunification.</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will continue to provide a dedicated phone line, email and office with dedicated staffing to respond to complaints and requests for information. The dedicated staffing will not be involved in case management and will be able to quickly refer and access information and/or resources to assist callers.</p>
<p>All complaints should be resolved at the lowest level possible, and elevated only when resolution at a lower level could not be achieved, as stated in current CWS Policy & Procedure (No.10-75).</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will continue to attempt resolution at the lowest level possible, as stated in the current CWS Policy and Procedure No. 10-75.</p>



Recommendation from CCRP	Humboldt County CWS Implementation Plan
<p>Clearly identify the decision tree for complaint and information referrals to ensure that both complaints and requests for information are followed up on. Add a “action taken” column to the existing data tracking spreadsheet. Add a YES/NO column, a date column, and a “referred to” column.</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will update their complaint and information request tracking to include a column for “action taken”, with a YES/NO column, a date column for date action was taken, and a “referred to” column.</p>
<p>At least twice a year, review the data tracking spreadsheet and follow up on any complaints that were not acted upon.</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will review the data tracking spreadsheet at least monthly to follow up on any complaints not yet acted upon.</p>
<p>Track the type of information requests to understand if there are common themes in those requests and, as resources allow, make information that the public regularly inquired about as accessible as possible. Continue to track calls to the dedicated line to understand community needs and concerns, and be able to address them whenever possible, at the lowest level possible, and in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will generate at minimum, a bi-annual, de-identified aggregated report that identifies common themes from the calls to the Complaint and Information Office and use the data, as resources allow, to address gaps in training, information dissemination and policy and procedure. This report will be disseminated to CWS Administration. Humboldt County CWS will continue to track calls to the dedicated line to understand community needs and concerns, and be able to address them whenever possible, at the lowest level possible, and in a timely manner. The aggregated reporting will also include data on “action taken” and “referred to” as noted above.</p>
<p>Provide web-based resources to help community members access and utilize state-level resources discussed in the report, specifically the CWS Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson and the ICWA hotline.</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will update their web-based resources to provide contact information for state-level resources that are available to community members for filing complaints, specifically the CWS Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson and the ICWA hotline.</p>
<p>Continue to provide clear direction when complaints are based on a caller’s desire to</p>	<p>Humboldt County CWS will continue to provide clear direction when complaints are</p>



Recommendation from CCRP	Humboldt County CWS Implementation Plan
overturn or overrule a CWS or court decision. Clearly explain what action can be taken, if any, and that the resolution they seek cannot circumvent other policies and procedures that CWS and/or the courts follow to make decisions and determinations about investigation, placement, visitation, reunification, and court orders.	based on a caller’s desire to overturn or overrule a CWS or court decision, and clearly explain what action can be taken, if any, and that the resolution they seek cannot circumvent other policies and procedures that CWS and/or the courts follow to make decisions and determinations about investigation, placement, visitation, reunification, and court orders.

Further details and information on the CCRP’s recommendations can be found in the full report.

Below is a Summary of the specific findings from CCRP’s assessment that relate to the HCCGJ recommendations 3, 4, 6 & 10, since it was noted in the BOS response that the assessment by CCRP would be relevant to implementation decisions for those recommendations.

HCCGJ 23-24 Report - Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson Recommendation #3: Humboldt County CWS provide physical copies of the documents detailed in recommendation one (standardized complaint form) and two (brochure detailing procedures for making a complaint) to every member of the public involved in Child Welfare Services proceedings of any type.

In regards to recommendation #3 from the HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson and in consideration of CCRP’s *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report, Humboldt County CWS will continue to provide a standardized complaint form to anyone requesting to make a complaint. A printable copy of this standardized form is currently available, and will continue to be available, on the County’s public website. Hard copies are available, and will continue to be available upon request, at the main reception desk for CWS. Humboldt County CWS will not automatically provide this complaint form to every member of the public involved in Child Welfare Services proceedings of any type and that is not a recommendation from CCRP’s assessment. Humboldt County CWS will continue to make available a brochure detailing the procedures for making a complaint. CWS will update the brochure to also provide contact information for obtaining information about CWS and its function and roles. A printable copy of a brochure detailing procedures for making a complaint is currently available, and will continue to be available, on the County’s public website. Hard copies of a brochure are available, and will continue to be available, at the main reception desk for CWS. Hard copies of the brochure will be provided to members of the public who communicate that they are dissatisfied with CWS services or are looking for information related to CWS’s function and roles. Humboldt County CWS will not automatically provide a brochure to every



member of the public involved in CWS proceedings of any type and that is not a recommendation from CCRP's assessment.

HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson Recommendation #4: Humboldt County CWS follow all elements of the CWS Policies and Procedures section 10-75.

In regards to recommendation #4 from the HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson and in consideration of CCRP's *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report, Humboldt County CWS will update their CWS Policies and Procedures section 10-75 to reflect the actions listed in the table above and will follow all elements of the updated Policies and Procedures.

HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson Recommendation #6: Humboldt County CWS expand the range of performance data acquired for the Office of the Ombudsperson to include what policies, procedures, and civil rights have been violated and what, if anything, has been done to address these violations.

In regards to recommendation #6 from the HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson and in consideration of CCRP's *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report, Humboldt County CWS will Humboldt County CWS will generate at minimum, a bi-annual, de-identified aggregated report that identifies common themes from the calls to the Complaint and Information Office and use the data, as resources allow, to address gaps in training, information dissemination and policy and procedure. Humboldt County CWS will continue to track calls to the dedicated line to understand community needs and concerns, and be able to address them whenever possible, at the lowest level possible, and in a timely manner. The aggregated reporting will also include data on "action taken" and "referred to" as noted above.

HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson Recommendation #10: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors remove the Humboldt County CWS Office of the Ombudsperson from the Humboldt County CWS organizational structure and reallocate the Office of the Ombudsperson to report to the Humboldt County Administrative Office.

In regards to recommendation #10 from the HCCGJ 23-24 Report- Child Welfare Services Ombudsperson and in consideration of CCRP's *Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson – Humboldt County Child Welfare Services* report, Humboldt County CWS does not recommend implementing this recommendation.

