



# COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 11/4/2025

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File #: 25-1245

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**To:** Board of Supervisors

**From:** DHHS: Social Services

**Agenda Section:** Consent

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**SUBJECT:**

California Center for Rural Policy Assessment of the Humboldt County Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive and file the Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson - Humboldt County Child Welfare Services (CWS) that was prepared by the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP); and
2. Receive and file CWS' Implementation Plan in Response to CCRP Assessment of the Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson; and
3. Approve CWS' Implementation Plan in Response to CCRP Assessment of the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson Report.

**STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: Choose a topic.

Strategic Plan Category: 9999 - Core Services/Other

**DISCUSSION:**

On Sept. 12, 2023, Humboldt County's Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)-CWS division contracted with the CCRP to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson. The contracted scope for CCRP's assessment included:

- Reviewing all existing data and reports collected by the Ombudsperson Program in order to categorize the types of complaints received to date and, if possible, determine the percentage of complaints that are related to system-level issues versus case-level issues;
- Comparing the desired intent and purpose of the Ombudsperson Program with the types of complaints received to assess effectiveness;
- Reviewing other Ombudsperson programs in California and compiling summary information to inform a review of alternative models/mechanisms public agencies use to provide a clear path for complaint resolution to community members;
- Discussing the intent and purpose of the Ombudsperson Program with DHHS-CWS staff and other key partners;
- Providing recommendations on mechanisms to effectively and efficiently respond to complaints received by the Ombudsperson's office; and,
- Preparing a performance assessment report which summarizes key findings, clarifies the difference between current Ombudsperson Program practices and other mechanisms currently in place and identifies results and recommendations

relating to both system-level and case-level areas for improvement.

Additionally, on June 28, 2024, the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury (HCCGJ) released the HCCGJ 23-24 Report: Humboldt County CWS- Office of the Ombudsperson which included findings and recommendations related to the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson. In the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors (BOS) response to the HCCGJ report, it was 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.

In May 2025, DHHS-CWS received the final assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson from CCRP and in response has prepared an implementation plan for the recommendations. The Implementation Plan in Response to California Center for Rural Policy's (CCRP) Assessment of the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson which is included herein provides a list of the recommendations and CWS's implementation plan for each recommendation, as well as a summary of the specific findings from CCRP's assessment that relate to HCCGJ recommendations, since it was noted in the BOS response that the assessment by CCRP would be relevant to implementation decisions for those recommendations.

DHHS-CWS is proposing implementation of all recommendations made by CCRP in their Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson - Humboldt County CWS final report. Implementation of the recommendations includes, in part:

- DHHS-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.
- DHHS-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. The County website and CWS brochures will be updated to reflect the name change.
  - CCRP's assessment found that 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.
- DHHS-CWS will continue to attempt resolution at the lowest level possible.
- DHHS-CWS will continue to track data from the complaints and requests for information to identify common themes and use the data to address gaps in training, information dissemination and policy and procedure.
- DHHS-CWS will continue to provide clear direction when complaints are 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.

DHHS-CWS values the impartial and thorough examination of the Office of the Ombudsperson that was conducted by CCRP. DHHS-CWS also 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. DHHS-CWS believes implementation of these recommendations reflects DHHS-CWS's commitment to being responsive to community requests for information, being responsive to requests for support, resolving concerns at the lowest level possible and using data to address gaps in training information dissemination and policy and procedure.

**SOURCE OF FUNDING:**

There is no funding allocation for Ombudsperson Offices.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There is no financial impact.

**STAFFING IMPACT:**

There is no impact to staffing. However, implementation of these recommendations will allow for more efficient and flexible coverage, aligning different tasks related to processing complaints and requests for information across a unit of staff made up of different job classifications, rather than having the need for a single dedicated Ombudsperson.

**OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:**

CCRP

**ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Board could choose not to receive and file the attached documents and/or choose not to approve CWS's Implementation Plan in Response to the CCRP Assessment of the Child Welfare Services Office of the Ombudsperson Report. However, that is not recommended as the steps outlined in the implementation plan are based on the data analysis and findings from the formal assessment.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson - Humboldt County CWS that was prepared by the CCRP
2. CWS Implementation Plan in Response to CCRP Assessment of the CWS Office of the Ombudsperson

**PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:**

Meeting of: N/A

File No.: N/A