

# General Assembly Report

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# 2022



COLORADO OFFICE OF  
**THE CHILD'S  
REPRESENTATIVE**

## Mission

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OCR gives children and youth a voice in Colorado legal proceedings through high-quality legal representation that protects and promotes their safety, interests, and rights.

## Vision

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Justice, opportunity, and healthy families for all court-involved children and youth.

## Values

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### **Accountability**

Colorado's children, attorneys, families, and communities can count on OCR to ensure that each decision we make and action we take advances our mission in a fair, equitable, inclusive, and transparent manner.

### **Efficiency**

OCR strives to accomplish its mission and conserve resources by streamlining efforts, adhering to deadlines, resolving conflict constructively, and honoring well-defined projects, processes, and roles. We balance our drive to achieve with thoughtful planning and implementation.

### **Empowerment**

OCR cultivates an environment of respect, honesty, and equity. We value the diverse experiences and expertise of the children we serve, our attorneys, and our staff. We invest time to reflect and connect, focus on strengths, value feedback, and recognize success. We stand for justice and support each other in our mission to empower children.

## Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022

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This has been a year of accomplishment here at OCR and for children and youth in the Dependency and Neglect (D&N) system!

First and foremost, OCR must thank the members of the Joint Budget Committee and General Assembly for approving the much-needed **attorney rate increase** for OCR contract attorneys. These attorneys have dedicated their lives to public interest legal work and deal with heart wrenching issues on a daily basis. Most of them do so without benefits, paid time off or loan forgiveness. Their increase, from \$80/hour to \$85/hour, is the first increase in 3 years. Similarly, OCR appreciates the salary increases for the El Paso County Office of the Guardian *ad Litem* (“OGAL”), making those salaries comparable with similar positions at the Office of the Public Defender.

Unfortunately, these increases have not yet had the desired impact and OCR continues to struggle to find qualified attorneys to fill open positions at the OGAL office. OCR is also experiencing a major attorney shortage in our rural districts, particularly those in the southern parts of the state. This has led to attorney burn out and has required paying metro area attorneys to travel to these remote locations to ensure children and youth have legal representation in their D&N proceedings. OCR is exploring innovative ways to address these rural shortages.

Another big accomplishment was the passage of **HB22-1038** which provides client-directed legal counsel to youth 12 and older in D&N proceedings. This was part of the FY22 Wildly Important Goal for the agency. OCR sought this change to give youth a more authentic voice in their D&N proceedings, to bring Colorado in line with national standards and to ensure procedural justice and parity in the D&N system. A special thanks to Rep. Lindsey Daugherty, Rep. Tonya Van Beber, Sen. Dominick Moreno and Sen. Bob Gardner for their sponsorship of this important bill and to all members of the General Assembly for recognizing the importance of youth voice!

OCR’s **Lived Expert Action Panel (LEAP)** completed their first full year of service and provided valuable insight and guidance regarding OCR training, policies and practice standards. LEAP will continue its work in the coming fiscal year with additional members, including members in the Division of Youth Services, expanding its incredible perspective.

OCR is also expanding, and again must thank the General Assembly for supporting these important positions by approving spending authority to use Title IV-E funding, or through the fiscal note process. In February, OCR welcomed a new staff attorney who focuses on Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies. In May, OCR welcomed a Case Operations Assistant to help successfully implement HB21-1094. Recently, OCR filled the Youth Justice Attorney position, with an anticipated start date in September.

The OGAL office experienced a significant transition as the managing attorney for the last 21 years retired and **OGAL welcomed a new managing attorney** for the first time since its inception.

Shortly thereafter, the long-time managing case coordinator also retired and OGAL welcomed its new case coordinator in the summer of 2022.

OCR continued to provide an incredible array of **training** to attorneys, judicial officers and stakeholders. This included over 80 CLE hours provided at no cost and covered a wide range of topics, including: diversity, equity and inclusion, trial skills, attachment and bonding, case law and legislative updates, and much more.

This training is critical, as the issues attorneys face in dependency and neglect (D&N), Foster Youth in Transition (FYTP) and Juvenile Delinquency (JD) cases continue to get more complex. A wide variety of federal policies such as the Indian Child Welfare Act, CAPTA, and Families First Prevention Services Act are at issue and require advocacy at multiple levels. The mental health and fentanyl crises in Colorado are having a terrible impact on children, youth and families and cause devastation in these cases. The complexities of the practice have led to increased appellate work at both the Colorado Court of Appeals and the Colorado Supreme Court. The increased demands on appellate litigation requires even more training, support, diligence in preserving the record, and advocating for children's rights through written briefs and oral argument.

Multidisciplinary law practice is a nationally recognized best practice to deal with the increasing complexities in these cases by adding the knowledge and expertise of a social work professional to enhance attorney services. OCR's **Case Consultant (CC) program** has continued to expand over the past year, with 9 new contract CCs joining the OCR and approximately 170 case requests made in FY22.

OCR continues to focus on elevating **youth voice** by promoting youth participation in their D&N court proceedings and disseminating Youth in Court reports to judicial districts on a quarterly basis. OCR utilizes a variety of tools aimed at increasing and normalizing youth participation in D&N Court and will continue to do so in the next fiscal year. While these efforts are complex, and many other parties impact a youth's ability to participate in their court proceedings, OCR has seen improvement in the number of youth able to meet with their Judicial Officer in an in-camera setting. OCR has also seen the number of local judicial districts prioritizing youth in court as part of their Best Practice Team goals increase, which is an important step in moving this effort forward. The emphasis on a youth's right to attend court in HB22-1038 is a vital piece that will help OCR advance this vital issue.

"The strongest advocate you're ever going to have is yourself. You have to learn to advocate for yourself and find people who can help you."

*-quote from a Colorado Youth Emancipated from Foster Care*

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## Board of Directors

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The Colorado Supreme Court appoints OCR's nine-member board (Board) in accordance with C.R.S. § 13-91-104 (2) which requires Board membership to include:

- three attorneys admitted to practice law in this state who have experience representing children/youth as Guardians *ad Litem* (GALs) or legal representatives,
- three non-attorneys who have experience advocating for children in the court system and,
- three citizens who are not attorneys and who have not served as CASA volunteers or child and family investigators.

Each of the Colorado Congressional Districts must be represented on the Board and there must not be more than five members of the same political party. Board members serve without compensation for terms of four years and work cooperatively with OCR's Executive Director to provide governance to the office, fiscal oversight of general operating budget and participate in funding decisions related OCR services. OCR's current Board:

- **Jean White (Chair)**  
Citizen, Third Congressional District, Republican, *former Colorado Senator*.
- **Don Moseley**  
Advocate, Seventh Congressional District, Democrat, *Executive Director of Ralston House*.
- **Kelvin Nicholson**  
Citizen, First Congressional District, Republican, *Psychotherapist and former foster parent*.
- **Gwen Schooley**  
Advocate, Fourth Congressional District, Independent, *Executive Director of A Kids Place/CASA Program and Child Advocacy Center*.
- **Maria Valdez**  
Attorney, Sixth Congressional District, Independent, *retired GAL (Arapahoe County)*
- **Marc Winokur**  
Advocate, Second Congressional District, Democrat, *Director of the Social Work Research Center at CSU*.
- **Victoria "Tori" Shuler**  
Although not statutorily required, the Board includes a valued non-voting youth advisory member. Tori has lived experience and is the Denver Director of Fostering Great Ideas.
- **Vacancies**  
There are three vacancies on the Board. Filling these positions has been more challenging as people continue to work remotely, however OCR will continue to make diligent recruitment efforts.

## OCR Staff

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OCR is comprised of an Executive Office, located in the Ralph Carr Judicial Center at 1300 Broadway, Suite 320, Denver, CO 80203 and the Office of the Guardian ad Litem (OGAL), located in Colorado Springs. OGAL was created in 2001 as a pilot program in response to SB215 (*see* footnote 135). It is a multidisciplinary law office that provides high quality GAL and CFY representation to children and youth in El Paso County. OGAL is comprised of a managing attorney and 11 additional case carrying attorneys along with 5 case consultants (CCs) and administrative support staff.

OCR's Executive Office currently employs the following:

### Executive Team

#### Chris Henderson

Executive Director

#### Sheri Danz

Deputy Director

#### Mark Teska

Chief Operating Officer

#### Rebecca Garrison

Information Systems Director

### Staff

#### Stacie Cain

Administrative Specialist

#### Ashley Chase

Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison

#### Gina Circo

Program & Performance Analyst

#### Katie Hecker

Youth Justice Attorney (starting Sept., 2022)

#### Katie Irwin

Accountant

#### Michelle Jensen

Training Director

#### Brandy Lombardi

Administrative & Accounting Specialist

#### Brandi Micheau

Case Operations Assistant

#### Cara Nord

Youth Empowerment Attorney

#### Anna Ulrich

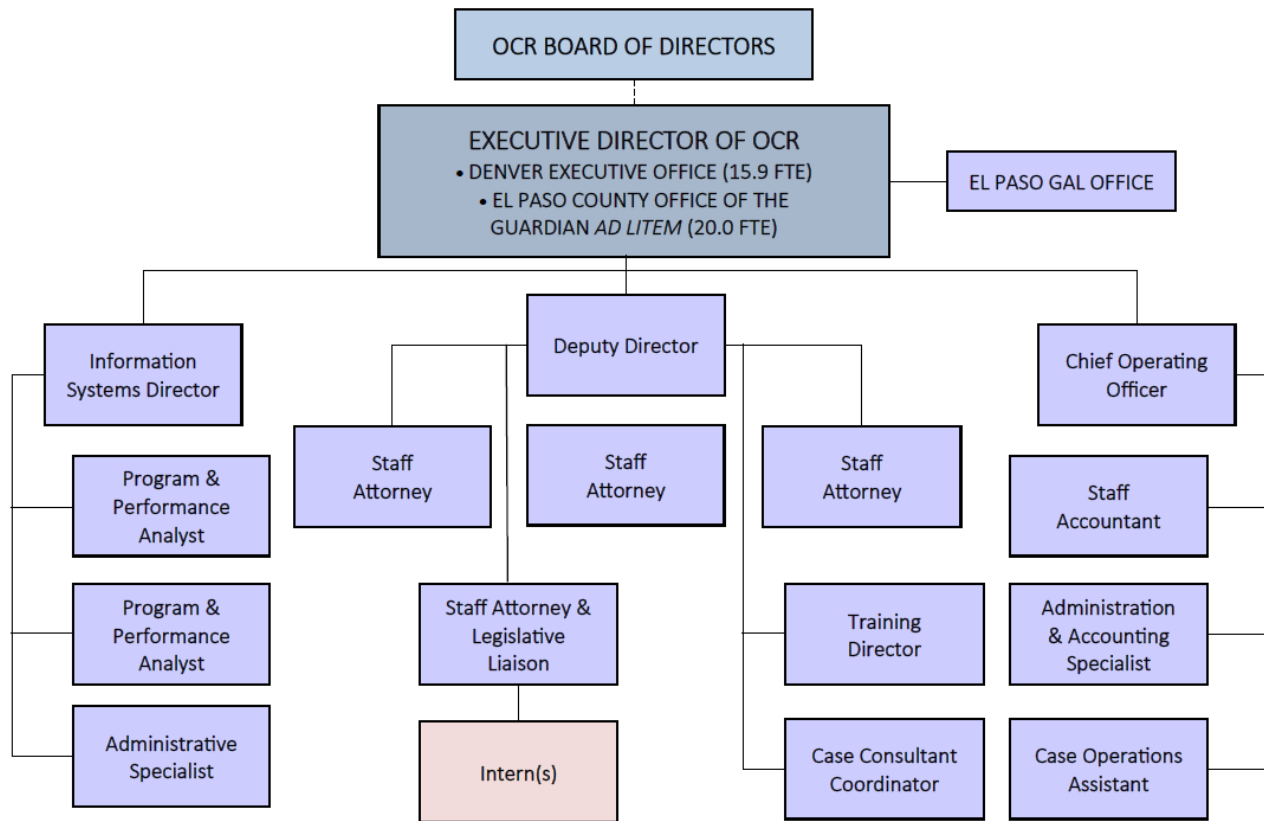
Appellate & Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney

#### Alex Wolff

Case Consultant Coordinator

# Colorado Office of the Child's Representative (OCR) Organizational Chart

July 1, 2022



This dedicated team fulfills OCR's statutory mandates, found in C.R.S. § 13-91-101, et seq., as set forth below.

## Agency Overview

OCR is an independent agency within the Judicial branch created in 2000 to ensure the provision of high-quality legal representation to children involved in judicial proceedings in Colorado. OCR is mandated to enhance the provision of GAL, CFY, and Child's Legal Representative (CLR) services in Colorado by:

- Ensuring the provision and availability of high-quality, accessible training throughout the state and establish minimum training requirements for GALs and CFY.
- Establish minimum practice standards and caseload limitations for GALs and CFY.
- Provide oversight of the practice of GALs and CFY.
- Work cooperatively with local judicial districts, attorneys, and children and youth impacted by the child welfare and judicial system.
- Establish fair and realistic compensation rates that take into consideration caseload limits and are sufficient to attract and retain high quality, experienced attorneys to serve as GALs or CFY.



- Seek to enhance and study additional funding sources.
- Provide support for the CASA program in Colorado.
- Assess and document the effectiveness of various models of representation.
- Conduct program review and outcome-based evaluations of OCR on an annual basis to determine if the office is effectively and efficiently meeting the goals of improving child and family well-being and the duties set forth in the enabling legislation.

OCR currently contracts with approximately 270 attorneys who provide high quality legal services to children and youth in all 22 Judicial Districts in Colorado. OCR attorneys are well trained, skilled litigators, who have specialized knowledge of child welfare and juvenile law. These dedicated attorneys are predominately solo practitioners or small business owners who provide attorney services at a rate of \$85 per hour in the following case types:

Case Type	OCR Responsibility
<b>Dependency and Neglect (D&amp;N)</b>	All GAL appointments ( <i>a GAL is appointed for each child/youth in every D&amp;N case in Colorado</i> )
<b>Foster Youth in Transition Program (FYTP)</b>	All CFY assignments or appointments ( <i>a CFY is appointed by the Court or assigned by OCR for every eligible youth aged 18 and older who is entering or seeks to enter a FYTP case</i> ).
<b>Underage Party seeking a Marriage License</b>	All GAL appointments ( <i>a GAL is appointed for all youth 16-17 years of age seeking a marriage license</i> ).
<b>Delinquency (JD) &amp; Direct File</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for every appointment made by the Court.
<b>Truancy</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for every appointment made by the Court.
<b>Parentage &amp; Child Support</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for appointments when at least one party who is ordered to be responsible for the costs is indigent.
<b>Probate</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for appointments when the parties ordered to be responsible for the costs are indigent, or when the minor's estate is deemed indigent.

<b>Adoption &amp; Relinquishment</b>	For cases that do not originate from a D&N matter, appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for appointments when at least one party is indigent. For cases that do originate from a D&N matter, the same GAL/CFY is appointed and OCR is responsible for those appointments.
<b>Mental Health</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for every appointment made by the Court.
<b>Victim Witness</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for every appointment made by the Court.
<b>Child’s Legal Representative (CLR) in domestic relations (DR) matters</b>	Appointments are made at the discretion of the Court and OCR is responsible for appointments when the parties are determined to be indigent in accordance with §14-10-116 (3).

The attorney’s statutory role and responsibilities vary slightly by proceeding. Attorneys must be well versed in the law (both state and federal), evidence based social science research, best practices related to their case type and practice standards and requirements found in Chief Justice Directive (CJD) 04-06.

Attorneys appointed as GALs provide best interests legal representation to the child/youth and the attorney’s professional duties flow solely to that child/youth’s best interests. A GAL must independently investigate, meet with the child/youth, take into account the child/youth’s position and advocate for what the attorney determines to be in the best interests of the child/youth through all stages of the proceedings.

She’s very communicative. She always showed interests in our lives and got to know our personalities and was good in representing us. She showed more interest than just a case to us, which was very supportive.

- *Youth feedback about an OCR Attorney*

Currently, attorneys may only be appointed as CFY in FYTP cases. However, with the passage of HB22-1038, youth 12 and older in D&N cases will also have CFY (beginning January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023). CFY provide client-directed legal representation to the youth and the attorney’s professional duties flow to the client. A CFY must independently investigate, meet with

the youth, counsel the youth regarding their legal position and advocate for the youth's position through all stages of the proceedings.

OCR advocates on a national level when applicable and stays abreast of relevant national issues that impact its work in Colorado. In addition, OCR advocates on a statewide basis regarding issues that impact the children and youth its attorneys work with, and the various practice areas mentioned above. OCR staff participate in a wide variety of committees and taskforces (see Appendix A), including the Court Improvement Program (CIP). OCR serves as a resource to legislators by providing subject matter expertise, answering questions, and providing nonpartisan research concerning children, youth, child welfare and juvenile justice issues. OCR welcomes comments and questions from legislators regarding anything in this report or specific issues concerning children/youth or their attorneys in your community.

## OCR Performance Plan Goals for Fiscal Year 2022

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OCR's legislative mandates are encompassed in our SMART Act Performance Goals:

**WILDLY IMPORTANT GOAL (WIG):** OCR WILL ELEVATE CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH'S VOICE AND RIGHTS IN D&N PROCEEDINGS BY SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING CHANGES ENACTED IN HB21-1094 AND PURSUING AN UPDATED MODEL OF REPRESENTATION IN THE 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION.

**GOAL 1:** PROVIDE CHILDREN A VOICE IN THE COLORADO LEGAL SYSTEM THROUGH EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ATTORNEY SERVICES AND ADVOCACY.

**GOAL 2:** OCR WILL OPTIMIZE EFFICIENCIES IN ATTORNEY PRACTICE AND BILLING

**GOAL 3:** OCR WILL ENSURE ATTORNEYS AND CASE CONSULTANTS REMAIN CURRENT IN STATE AND FEDERAL LAW AND REGULATIONS, SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH, BEST PRACTICES IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, AND EVIDENCE-BASED SERVICES.

## Implementation of HB21-1094

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OCR helped successfully implement the Foster Youth in Transition Program (FYTP) created in HB21-1094 throughout the 2022 fiscal year. Initially, OCR informed attorneys state-wide about the new program and developed resources for practitioners to begin navigating this new set of laws. OCR offered an initial training June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and then offered additional trainings:

- at the OCR Annual Conference in August 2021,
- via webinar in September 2021,
- an online, stakeholder specific, FYTP training in November 2021,
- a pre-convening webinar in March 2022.

OCR hosts monthly townhalls to staff questions and provide support for FYTP cases. Along the way, OCR continues to refine the initial resources, develop additional resources, and participate in related rules committees and implementation meetings with CDHS and other partners.

OCR also quickly established an online referral form to facilitate connecting eligible youth with an attorney as required in the bill. This form is found on the newly developed [FYTP section](#) of the [OCR's online Youth Center](#). The FYTP section was created in the last year to ensure youth and attorneys have access to the resources developed by OCR in support of the program. In

She's been really great. She's been really encouraging and wants to see the reunification of our family. She always prioritizes the best interests of the kids.

- *Parent feedback about an OCR attorney*

addition, OCR developed a case assignment system through its case management and billing system, CARES.

OCR worked collaboratively with stakeholders to develop the [FYTP benchcard](#) which can be used by attorneys, judicial officers and others involved in the court process. Additionally, OCR participated in HB22-1245, which clarified certain aspects of the FYTP and passed this legislative session.

## Advancing youth rights through HB22-1038

Building on the foundation laid in HB21-1094, and in accordance with the FY22 WIG, OCR actively sought to change the model of legal representation attorneys provide youth in Colorado through [HB22-1038](#). This change is an essential component of advancing youth rights and giving youth an authentic voice in their D&N proceedings as it transitions youth 12 and older from a best interest of the child model of legal representation to a client-directed model of legal representation.

Not only does HB22-1038 give youth 12 and older a more authentic voice in their D&N proceedings, it also gives children and youth the right to attend and fully participate in all

Good at foreseeing problems, he's very quiet but I always felt like he had a strategy and you could see the strategy. He did a lot of listening. He was there for the kids. He would always explain things.

- *Caregiver feedback about an OCR attorney*

hearings related to their case. This includes providing children and youth notice of the proceedings. The bill preserves continuity of counsel by authorizing the attorney acting as a GAL for a child under 12 to transition to client directed at the age of 12 and remain on the case (unless the attorney determines there is a conflict of interest). It also

establishes diminished capacity as the standard for when a youth over 12 may need a GAL in addition to their CFY.

OCR is thrilled that this important piece of legislation passed unanimously in both chambers and was signed by Governor Polis on April 12, 2022. Implementation of client-directed counsel for youth 12 and older in D&N proceedings will go into effect on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Information about HB1038 can be found on the OCR website by clicking on the “Transition to Client-Directed Representation” tab under the [General Assembly section](#). By visiting this section, you can listen to powerful testimony from two young women who were former foster youth, showcasing how powerful youth voice is as we think about policy considerations. OCR’s FY23 WIG focuses on implementation of HB22-1038 to ensure it is executed thoughtfully and effectively.

## Provide Children/Youth a Voice

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OCR continued its robust Engaging and Empowering Youth efforts during FY22. These efforts have focused on conducting youth focus groups, attending youth events, administering youth surveys, promoting youth in court and working collaboratively with our Lived Expert Action Panel (LEAP) in its first year of operation.

LEAP is an incredible group of 13 lived experts aged 18-28 who have current or prior involvement in D&N, juvenile delinquency, truancy and/or criminal cases. Members are located throughout the state, including the Denver, Colorado Springs and Grand Junction areas. This year, LEAP features 7 returning members and 3 members from the Division of Youth Services.

In their first year LEAP members:

- Spoke at and helped train GALs and other stakeholders during OCR Core Competencies, OCR Fall Conference, National Council of State Courts (NCSC) Conference addressing virtual child welfare hearings, NCSC Continuing Upward from the Summit event, and at the Colorado Presentation at Strengthening Families and Communities Conference.
- Provided input/feedback on OCR’s youth survey, OCR legislative priorities, OCR attorney interview process and performance standards for GALs and CFY.
- Testified at the state capitol in support of HB22-1038 and HB22-1373.
- Spoke with legislators in the Colorado House of Representatives about LEAP and legislative recommendations.
- Participated in state committees related to Colorado Youth Awareness Week and diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Recruited new LEAP members and collected youth surveys.
- Planned and participated in events for the Colorado Youth Awareness Week.

OCR is very excited to continue building on this incredible progress in the year to come!

## Youth in D&N Court Proceedings

OCR firmly believes that youth must have the ability to attend their own D&N court proceedings and should be encouraged and supported to do so. While youth attendance in court is impacted by all parties involved, OCR believes GALs and CFY are uniquely situated to encourage this practice and influence youth attendance. To that end, OCR tracks data related to youth in court and generates district specific reports that are disseminated on a quarterly basis.

In 2021, for example, OCR started tracking the percentage of youth 12 and older who attended a benchmark, permanency or review hearing. Initially, the percentage was 19% and has risen slightly over the last year to 20.4%. OCR also looks at the number of times a youth meets with their judicial officer in an in-camera setting, as this can be an appropriate way for a youth to have

a voice in court. Between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022 youth met with their judicial officers a total of 403 times, a modest increase from the year prior.

Yeah, I trust him. He's just a good person. He's never given me a reason not to trust him. He helped me get done with everything. He helped me get out of the system. Uh, every move he made was to help get me to the point where a successful young man in society can fit and able to function even though I've done five years in the juvenile system. So I was with him for about five years, in that time he just never gave me any reason not to trust him or even question his decision. If he made a decision it was usually in my best interest.

- *Youth feedback about an OCR attorney*

During that time OCR has been presenting youth in court data to attorneys and other stakeholders, training attorneys to address this more directly in court, and providing resources and litigation support. Encouragingly, several judicial districts have made youth in court a goal for their best practices team, based in part on seeing their district data and comparing it with other districts. OCR is hopeful these numbers will increase with the implementation of HB1038 and as OCR continues to prioritize this policy statewide.

## Youth Surveys and Refence Interviews

While the previous year provided limited opportunities to attend youth events or hold youth focus groups due to COVID 19, this year saw greatly improved opportunities to interact with youth throughout the state. OCR attended or sponsored twelve youth events and focused on youth in detention centers and committed youth from across the state. OCR collected 140 youth surveys during the fiscal year and will use that data to inform future policies and training.

In addition to the youth survey, OCR conducts reference interviews with youth for each attorney renewing their contract for the year. In FY22, OCR interviewed 62 youth regarding the 61

attorneys that were up for a contract renewal. This information is used in our attorney evaluation process detailed below.

### Oversight and Evaluation to Ensure Effective Attorney Services

OCR attorneys are held to high practice standards and are evaluated using data related to compliance of those standards. Full-time GALs/CFY may not have a caseload of more than 100 children or youth. All GALs and CFY must comply with the professional standards governing all attorneys, as well as additional standards are set by CJD 04-06, OCR manuals and policies and the attorney's contract with the OCR. Each year, OCR establishes a list of attorneys eligible for OCR appointments in each of the 22 Judicial Districts. To do this, OCR uses a comprehensive evaluation strategy which includes:

- Annual verification process
- Tri-annual renewal application process
- New attorney interviews
- Ongoing assessment, periodic reviews, and risk-based sampling of attorney activity.

The annual verification and tri-annual renewal processes require review of the following data sources (those in bold only apply to the tri-annual renewal process):

- D&N Visit Report (to show compliance with the initial 30-day visit requirement in CJD 04-06)
- Discipline Report
- Judicial Officer Survey Results
- Training Verification Form
- Formal Complaints
- Outstanding Issues Form
- **Court Observation Summary**
- **Case Reference Summary**
- **Writing Sample**
- **One on One Interview**
- **Activity in Timeframe Report**
- **Youth Surveys**

With utter respect and dignity. She treats me like a person. She doesn't judge me based on my disabilities or the color of my skin. She truly is a beautiful soul.

- *A parent's feedback about an OCR attorney*

Each attorney is reviewed by a staff attorney who assesses any discrepancies between the data and established [benchmarks](#). Attorneys falling outside the benchmarks are staffed by OCR, to promote consistency and transparency in OCR contracting decisions. Data from this process is also used in OCR SMART Act Performance Planning and Reporting.

### Fair and Reasonable Compensation

As mentioned previously, the attorney rate increased from \$80 to \$85 on July 1, 2022. This was the only increase in the past three years for OCR contract attorneys. OCR will continue to assess

the realities of the state budget, the impact of the current economy and inflation on contract attorneys, and OCR’s ability to recruit and retain high quality attorneys as required by statute.

## Optimize Efficiencies

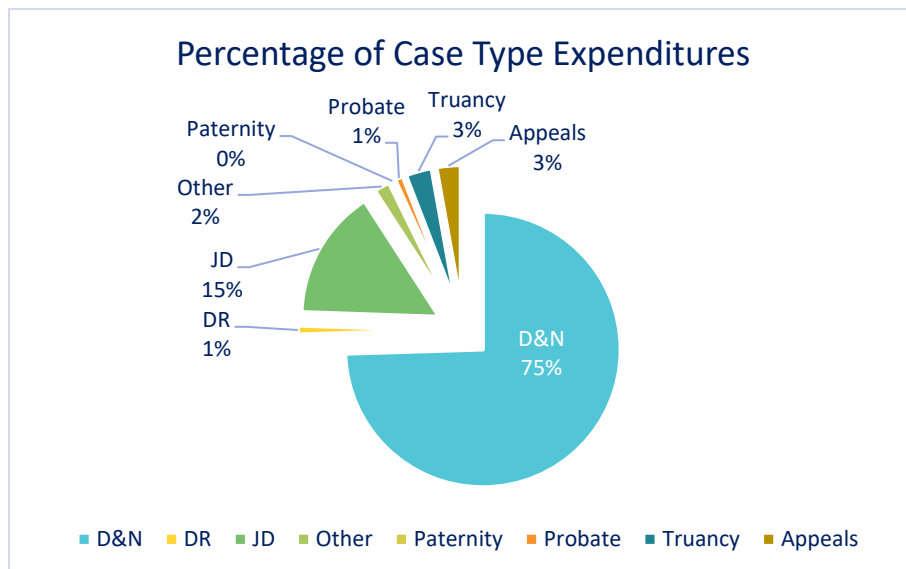
OCR strives to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars and to stay within its appropriation each year. This is complicated by the fact that OCR’s budget is driven primarily by attorney activity and caseloads and OCR does not control the number of appointments, as these are made by the Court. Fortunately, OCR has refined its internal budget process and projections to track these factors more accurately. In FY22, OCR used 91% of expended funds (\$25 million) for attorney services for

FY 22 Administrative Expenditures



children/youth and only 9% for administration. OCR expended \$74,642 (including grant funding received by OCR) to provide high quality and accessible training. The general assembly passed \$1,550,000 through OCR’s budget to Colorado CASA for distribution to local CASA programs. In total, OCR used 84% of its appropriation and reverted \$3.7 million to the general fund. While recovery from COVID is ongoing, OCR is hopeful that some prevention efforts may be impacting filings across the state. The other side of that impact is that the cases filed on tend to be higher acuity and more difficult. OCR will balance these issues in the FY24 budget analysis.

D&N appointments account for 75% of attorney services expenditures and other expenditures are made as follows:





## Title IV-E Funding

OCR is authorized to use IV-E funding to enhance attorney services and utilized \$263,074 in FY22 to increase support of multidisciplinary law practice by contracting with additional CCs, to add necessary staff that can provide increased litigation support, appellate support, and support in youth justice matters. OCR will continue to explore innovative ways to enhance attorney services with IV-E funds.

## CARES case management and billing system

OCR's proprietary online case management and billing system was designed specifically to support OCR attorneys, to provide up to date budget analysis and projections and to generate data and reports necessary for OCR's oversight and reporting. CARES was updated in early 2022 to increase performance speed and the user-friendliness of routine functions such as requesting additional funding or changing billing information. Upgrades also improved OCR's ability to track IV-E spending through a fully custom, rules-based engine; and improved cost-per-case reporting by allowing case consultants, mentors, and litigation support attorneys to request access to another office's appointment directly to enter their billing. OCR is currently working on the next round of enhancements to support client-directed representation and additional user-friendly innovations.

CARES reporting allows OCR to do quarterly reviews of child counts for each attorney, 30-day initial visit reports, potential duplicate reports and more. In addition, OCR can do risk sampling of high-cost contractors/appointments for the quarter.

## Litigation Support

Well supported and trained attorneys are more efficient and effective when providing child/youth legal representation. OCR provides a variety of litigation support that not only enhances attorney efficiency but also serves to keep attorneys and CCs current in relevant subject matter areas. These supports are:

### Westlaw

OCR offers this comprehensive legal research tool to every contract attorney at no cost to the attorney.

### Guided Reference in Dependency (GRID)

She cares, genuinely cares. I think that's such a wonderful thing. She's given me hope and humanity again in a system where most people don't care and we are just numbers.

- *Youth feedback about an OCR attorney*

The GRID is Colorado's first comprehensive advocacy guide for attorneys in D&N proceedings. First published by OCR with grant funding from the Colorado Children's Justice Task Force in 2012, and rewritten in 2018, this robust and up-to-date reference guide has been given to all OCR contract attorneys and is available online. The

GRID features 8 hearings chapters, which include before, during and after checklists and blackletter law discussion and tips, and 36 comprehensive fact sheets covering a wide variety of topics. OCR continues to update the GRID annually to reflect legal and practice developments.

#### [Litigation Toolkit](#)

The Litigation Toolkit is available to all OCR contractors online and is comprised of pleadings, social science resources and practice tools to give attorneys a centralized resource when drafting motions, preparing for litigation, and researching the multitude of issues impacting cases. Currently, the Litigation Toolkit has 155 pleadings, 41 social science resources, and 70 practice tools available to contractors. OCR added 102 new or updated documents to the Litigation Toolkit this year and will continue to update and add documents to ensure it remains current and comprehensive.

#### [Litigation Support list](#)

OCR maintains a list of attorneys with subject matter expertise who are approved to consult on cases in order to be efficient and effective when dealing with crossover issues like immigration, education, or appeals. Litigation support ensures attorneys have access to specialized knowledge and experience to assist in their high-quality legal representation.

#### [OCR Listserv](#)

Each contract attorney is required to join the OCR listserv, which features a searchable archive and provides an excellent forum for attorneys to discuss difficult case issues, trends in the state, case law updates, and more. OCR also uses the listserv to communicate new case processes, inform contractors of recent developments, and provide case law and legislative updates. In FY22, attorneys sent a total of 528 emails discussing 203 topics.

#### [Quarterly Newsletters](#)

OCR publishes a quarterly newsletter to ensure all contract attorneys have up-to-date information regarding case law updates, legislative updates, training announcements, and more. The newsletter is archived on the OCR website and provides links to new cases (which are then added to an online bank of cases) and a searchable link to access new statutes. In FY22, OCR published 4 newsletters.

[The CC] is an invaluable resource. His knowledge of educational law, specifically Special Ed, is amazing. His knowledge and advocacy skills and recommendations have enabled me to advocate for my clients at a level that I could not without him.

- *An attorney's feedback about OCR CC*

[The CC] kept me informed, maintained appointments and helped connect me to resources in the Denver area. [The CC] was also very knowledgeable about the special needs of the child in this case and addressed issues or highlighted issues for me that I would have otherwise overlooked.

- *An attorney's feedback about OCR CC*

### Case Consultant (CC) Program

Multidisciplinary law practice is a well-accepted best practice and OCR strives to support the use of CCs in the cases it is responsible for. The use of CCs allow additional work on cases at a lower hourly rate, provides social science expertise to complement the attorney's expertise and can enhance attorney contract with children/youth and other parties. In FY21, OCR launched a contract CC program which allowed contract attorneys to request CC assistance on a case-by-case basis. This program has grown substantially through FY 22 and OCR currently contracts with 14 CCs who provided assistance in over 210 cases covering 17 judicial districts. OCR is continuing to evaluate the use of CCs to implement best

practices across the state. As part of that process, attorneys are asked to fill out feedback forms for cases OCR CCs have been assigned. This feedback has highlighted how helpful a CC can be in these difficult cases.

## Accessible State-Wide Training

OCR is particularly proud of its robust training program which provides high quality, accessible training to attorneys and other stakeholders throughout the state. OCR focuses on four core competencies that provide the overarching umbrella for OCR's training program:

- Ethics/role of GAL, CLR and CFY
- Substantive knowledge (federal and state law, social science, and cultural competency)
- Skills (in and out of court advocacy, effective engagement with youth and professionals, and conducting a meaningful independent investigation)
- Law practice management

In FY22, OCR offered a series of concentrated trainings covering 4 key areas that have a significant impact on positive outcomes for children, youth, and families:

- Placement advocacy
- Youth voice and youth rights
- Effective advocacy in delinquency cases
- Trial skills

OCR requires all contract attorneys and OGAL attorneys to complete 10 hours of continuing legal education from a curriculum of sponsored and approved trainings. Five of these hours must be OCR sponsored trainings, which are provided to attorneys at no cost to them, and two hours must be diversity, equity and inclusion specific trainings. The majority of OCR sponsored trainings are recorded, archived and offered online to ensure accessibility across the state. OCR hosts an annual Fall Conference, new attorney trainings in the summer and winter, and regular webinars throughout the year. OCR also partners with other agencies to provide cross-systems training opportunities and offers scholarships to a variety of trainings, including national conferences for the NACC and ABA. In FY22, OCR provided 30 separate trainings, including 83 CLEs as follows:

- Core Competencies I
- OCR Annual Fall Conference
- Westlaw Edge Legal Research Training
- Addressing Domestic Violence in D&N Cases
- Foster Youth Transition Program
- Family First Prevention Services Act: Litigation & Advocacy Strategies for GALs
- Family First Prevention Services Act: Practice Considerations for Legal Professionals
- Family First & Juvenile Justice Reform in Colorado
- Human Trafficking 101
- Client-Directed Representation: Attorney Panel
- Core Competencies II
- Supporting Gender-Expansive Youth
- In Practice: Foster Youth in Transition Program
- GAL and CC Personal Safety in the Field
- Witnesses 101
- 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Excellence in Juvenile Defense Conference
- Using Experts in D&N Cases
- Using an Attachment & Bonding Expert in D&N Cases
- Trial Skills Training for GALs

At the end of FY22, OCR has a total of 424 hours of CLEs available online for easy accessibility to attorneys across Colorado.

OCR provides a mentoring program for attorneys for the first year of their contract with OCR. Mentors are paired from the relevant judicial district and help new GALs/CFY navigate this complex area of law. In FY 22, OCR established 17 mentoring pairs in 7 judicial districts.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

OCR engaged the Equity Project to do an organizational assessment in 2021. During that process, the Equity Project conducted a state-wide survey, a series of focus groups and a review of internal data. The resulting report was shared with staff in late 2021 and is the impetus for an OCR retreat (slated to be held this fiscal year) where staff and the executive team, along with a local DEI

I think she treated us fairly. You could definitely tell she wanted what was best for the children, but I didn't see her showing any favoritism for anyone, us included. She's an independent thinker. I think she did her job professionally.

- *Caregiver feedback about an OCR attorney*

expert facilitator, will engage in further planning around continuing to grow and improve as an agency. Meanwhile, the OCR DEI committee continued to meet on a regular basis to identify issues and resources impacting the agency, attorneys, and children and families. Outside of the agency, OCR continues to provide high quality DEI trainings accessible state-wide and participates in a variety of DEI committees.

## CASA Overview and Update

OCR works with Colorado CASA to support Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) as established in 19-1-213. While GALs and CFY are appointed on every case and serve as the child's legal advocate, CASAs are appointed for a portion of children by the Court to provide additional information and support. CASA is currently operating in 18 of the 22 judicial districts and each program operates under a memorandum of understanding between the program and the chief judge of the district. The CASA role and expectations are set out in C.R.S. 19-1-201 et seq.

Although each local program is unique, similarities do exist. CASA volunteers must meet minimum requirements, pass background checks, and successfully complete a mandatory 30- or 40- hour training program based on the curriculum created by the National CASA Association. Local CASA programs also require additional training for volunteers. Most CASA volunteers concentrate their service on one case at a time and typically a volunteer must commit to 18 months of service (though many volunteers serve throughout the life of a case). CASA volunteers monitor and increase support to counter the effect of trauma and increase children's resilience, education success, health and overall well-being. They focus on permanency, safety, education, health, development, relationships, extracurricular activities and transition to adulthood.

While GALs and CASA volunteers generally work collaboratively and are each required to provide independent information to the court, their roles differ in significant ways. A GAL is a licensed attorney and is an active party in all litigation related to the best interests of the child, CASA

volunteers are non-attorney advocates who provide written reports to the court and parties, establish supportive relationships with children, youth, parents, kin and placements.

OCR supports Colorado CASA by serving as the pass-through agency for general fund dollars and providing technical support and consultation regarding IV-E reimbursement. In FY22, 2,447 citizens volunteered as CASAs in 2,690 D&N cases, serving 4,800 children and youth.

## Looking Ahead

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OCR is excited to fully implement HB1038 and is dedicating significant time and resources to develop necessary training and supports to ensure its success. OCR's fall conference features an incredible array of local and national experts to launch its high-quality training regarding the new client-directed model of legal representation. A well-developed training plan will launch after the fall conference, providing additional training for OCR attorneys as well as interested stakeholders. OCR made recommendations to the Chief Justice regarding necessary updates to CJD04-06 after extensive research and stakeholder engagement. As a compliment to the training and practice standards, OCR is also developing a panoply of practice resources to support attorneys in this exciting new practice.

OCR is also eager to see its youth justice work develop with the addition of the new Youth Justice Attorney in the fall. It promises to be another year of hard work, system improvement and pushing to elevate youth voice in the system.

She talked with me one on one, and uh, she, what really stood out to me is that she asked all the right questions; she asked really unbiased questions about my parents and my situation and sometimes people outside the whole situation just to know what made me comfortable and she wasn't, um, too pushy about anything but the questions she asked made me feel safe and could trust her and respect her and I really appreciated that. She was here to advocate for me. That was really scarce for me at the time of my situation, um, that she was here to ask me for me and that was, that was a total blessing. She was kind and she made me feel safe and comfortable and just asked a lot of questions.

- *Youth feedback about OCR attorney*

## Appendix A

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### OCR Committee Work

OCR's mission, vision and values inform the work of staff as they participate in a wide variety of committees, taskforces and working groups. This work is essential to successfully advocating for children and youth in state level policy and administration. The following is the list of OCR committee involvement.

**Supreme Court Family Issues Committee and Other Professionals Standing Subcommittee:** This committee was established by the Supreme Court as a result of the recommendations of the Colorado Supreme Court Commission on Families. OCR's Executive Director serves on this committee.

**Child Focused Innovative Practices Subcommittee:** This subcommittee is charged with exploring innovative ways to serve Colorado's children in domestic relations and other court cases in Colorado. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

### Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

**CDHS Time Limited Foster Care Group:** This Task Force is determining whether administrative rules are necessary based on the recommendations from a CDHS Foster Parent Steering Committee related to foster care. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney sits as a non-voting member of the taskforce.

**Delivery of Child Welfare Services Taskforce:** This taskforce was created through SB18-254 to make recommendations regarding 12 areas of child welfare service, including implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). OCR's Executive Director is a member of the taskforce.

**FFPSA Workgroups:** OCR's Deputy Director sits on the juvenile justice workgroup and the Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison participates in the assessment cohort and the prevention/candidacy group.

**Children's Justice Act Task Force:** Reviews and evaluates state investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal. The taskforce makes policy and training recommendations to child welfare agencies and the judiciary and makes recommendations regarding the distribution of federal CJA funds. OCR's Training Director serves on this task force.

**Colorado Youth Detention Continuum Advisory Board (CYDC):** CYDC is implemented locally within each of Colorado's 22 Judicial Districts. The Advisory Board is responsible for developing an allocation formula and allocating funds from the General Assembly for these programs. In addition, this group is examining the services and placements necessary to ensure ongoing implementation of SB71 and the detention bed cap. OCR's Deputy Director is a member.

**Colorado Youth Leadership Network (COLYN):** Leaders of groups who work with young people who have been through the child welfare and/or delinquency system(s), share and coordinate efforts of their groups, and plan each year's Youth Awareness Week, which emphasizes positive youth voice, celebrates the influence youth have in our state and local communities, and recognizes the organizations/advocates who collaborate with Colorado youth and help guide them toward positive life choices and stability. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**Institutional Assessment Work Group:** This group drafted recommended revisions to CDHS regulations addressing assessments of referrals of child abuse occurring in public or private facilities that provide childcare out of the home, supervision, or maintenance. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**Kinship Foster Care Certification Task Group:** This group continues to draft recommended revisions to CDHS regulations related to the requirements for kinship caretakers of Colorado children/youth placed through child welfare cases. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**Training Steering Committee:** The Training Steering Committee is the decision-making body for the Division of Child Welfare Training System Academy. The Steering Committee provides continuous evaluation of the training program, reviews the training needs of the state, provides direction for standardized training, creates and integrates statutes, policies, and practices into statewide training. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

**Permanency Task Group:** A subcommittee of the Child Welfare Sub-Pac working on various permanency related issues including identifying barriers to permanency, possible solutions and financial needs, and focusing on disrupted/dissolving of adoptions. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney serves on this committee.

**DYS/DHS Transition Group:** This group is drafting recommendations to improve the collaborations between, and services and supports provided for, Colorado children/youth who transition from the child welfare system to the department of youth services system and vice versa. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**DYS State Policy Review Committee:** A DYS-assembled committee that allows stakeholders to discuss pending DYS policies and changes. As a member, OCR's Deputy Director reviews these policies and provides input on how policies may impact the best interests of youth in facilities.

**Statutory/Rules Review Group:** A multi-agency group that looks at necessary statutory and rule changes in child welfare. OCR's Deputy Director participates in this group.

**CDHS Chafee Quarterly:** The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program, formerly the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program) was created after the passage of the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 (Public Law 106-169). The program provides assistance to youth currently, and formerly, in foster care to successfully transition to adulthood by providing activities and programs



such as education, employment financial management, housing, emotional support, and connections to supportive adults. During the CDHS Chafee Quarterly Meetings, personnel from CDHS and county departments discuss the Chafee Program and other similar programs and resources available to older Colorado youth. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney attends.

**Program Improvement Plan Implementation Team/Continuous Quality Improvement (PIPIT/CQI):** Brings county and state child welfare practitioners together to examine state and county performance on key child welfare outcome indicators identified by the federal government on Colorado's PIP; identify strengths, opportunities, and strategies; and explore areas that are in need of further research. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney attends.

**CDHS Persons Responsible for Abuse and Neglect (PRANS) Under 18 Workgroup:** Founded findings of child abuse and neglect become part of a person's permanent record, which can create long-term negative consequences such as barriers to employment. This multidisciplinary work group is reviewing the Colorado Department of Human Services regulations and processes related to child abuse and neglect findings of children/youth aged less than 18 and making recommendations for change. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney participates in the group.

**Colorado Child Fatality Prevention Review Team:** The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's state-wide multidisciplinary team examines every child death in Colorado. The committee is charged with compiling statistical analysis, trends, and recommendations to reduce child fatalities. OCR's Executive Director serves on this committee.

**Court Improvement Program (CIP):** The CIP focuses on improving the justice system for children, especially children in dependency and neglect cases. Specifically, the CIP oversees the federal grant given to each state that is to be utilized to improve the Dependency Court System and oversees the DANSR cross-systems collaboration. **Best Practices CIP Taskforce** is comprised of 10 leaders in child welfare, including OCR's Executive Director, who serves as an executive member. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney serves as a non-executive member.

OCR staff also serve on the following CIP groups:

**CIP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup:** Created to improve outcomes for children, youth and families in all dependency and neglect cases by devising a programmatic strategy to address the overrepresentation of people of color and other groups of individuals facing discrimination in the child welfare system. The CIP DEI Workgroup's strategy involves infusing anti-racism tactics throughout the CIP program and addressing implicit and explicit bias by those working within the child welfare system. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney serves as a non-executive member as does an OCR LEAP member.

**Safety Based Decision Making Workgroup:** OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney serves as a co-lead.

**Best Practice Court Team & Family Treatment Drug Court Convening Planning Committee:** A multidisciplinary committee convened by the State Court Administrator's Office for the purpose of planning the annual BPCT/FTDC Convening for judicial district teams. OCR's Training Director serves on this subcommittee.

**Best Practice Court Team Redesign Workgroup:** OCR's Training Director is a non-executive member.

**Colorado Dependency & Neglect Judicial Institute Planning Committee:** A multidisciplinary committee convened by the State Court Administrator's Office and Dean of the Institute for the purpose of planning the annual D&N Judicial Institute for judicial officers in dependency court. OCR's Training Director serves on this committee.

**Jefferson County Joint DANSR/FIT Court Advisory Committee:** Jefferson County has been selected as a grant recipient of a Prevention and Family Recovery grant, an initiative undertaken by Children and Families Futures to work with established family treatment courts to integrate and institutionalize evidence-based services into their larger systems of care. OCR's Deputy Director serves on the advisory committee.

**Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Council:** The Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Council is appointed by the Governor as the State Advisory Group pursuant to the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and is charged under the Act to advise and make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on juvenile justice issues. The Council reviews and approves applications for federal grant funding through the JJDP Act, monitors and evaluates projects funded, and oversees compliance with the core requirements of the JJDP Act. OCR's Deputy Director sat on the Council in FY2022 and OCR's new Youth Justice Attorney has been appointed going forward.

**Code Review Committee:** The committee is reviewing Article 2 of Title 19 to promote improvements to, increasing the ease of use and clarity of laws regarding juvenile justice, ensuring the Code complies, or is consistent, with current research and evidence-based policies and practices. OCR's Deputy Director serves on this committee.

**Colorado CASA Public Policy Committee:** OCR Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is a member of the CASA Public Policy committee.

### **Colorado Bar Association**

**Juvenile Law Section (JLS):** The JLS "[p]rovides an organization available for all lawyers whose practice brings them in contact with matters affecting young people. Though a major focus concerns practice under the Children's Code, the committee is also concerned with relevant aspects of education law, domestic relations, agency/administrative law, and disability law." OCR Deputy Director is a co-editor for the Juvenile Law section of the Colorado Lawyer.

**Colorado Supreme Court Rules of Juvenile Procedure Committee:** The Committee's purpose is to periodically review, correct, update, and improve the Colorado Rules of Juvenile Procedure. The Committee is chaired by the Honorable Craig R. Welling of the Colorado Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court Liaison to the Committee is Justice Richard L. Gabriel. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney is a member of this committee and serves on the following subcommittees: Drafting; 1038/Counsel for Youth; Visions; Adjudication Advisement; and Indian Child Welfare Act.

**Colorado Judicial Department Child Welfare Appeals Workgroup:** Established pursuant to 19-1-109(3), this committee considers necessary changes to practices, rules, and statutes in order to ensure that appeals in D&N cases are resolved within six months of filing. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney serves on this workgroup and participates in the following subcommittees: Practitioners; Timelines to Permanency; Records; and Rule 3.4.

**Legislative Committees:** Legislation passed by the General Assembly requires implementation by the Executive and Judicial Branches. OCR staff participate in multi-disciplinary committees in order to affect the General Assembly's intent.

**Treatment of Persons with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal Justice System Taskforce (reauthorized pursuant to SB14-021):** Directed to examine the identification, diagnosis and treatment of persons with mental illness who are involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, including the examination of liability, safety and cost as they related to those issues. OCR's Deputy Director services as member of the taskforce.

**Human Trafficking Council (HB 14-1273):** The purpose of the council is to bring together leadership across various levels of government and the community a collaborative coalition to help combat human trafficking. The Council is expected to improve comprehensive services for victims and survivors of human trafficking, to assist in the successful prosecution of human traffickers, and to enhance human trafficking prevention efforts in Colorado. OCR's Executive Director is a member of the council.

**Substance Abuse Trend and Response Taskforce (SB 13-244):** In 2013, the General Assembly reauthorized the Colorado State Methamphetamine Taskforce under the name "Substance Abuse Trend and Response Taskforce" with representatives of state government, local governments, and the private sectors, including legislators, child advocates, public health officials, drug treatment providers, child welfare workers, law enforcement officers, judges, and prosecutors. OCR's CC Coordinator is a member of the taskforce.

**Juvenile Justice Reform Committee (SB19-108):** The JJRC was created to fulfill the mandates of SB19-108 including adopting assessment tools, screening tools, selecting vendors to assist in implementation and training on the tools and developing plans to measure their effectiveness. OCR's Deputy Director is a member of the taskforce and also participates on the Detention Alternatives Workgroup.

**High Quality Parenting Time Taskforce (HB21-1101):** The HQPTTF was created to research and review best practices in family time and make recommendations for family

time improvement in Colorado. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is a member of the Steering Committee and a voting member of the taskforce.

**Domestic Abuse Statutory Definition Taskforce (HB21-1099):** The taskforce will work to determine a recommended definition of domestic abuse to be included in the Children's Code and will review proposed language concerning best practices and training regarding domestic abuse for child welfare. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison is an appointed member of the taskforce.

**Celebration of Educational Excellence (CEEX):** Recognizes young people involved in foster care or youth services who graduated from high school, received a GED, or obtained a college degree each year. Graduates can attend a resource fair to connect with organizations that can support their future success. OCR's Youth Empowerment attorney serves on the CEEX planning committee.

**Coalition for Minority Equity (CMYE):** The mission of the CMYE is to ensure fair and equal justice for all juveniles by overseeing policies that address social, cultural, economic and educational roots of the disproportionate representation of minorities in the juvenile justice system. OCR's Case Consultant Coordinator is a member.

**Advisory Council for Homeless Youth (ACHY):** This multidisciplinary council shares resources and information relevant to homeless youth and plan's Colorado's Homeless Youth Awareness Month. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney attends meetings.

**Systemic Family Engagement/Steering Committee:** This multidisciplinary committee aims to re-imagine the child welfare system for the next seven generations, based largely on the input with children/youth and families who have experienced the system. OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney is a member.

**Children's Justice Act Taskforce Subcommittee:** This is a time-limited taskforce funded by the Children's Justice Act to develop a statewide Parent Toolkit for D&N cases that can be used statewide. OCR's Training Director serves on this subcommittee.

**American Bar Association Section of Litigation Children's Rights Litigation Committee – Children's Lawyers Connect:** This strategy group monitors developments impacting children's right to counsel and works to improve access to justice, engage pro bono lawyers, and improve outcomes for all children who have contact with the legal system. OCR's Deputy Director is a committee member.

**The Family Justice Initiative:** A national collaborative who share a common goal: to increase access to high-quality legal representation for children and parents in child welfare cases. It is led by the ABA Center on Children and the Law, the Children's Law Center of California, and the Washington State Office of Public Defense. OCR's Deputy Director is participating in the initiative.

**FJI Quality Workgroup:** This workgroup is creating tools and provides expertise to improve the quality of legal representation for families across the country. Research of parent representation programs has shown that interdisciplinary legal teams that are well-trained, fairly compensated, and have reasonable caseloads help families reunify more quickly without compromising child safety. One of the tools this group is working on is an anti-racist toolkit. OCR's CC Coordinator participates in the subcommittee.

**FJI Appellate Advocacy Subcommittee:** Offers trial and appellate attorney guidance about what to look for in choosing the best cases to take on appeal, creating an Appellate How-to Guide, and creating talking points for lawyers to use when describing the appellate process to clients. In addition, the Subcommittee will provide an introduction that covers strategies for building an effective appellate practice. OCR's Appellate and Affirmative Litigation Strategies Attorney participates in this group.

**National Association of Child Counsel (NACC) State Coordinator:** NACC established a state coordinator program to expand outreach and localized support efforts to a growing network of child welfare attorneys. OCR's Staff Attorney & Legislative Liaison serves as the Colorado state coordinator.

**Children's Law Office Project (CLOP):** Designed to improve the delivery of legal services to children in abuse and neglect cases through improved child law office operation and management. OCR's Staff Attorney/Legislative Liaison participates.

**JCAMP:** The Capacity Building Center for Courts, through a project funded by the Children's Bureau, is working to create national Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP). OCR was selected to be on the expert advisor group. Its purpose is to create a set of court, judicial, and attorney performance measures for the field (including all IV-E jurisdictions) to understand and improve practice. OCR's Deputy Director serves as an expert advisor.