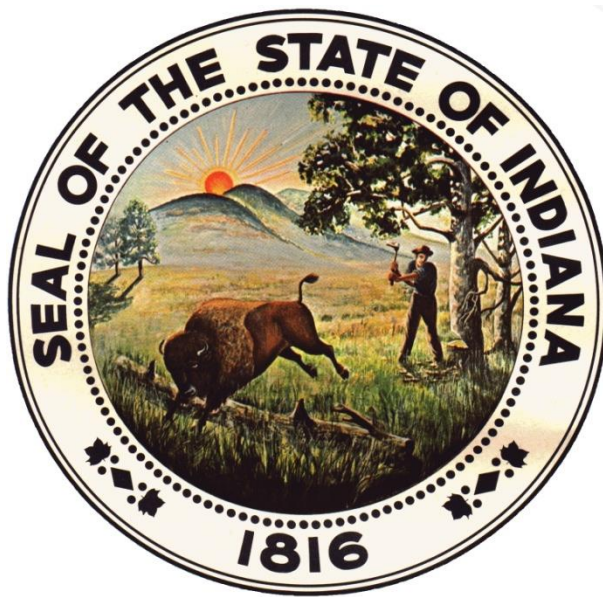


State of Indiana

**Department of Child Services
Ombudsman Bureau**



2022 Annual Report



Mission

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau effectively responds to complaints concerning DCS actions or omissions by providing problem resolution services and independent case reviews. The Bureau also provides recommendations to improve DCS service delivery and promote public confidence.

Guiding Principles

- A healthy family and supportive community serve the best interest of every child.
- Independence and impartiality characterize all Bureau practices and procedures.
- All Bureau operations reflect respect for parents' interest in being good parents and DCS professionals' interest in implementing best practice.



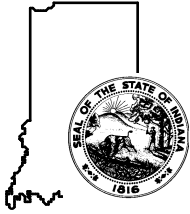
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STATE OF INDIANA

Eric J. Holcomb, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau

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Indianapolis, IN 46204
317-234-7361

The Honorable Eric J. Holcomb, Governor
The Honorable Speaker and President Pro Tempore
Dr. Rebecca Holwerda, Commissioner, Indiana Department of Administration
Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services

In accordance with my statutory responsibility as the Department of Child Services Ombudsman Director, I am pleased to submit the 2022 Annual Report for the Indiana Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau.

This report provides an overview of the activities of the office from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022, and includes information regarding program administration, case activity, and outcomes. Included as well is an analysis of the complaints received, recommendations provided to the Department of Child Services, and the agency's responses to the Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau.

I would like to express my continued appreciation for the leadership and support of Governor Holcomb, Director Stigdon, Commissioner Holwerda, and the Indiana State Legislature. We are fortunate to serve in a state that is concerned about and committed to the constituents of the State of Indiana. Appreciation is also extended to the staff of the Department of Child Services and their diligent efforts to support the mission of the Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau in 2022. The children and families, and those who serve them in our state, continue to face challenges and struggle with recovery from the vast effects of the pandemic. The professionals and the staff working with our vulnerable populations during this time are to be commended, as there continue to be barriers to this work. Critical issues involving hiring and retaining staff in DCS continue, as well as with the providers of services to families in the area of mental health and addictions. I am fortunate to continue my service to the citizens of Indiana as the Director of the Department of Child Services Ombudsman Bureau.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shoshanna Everhart".

Shoshanna Everhart, MSW LCSW
Director, DCS Ombudsman Bureau

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The delivery of services to Indiana families continued to be affected by the recent pandemic. Staffing and retention of staff in DCS and provider agencies continues to be a struggle. Our state did improve the salaries of DCS staff after a Comprehensive Compensation Study completed at the request of Governor Holcomb. We anticipate improvements in retention in the coming months.

Shoshanna Everhart was appointed as Ms. Alfreda Singleton-Smith's replacement as Director in September 2020. In 2022 one of the Assistant Ombudsman left the agency after completing her graduate degree and becoming employed as a school social worker. We were able to fill our open position with a recent college graduate after a six-month vacancy in the position.

Despite the challenges, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau continued to focus efforts on ensuring the continued stability of the agency's goals of:

- effectively responding to constituent complaints in a timely manner;
- enhancing and developing program practices and guidelines;
- increasing the number of constituent responses; and
- expanding outreach initiatives.

Authority

The Department of Child Services (DCS) Ombudsman Bureau was established in 2009 by the Indiana Legislature to provide DCS oversight. IC 4-13-19 gives the Department of Child Services Ombudsman the authority "to receive, investigate, and attempt to resolve a complaint alleging that the Department of Child Services, by an action or omission occurring on or after January 11, 2005, failed to protect the physical or mental health or safety of any child or failed to follow specific laws, rules, or written policies." The law also provides the DCS Ombudsman Bureau the authority to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures in general and provide recommendations.

Activity Overview

During 2022, the primary activity of the office was to respond to complaints, determine findings, provide case-specific and systemic recommendations, and monitor DCS responses. When case findings were determined to have systemic implications, policies and procedures were reviewed and general recommendations were provided. This year the DCS Ombudsman Bureau responded to 1,621 Information and Referral (I & R) inquiries, conducted 158 Assists, opened 135 Cases, and closed 127 Cases.

Administration

Location: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau is an independent state agency housed in the Indiana Department of Administration (IDOA). IDOA provides office space, furnishings, equipment, and utilities. During 2022 much of the work was completed by staff working with a hybrid schedule of work in the office and remote work. Staff rotated time in the office to allow for continued workflow, response to constituents in a timely manner, and coordination and supervision. This type of work environment serves our type of work very well, and the Governor allowed for this flexibility.

Staff/Resources: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau consists of the Director and three full-time Assistant Ombudsman (Appendix A – Staff Biographies). Legal consultation is provided as needed by Indiana Department of Administration (IDOA) General Counsel and/or Deputy Attorney General. Technical assistance is provided by the IDOA Management Information Systems Director.

In late 2016, the Director of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau began steps to increase the Assistant Ombudsman’s job title and salary to attract and retain skilled talent to the DCS Ombudsman Bureau, while enhancing current program service delivery. As a result of this endeavor, the Assistant Ombudsman’s class title of Administrative Assistant was adjusted in the first quarter of 2017 to Program Director 2. This change also included a 4.5 percent annual salary increase. It is believed this has assisted us with retention, and we are fortunate to maintain an experienced, talented staff.

Continued program growth in 2018 presented opportunities for the growth of service delivery to those constituents impacted by DCS involvement. In preparation for the 2019 budget year, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau worked with Indiana Department of Administration staff to submit a budget justification in the fall of 2018 proposing a staffing increase of one full-time equivalent (FTE) Assistant Ombudsman. The position was necessary to support the DCS Ombudsman Bureau’s goal of timely response to ever increasing constituent needs. The staff increase was approved during the 2019 state legislative session, and one FTE Assistant Ombudsman position was added to the DCS Ombudsman Bureau in October 2019, bringing the total to three.

At the beginning of 2022 the DCS Ombudsman Bureau had a resignation of one of the Assistant Ombudsman who had completed her MSW and was hired by a local school corporation. We did not fill that position until August of 2022 as we searched for an appropriate replacement. We are pleased to have a new Assistant Ombudsman who was able to complete new family case manager training to assist in his preparation for the position at our agency. We appreciate DCS providing this training for our employee.

Budget: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau was appropriated \$362,000 for the 2022-2023 fiscal year, which is allocated from the general fund. Most of the expenditures are for personnel, with the remainder allocated to supportive services, outreach, and supplies.

Program Development

Policies and Procedures: The *Procedures and Practices Guidelines* for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau is posted on the agency’s website. The manual continues to be a viable resource for sharing information regarding the policies and practices of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. The manual serves as an important mechanism for guiding the operations of the Bureau pursuant to statute (Indiana Code (IC) 4-13-19) and informing constituents of the agency’s policies and practices.

Website Enhancements: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau continues to monitor the website to ensure that it is functioning properly, and that information provided remains relevant to meet the needs of Indiana constituents. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau’s information is also linked to the Indiana DCS website (www.dcs.in.gov). An Ombudsman website launched in 2016 by the State of Indiana provided an additional opportunity for constituents to access ombudsman services and support

across the state (www.ombudsman.in.gov). Information regarding the DCS Ombudsman Bureau can be found on this page.

Tracking and Reporting: This office continues to compile quarterly reports to document complaint/case activity each quarter and track responses to recommendations. The information from the quarterly reports is used to compile summary information for the Annual Report. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has also been utilizing an electronic case management and data tracking system to support the agency’s continually increasing growth.

Outreach: In an effort to increase public awareness of the office pursuant to IC 4-13-19-5 (a) (5), the DCS Ombudsman Bureau developed several strategies. Educational presentations continue to be available to the public and can be requested via the website, DCS Ombudsman Bureau email, or staff. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau staff continued to be available to present workshops and presentations as requested. Additionally, as a member of the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA), the DCS Ombudsman Bureau participated in national ombudsman best practices member-sponsored surveys/queries and provided a presentation regarding Indiana’s program to the group. The Ombudsman Director is an active member of the USOA and has assisted on national efforts to improve the group.

DCS Ombudsman Bureau brochures and posters are available to all local DCS offices and the public. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau Director serves as a statutory member of Indiana’s Statewide Child Fatality Review Team, a multidisciplinary team charged with reviewing child fatalities. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau will continue to develop strategies designed to reach constituents, specifically those individuals that are least likely to access DCS Ombudsman Bureau services. These include, but are not limited to, parents, grandparents and other relatives, and service providers.

Training: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau continues to participate in educational programs specific to the ombudsman role and child welfare practice. The agency is a member of the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA). The USOA provides opportunity for consultation, support, and education to all members. The DCS Ombudsman Director attended the USOA Annual Conference in 2022. Trainings offered through this group are of high quality and staff often participate in these opportunities. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau staff have also participated in trainings at conferences hosted by DCS, Indiana Youth Institute, Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy (IARCA), Indiana Statewide Child Fatality Review Committee, Kids Count Indiana, Resource and Adoptive Parent Training (RAPT) Conferences, Marion County DCS Trauma Informed Care Symposium, and a variety of webinars, books, and articles with information of interest to the agency. In-person training was not plentiful during 2022; however, we are hopeful for additional in-person opportunities in 2023.

Metrics: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau continues to track the turnaround time for responses to complaints, completions of reviews, and investigations. The metrics indicate that the DCS Ombudsman Bureau continues to exceed the goals established for best practice related to response to constituents as defined below.

Identified Task	Goal	2020 Metric (Average)	2021 Metric (Average)	2022 Metric (Average)
<i>Days from Inquiry to Response</i>	1 day	.45 day	.52 day	.84 day

<i>Days Case Open</i>	30-60 days	25.53 days	24.2 days	29.8 days
<i>Days Investigation Open</i>	60-90 days	54 days	56.5 days	82.5 days

Collaboration with DCS

Communication: The communication between the DCS Ombudsman Bureau (DCSO) and DCS management has primarily been through email. We have not been able to meet in person to review overall findings, but we are hopeful for that opportunity in 2023. All specific case reviews and/or investigations are initiated by contacting the Local Office Director, Regional Manager, and/or other involved DCS department(s) who ensures the DCS Ombudsman Bureau is provided all requested information and/or facilitates staff interviews. Requests by DCSO for information in specific cases are responded to within appropriate time frames and the exchanges are respectful and informative.

Information Access: DCS has provided the DCS Ombudsman Bureau with access to all records on the MaGIK Casebook and MaGIK Intake systems, in addition to the DCS reports available on the DCS intranet. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau also reviews case files and interviews DCS staff, as necessary.

Fatalities/Near Fatalities: To ensure this office is aware of child fatalities/near fatalities with DCS history, the DCS Hotline forwards all such reports to the DCS Ombudsman Bureau to track and/or assess for further review. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau no longer participates in the Peer Review process on the cases that meet criteria, as the procedure has changed at DCS. DCS began the process of implementing the Safe Systems Improvement Tool (SSIT) in late 2019 as a means of improving the previous Peer Review process. According to the Praed Foundation, “the SSIT is designed to record the output of the peer review analysis. The purpose of the instrument is to support a culture of safety, improvement, and resilience – looking beyond ‘human error’ and fostering rich understanding of the complex interdependencies and system interactions that often underly common casework problems.” Implementation of the SSIT has significantly changed the involvement of the Ombudsman Bureau in the review of fatalities. We will continue to work with DCS to monitor the SSIT process and determine if our current level of involvement is appropriate.

Other: The DCS Ombudsman Bureau is unable to draw any conclusions about the general status of children in Indiana pursuant to IC 4-13-19-10(b) (2), as the focus of the Bureau has been on the complaint process. It is noted, however, the Indiana Youth Institute annually publishes [Kids Count in Indiana](#), a profile in child well-being data book, which provides data on the general status of children in Indiana. The current *Kids Count in Indiana Data Book Executive Summary* is available in the office of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau, and the full Indiana Data Book is available at no cost at www.iyi.org/databook.

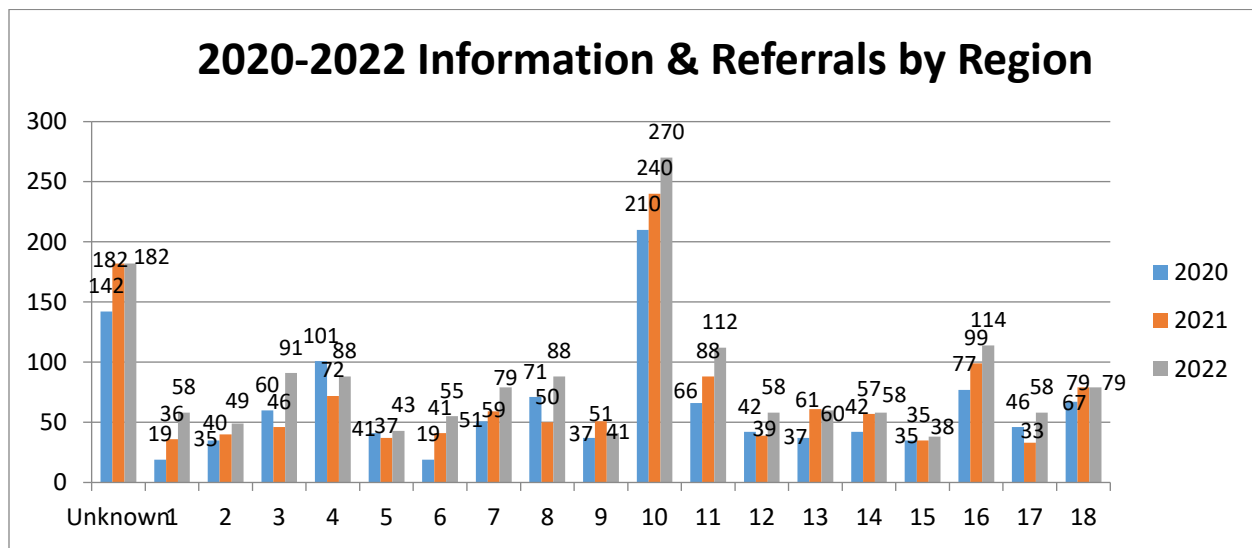
Complaints

Process Overview

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau receives many telephone and email inquiries that do not result in an open case but require an information and/or referral response. To track this service, pertinent information about the contact is recorded in the Information and Referral (I & R) contact log database. Some inquiries require assistance with a resolution but do not necessitate opening a case file. This level of response is referred to as an Assist; the pertinent information about the Assist is tracked and recorded in the Assist database. A case is opened when a complaint form is received and all required steps have been completed by the complainant. The complainant is notified of the receipt of the complaint, and an intake process is initiated to determine the appropriate response. DCS is notified of the complaint following the intake assessment, after which a variety of responses are possible. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau may initiate an investigation, resolve and/or refer after a thorough review, refer the case back to DCS, refer to Child Protection Team (CPT), file a Child Abuse/Neglect Report, decline to take further action, or close the case if the complainant requests to withdraw the complaint. Following a review, the complainant and DCS are informed in writing as to the outcome. If a case is investigated, a detailed report is completed and forwarded to DCS and the complainant if they are a parent, guardian, custodian, Court, or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Guardian ad Litem (GAL). Other complainants receive a general summary of the findings. If a complaint is determined to have merit, recommendations are provided to address the issue, and DCS provides a response to the recommendations within 60 days. The flowchart in Appendix C illustrates this process.

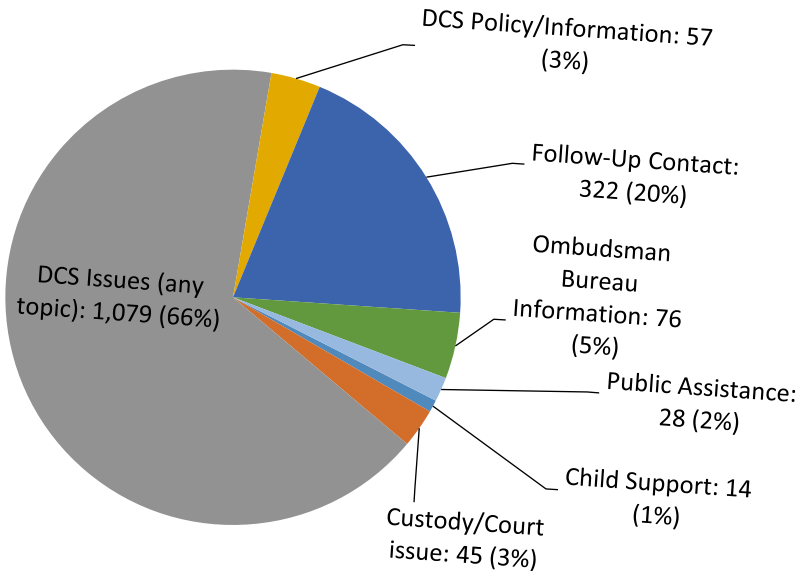
Information and Referral Inquiries (I & R)

The office received 1,621 I & R Inquiries during 2022, which is an increase of 276 contacts over the 1,345 I & R Inquiries received by the DCS Ombudsman Bureau in 2021. The graphs below illustrate the origin by DCS region and the topics of inquiry.



2022 Telephone + Email Information & Referral

(1,621 Contacts)

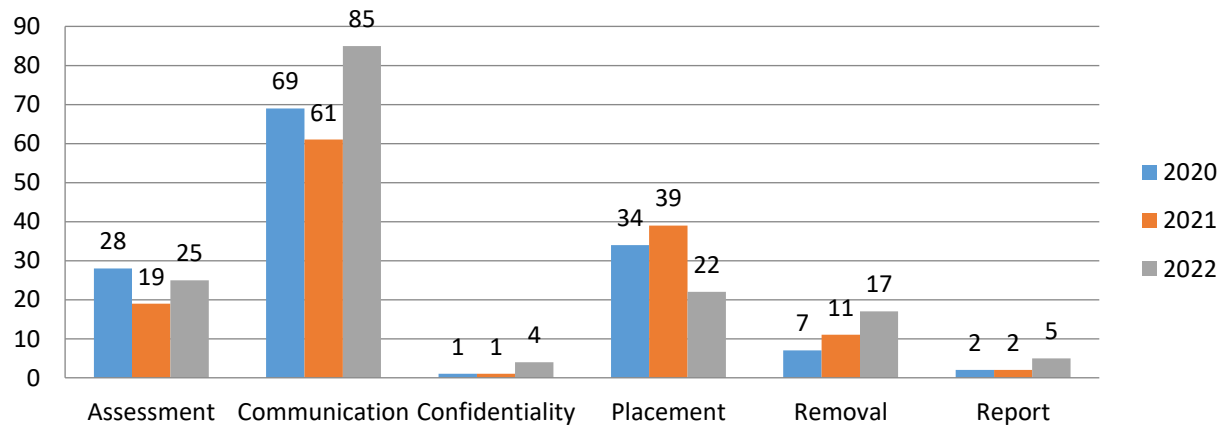


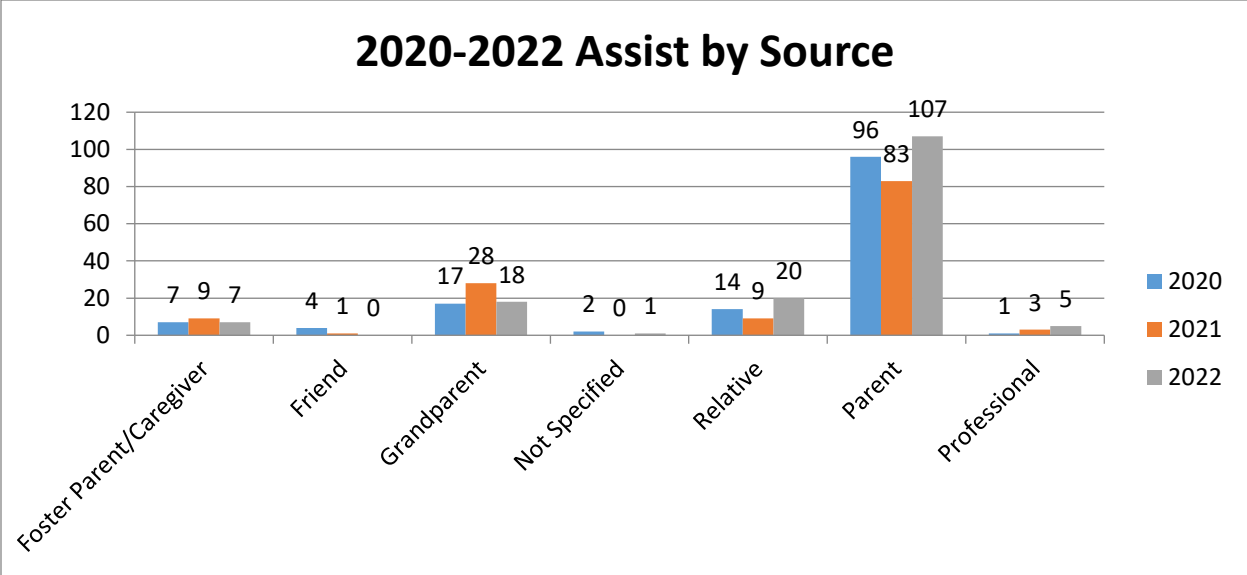
The I & R function has proven to be a valued service for constituents. Providing potential complainants with education regarding the DCS process and/or contact information for DCS staff is often the first step to a successful resolution. See Appendix D for a regional map.

Assists

Assists occur when a formal complaint is not necessary but a higher level of involvement than an I & R response is required. Assists are appropriate when communication and/or clarity of specific aspects of a case are the main concerns. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau completed 158 Assists in 2022, an increase of 25 over the previous year. The use of the Assist category continues to demonstrate that communication between complainants and DCS is key to resolving differences between stakeholders. The following graphs illustrate additional details about the Assists.

2020-2022 Assist by Issue





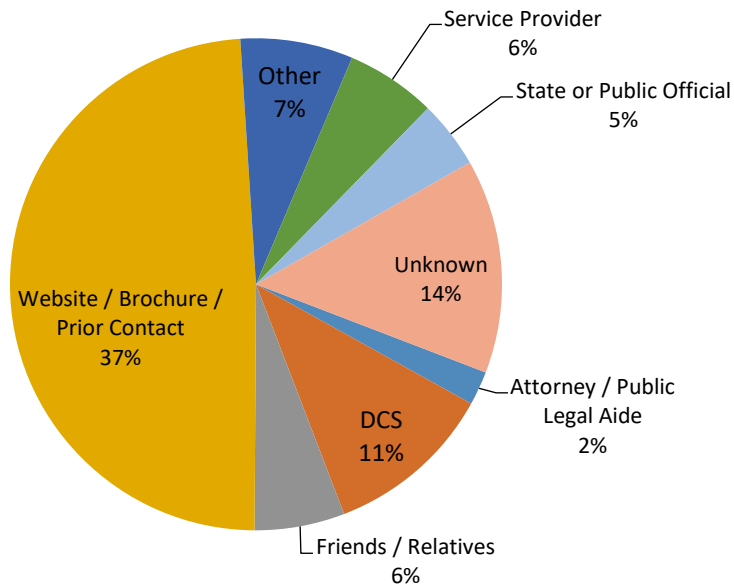
Cases

During 2022, 135 cases were opened, and 127 cases were closed. The cases were generated following the receipt of a formal complaint. A total of 135 active cases were reviewed during 2022, which included cases carried over from the last quarter of 2021. Two investigations were completed in 2022. The significant number of Assists (158) suggests the DCS Ombudsman Bureau was able to foster greater problem resolution by actively encouraging communication between the DCS local offices and DCS Ombudsman Bureau complainants at the onset of the inquiries. As a result, DCS Ombudsman Bureau staff were able to actively focus on case reviews and investigations that were more complex in nature. It should also be noted that Information and Referrals contacts increased from 1,345 to 1,621 in 2022, and active cases had a slight decrease as well (142 to 135) in 2022. These differences can be attributed to specific intake procedures that support communication between the complainant and DCS central and local offices for problem resolution before formal complaints are accepted by the DCS Ombudsman Bureau.

Referral Source

Data suggests that *Website/Brochure/Prior Contact* continues to be the largest source of referrals. Other referral sources have remained constant within one to ten points. The *Unknown* category reflects those individuals that chose not to identify a referral source during intake discussions with the DCS Ombudsman Bureau or on complaint forms.

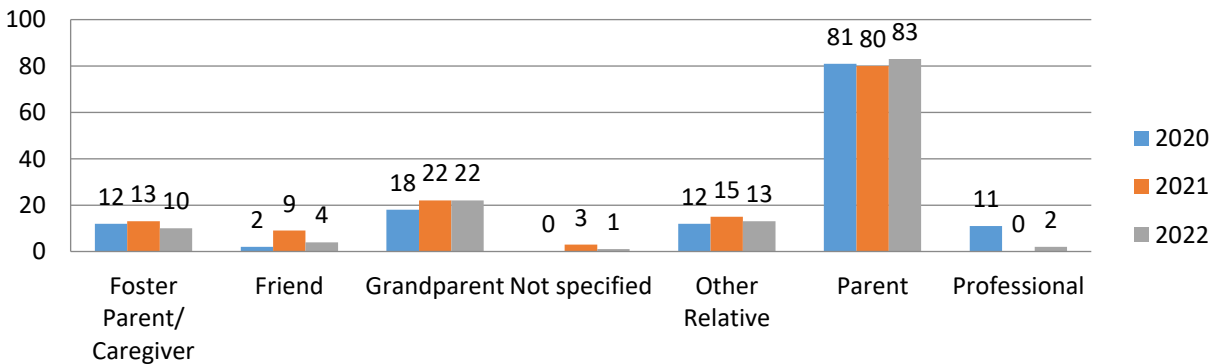
2022 Referral Source



Complaint Source

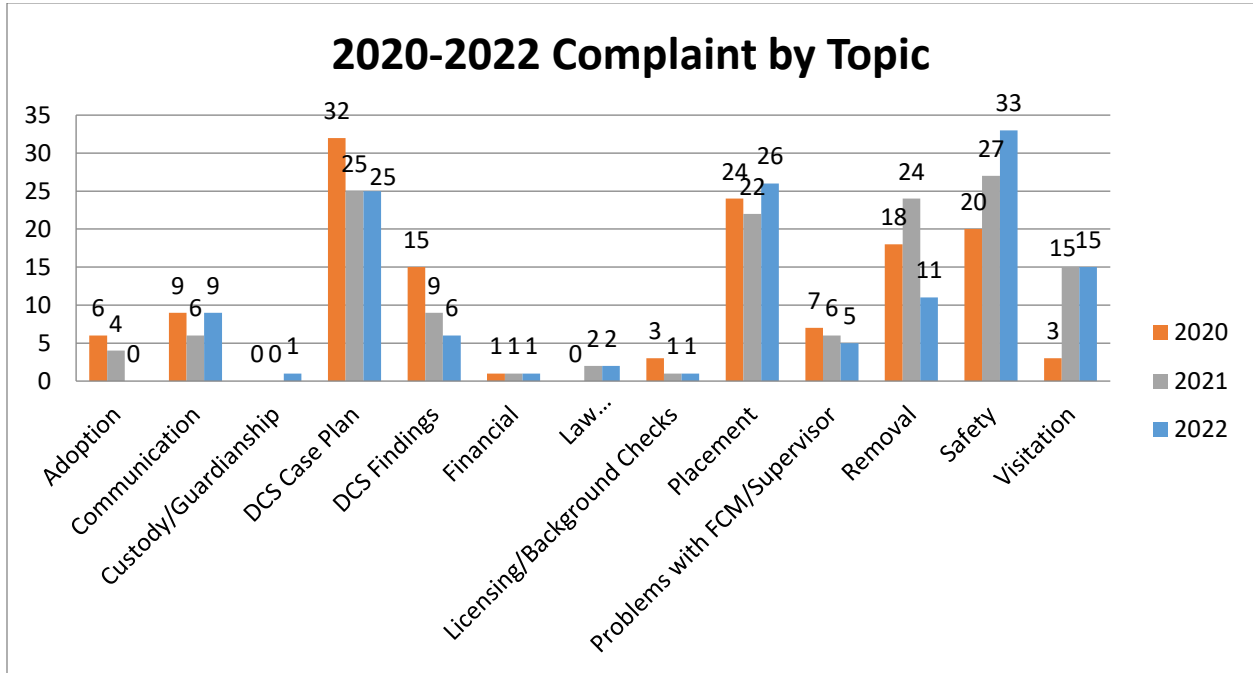
Except as necessary to investigate and resolve a complaint, the complainant’s identity is confidential without the complainant’s written consent. The complainant is given the opportunity to provide written consent on the complaint form. During 2022, parents continued to account for the greatest share of complainants followed by grandparents, other relatives, and foster/adoptive parents.

2020-2022 Complaint Source



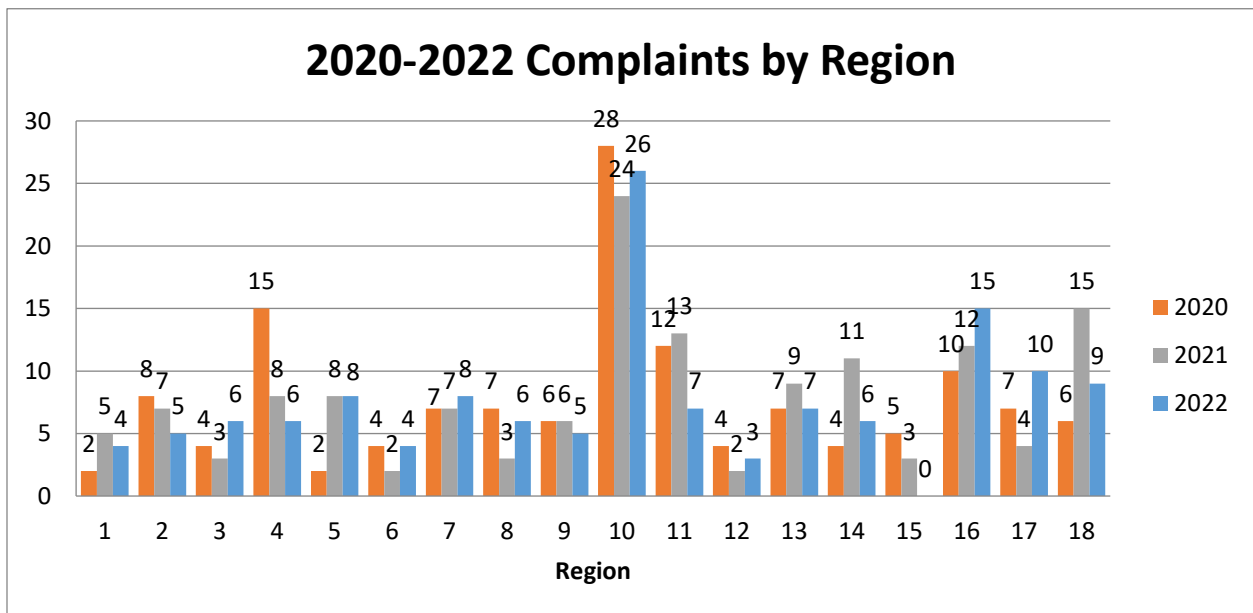
Complaint Topics

During 2022, the four major complaint topics included *Child Safety*, *Placement*, *Case Plans*, and *Visitation*. There is a continued trend of changes in complaint topics from previous years, as illustrated in the 2020-2022 graph comparison below.



Complaints by Region

As DCS is organized in regions, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau tracks contacts and cases accordingly. The graph below illustrates the complaint activity in each of the eighteen regions for 2020-2022.



Response Categories

When a complaint is filed with the office, a case is opened, and a preliminary review is completed to determine the appropriate response. A variety of responses are possible depending on case specifics. Following is a description of each type of response.

Review/Refer or Resolve: This type of response involves a comprehensive review of the case file and documentation provided by the complainant. The local office provides additional documentation requested and responds to questions from the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. Other professionals are contacted for information as needed. While the review is thorough, the focus is on providing a resolution or a strategy that can assist with a resolution. Depending on the circumstances in each case, some cases that are reviewed receive a validity determination and others do not. In either case, the complainant and DCS are notified of the findings in writing. A major portion of the complaints received fall into this category.

Investigate: An investigation also involves a review of the case files and documentation provided by the complainant. As needed, DCS staff involved with the case, in addition to the CASA/GAL and service providers, are interviewed. Case-specific laws, rules, and written policies are researched. Experts are consulted, if needed. Complaints that result in an investigation tend to have multiple allegations with little indication that a resolution is likely. Upon the completion of an investigation, an investigation report is submitted describing in detail the findings of fact regarding each allegation and a determination of the merit of each allegation in the complaint. The report is provided to DCS and the complainant if they are a parent, guardian, custodian, GAL/CASA, or Court. If the complainant is not one of the above, they are provided a summary of the findings in general terms.

Refer Back to the Local DCS: Pursuant to statute, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau requires that complainants attempt to resolve their issues with the local DCS office through the DCS internal complaint process prior to filing a complaint with the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. On occasion, it is discovered during the intake assessment that the complainant overlooked this step and failed to address his/her concerns with the local office before filing the complaint. These cases are referred to the local office. Appropriate contact information is provided. The complainant may reactivate the complaint if a resolution is not reached.

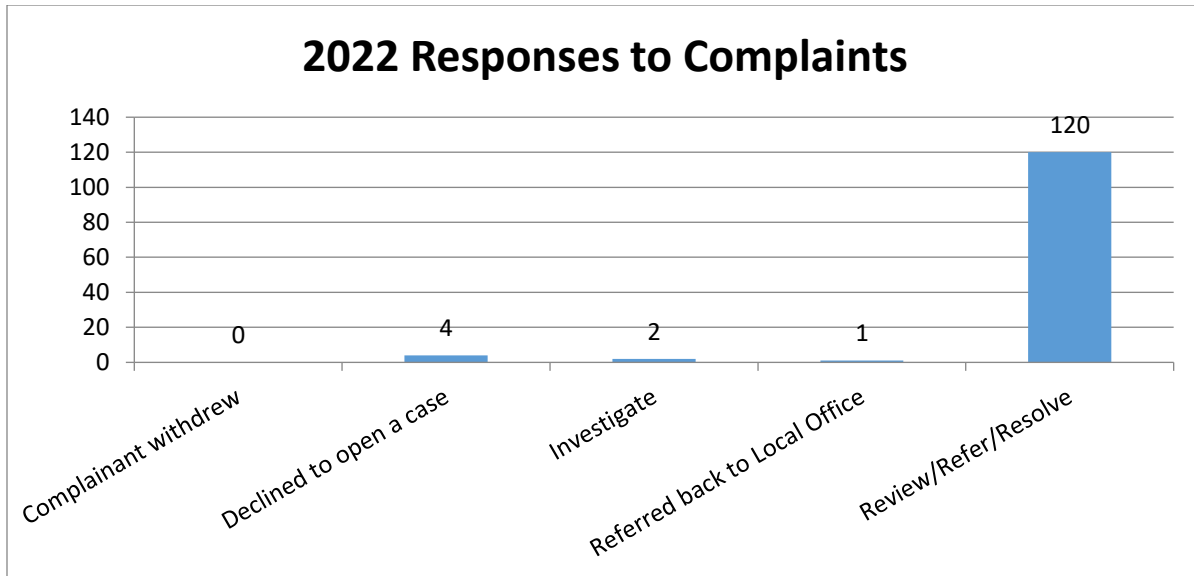
Close Due to Complainant Withdrawal: Some cases have been closed prior to completion because the complainant decides to withdraw the complaint during the process.

Decline: Cases that are not within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction or do not otherwise meet the criteria established in the procedural manual for screening out will be declined.

Refer to Child Protection Team: The Ombudsman has the option of seeking assistance from the local Child Protection Team and may refer cases to the team for review.

File a Child Abuse Neglect (CA/N) Report: In the event the information disclosed in the complaint to the Ombudsman contains unreported CA/N, a report is made to the child abuse hotline. This is not a frequent occurrence.

The following graph illustrates the frequency of each type of response in 2022.



Complaint Validity

The standard for determining the validity of the complaint is outlined in the statute. If it is determined DCS failed “to protect the physical or mental health or safety of any child or failed to follow specific, laws, rules, or written policies,” a complaint is considered valid. All investigations generate a validity finding, but all reviewed cases do not – depending on the specific case circumstances. When determining the merit of a complaint, the following designations are applied.

Merit: When the primary allegation in the complaint is determined to be valid following a review or an investigation, the complaint is said to have merit.

Non-Merit: When the primary allegation in the complaint is determined not to be valid following a review or investigation, the complaint is said not to have merit.

Both Merit and Non-Merit: When there are multiple allegations, each allegation is given a separate finding. This designation is applied when some allegations have merit and others do not.

Not Applicable (NA): Some cases that are opened for a review reach closure without receiving a validity determination. In these instances, the findings fall into one of the categories below.

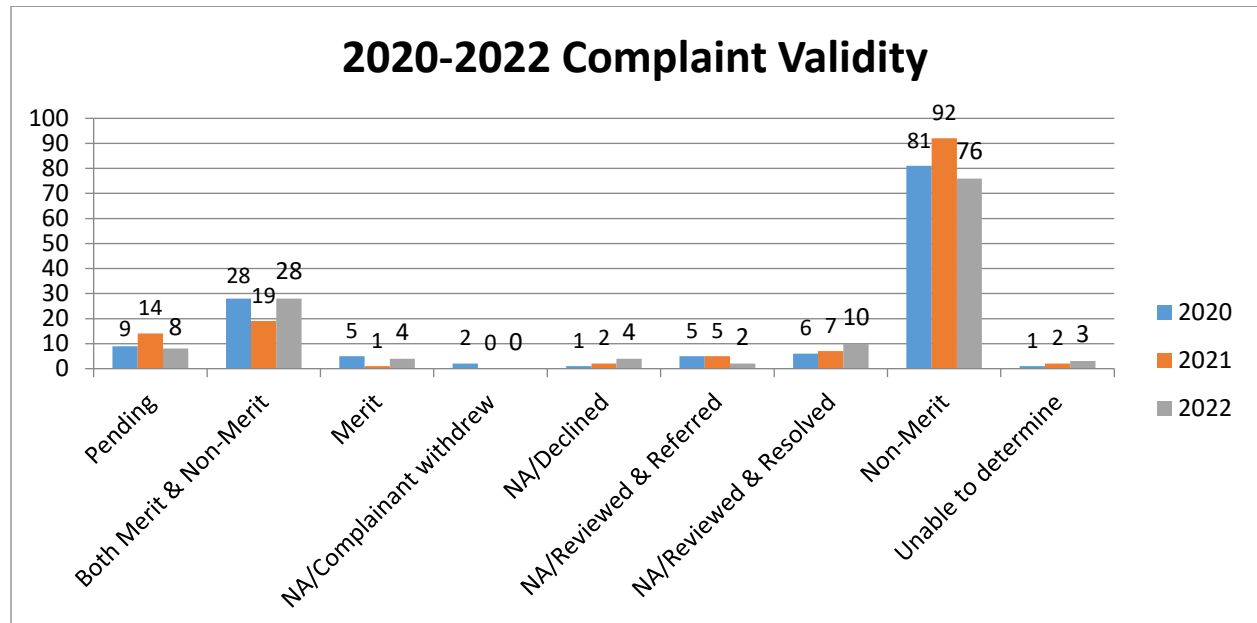
- NA/Complainant Withdrew
- NA/Case Declined
- NA/Reviewed & Referred
- NA/Reviewed & Resolved

Unable to Determine: Occasionally the information uncovered is so conflicting and/or the unavailability of significant documentation renders it impossible to determine a finding.

Peer Review: When the Ombudsman participates in a collaborative review with DCS, a case is opened to reflect that a review is occurring. However, the peer reviews do not receive a validity determination, and the results of the review are internal and deliberative.

Outcomes

During 2022, validity designations were determined in 127 cases. Of these cases 4 were found to have merit, 28 had allegations that were both merit and non-merit, and 76 were determined not to have merit. The remaining 19 cases fell into other categories. Eight cases were pending determination at year end. Based on this information, it can be generalized that most of the cases (non-merit) that come to the attention of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau are most appropriately managed by completing a thorough review for the purposes of facilitating a resolution or providing a resolution strategy. For these reasons it would be counterproductive to issue a finding. On the other hand, some reviews, and all investigations, involve the depth of analysis that result in detailed findings that generate case-specific and, at times, systemic recommendations (merit). The following graphs provide an illustration of the validity outcomes for 2022 as well as a comparison with prior years.



DCS Ombudsman Bureau Recommendations and DCS Responses

During 2022, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau offered case-specific recommendations on 32 cases following a review or an investigation. Pursuant to IC 4-13-19-5 (f), “If after reviewing a complaint or conducting an investigation, and considering the response of an agency, facility, or program and any other pertinent material, the office of the Department of Child Services Ombudsman determines that the complaint has merit or the investigation reveals a problem, the Ombudsman may recommend that the agency, facility, or program:

- (1) consider the matter further;
- (2) modify or cancel its actions;
- (3) alter a rule, order, DCS policy or internal policy; or
- (4) explain more fully the action in question.”

DCS is required to respond to the recommendations within a reasonable time, and the DCS Ombudsman Bureau has established sixty days for the response time frame. The following case examples include a sample of case reviews and investigations completed in 2022 in which the allegations were determined to have merit or both merit and non-merit, DCS Ombudsman recommendations, and DCS responses.

CASE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

These examples are provided to depict the wide range of issues brought to the attention of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau and the types of recommendations offered. ***The DCS Ombudsman Bureau affirms the actions of DCS in most cases reviewed, and it is important to maintain this perspective when reviewing cases in which concerns are identified.***

Case Example #1 Parent Engagement/Safety

The complainant alleged DCS failed to notify the biological mother of the assessments regarding the child while in the care of the legal guardian. The complainant alleged the child remained in the home despite there being concerns regarding the legal guardian’s ability to keep the child safe.

Finding(s):

The child was residing with their legal guardians (relatives). The biological parents had been involved with DCS before. DCS received three reports in 2021 alleging the guardian(s) had neglected the child. The biological parents were not notified about the first two assessments that occurred in February 2021 and October 2021, respectively. However, they were notified of the assessment that occurred in December 2021 by way of *Notice of Availability of Completed Report and Information (NOA)*. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the concern DCS did not notify the biological parents of the assessments pertaining to the child while in the care of the legal guardian. In *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.4: Locating and Engaging Noncustodial Parents* it states DCS will make diligent efforts to locate and engage the noncustodial parent

beginning in the assessment phase. It further indicates in *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.10: Interviewing the Parent, Guardian, or Custodian* the Family Case manager will provide each parent with a copy of the NOA.

DCS interviewed or attempted to interview the child, the legal guardian (alleged perpetrator), and the report source during each assessment. DCS assessed the child's safety and determined them to be safe with the other legal guardian as protective factor. DCS based their findings on the evidence available. Thus, no merit was found in this regard.

Recommendation(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau recommended the local office staff review the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.4: Locating and Engaging Noncustodial Parents* to increase the likelihood of future implementation.

DCS Response(s):

The Local Office Director (LOD) indicated DCS utilized this experience as a learning opportunity for the local office as well as the regional management team. LOD noted the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.4: Locating and Engaging Noncustodial Parents* was reviewed by all staff at the local office. Additionally, the policy was reviewed by the regional management team, which led to a better understanding of the policy.

Case Example #2 Safety/Documentation

The complainant alleged the child was allowed to remain in the mother's care though the child had suffered visible injuries at the hands of her mother.

Finding(s):

DCS allowed the child to remain in the home though the mother admitted to the physical abuse allegations and the child had visible marks and bruises on her person from the said abuse. DCS noted the case was staffed with the legal department, and it was determined there was no probable cause for removal. The family was referred for family preservation services.

During the review, DCS indicated there had been several visits to the home from the time of DCS's initial contact to the time that the family preservation provider began services with the family. However, some of these contacts were not entered in MaGIK pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*.

Recommendation(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau recommended that, specific to this case, contacts be made, and documentation be entered according to the *Indiana Child Welfare Manual*. It was recommended the local office staff review the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information; 7.3: Minimum Contact; and 7.5: Meaningful Contacts*.

DCS Response(s):

The Regional Manager indicated the recommendations were followed as written.

Case Example #3 Safety/Parent Engagement/Case Plan

The complainant alleged DCS failed to contact the mother timely to inform of the child's death. The complainant alleged DCS failed to keep the child safe. The complainant alleged DCS failed to include mother in decisions made at the hospital. The complainant was concerned DCS would not allow an in-home CHINS for the other children.

Finding(s):

No merit was found to the concern DCS failed to inform the mother of the child's death timely. The child was in foster care at the time of her death. DCS attempted to contact mother approximately two hours after the child's death; however, DCS was unsuccessful in contacting her via phone. DCS had to go to the mother's home to notify her after attempting to contact her via phone several times. Mother could not be included in immediate decisions (though there were very few or none) at the hospital because DCS was unable to reach her.

In the months preceding the child's death, the mother had not completed the terms of the Dispositional Decree and was not making progress. Father was making progress in services and DCS was not opposed to placing the child with the father; however, there was a clause in his divorce decree preventing him from having the child in his home. The return of surviving children is not necessarily warranted due to the death of a sibling that was under DCS supervision. No merit was found to this concern.

Upon case review, DCS missed an opportunity to assess the appropriateness of the children's placement. It was found the foster mother was a former DCS worker who substantiated on the family previously. The DCS local office indicated they were not aware of the connection. This presents a concern as DCS is responsible for assessing all situations related to the children. DCS has the responsibility of gathering as much information as possible about the family pursuant to the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*.

There was further concern DCS allowed the surviving toddler children to remain in the foster home after the child's death. This was concerning considering the child's death appeared to have occurred due to lack of supervision. DCS LOD indicated the children were allowed to remain in the foster home because there were no immediate safety concerns for the children. The Bureau noted that allowing the toddler children to remain in the foster home put them at risk for future safety concerns related to lack of supervision.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended the local office staff review the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information* and *8.38: Placement Changes*.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD noted they did not agree with the reasoning behind the recommendations; however, they agreed to complete the recommendations as written. LOD reported policy was reviewed with staff during group staff meeting. Policies were distributed to staff as well, and it was requested they be reviewed by entire staff.

Case Example #4 Case Management

The complainant alleged that DCS failed to protect the child by placing the child on THV with little notice, without holding a CFTM and without considering the therapist's recommendation. The complainant also alleged that DCS violated the Foster Parent Bill of Rights by failing to consider the foster family's schedule and providing them with little notice of the change of placement. The complainant further asserts that DCS was dishonest with the GAL and foster family and that DCS failed to complete service referrals.

Finding(s):

Merit was found for 2 of the allegations. A CFTM was not held prior to DCS requesting a THV, which is required by policy. DCS struggled to find providers for certain services due to the mother's location, but

there were instances where needs had been identified and a referral was not made for a month or more. No merit was found to the allegation that DCS violated the Foster Parent Bill of Rights and that DCS was dishonest with the GAL and foster family. DCS was very accommodating to the foster parents' schedule except for one visit, which was for a special occasion; however, DCS arranged transportation that could pick the child up and drop the child off where the foster parents planned to be. The foster parents refused to make the child available for this visit, which, along with some other issues, contributed to the decision to begin a THV earlier than planned. The allegation regarding misinformation and dishonesty stemmed from a poorly worded email and lack of specificity in the Court report.

Recommendation(s) and DCS Response(s):

Recommendation 1: It is recommended DCS review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.39: Trial Home Visits* with a focus on the procedure and what steps need to be taken before filing a motion for a THV.

DCS Response: DCS reviewed this policy during office staffing and discussed the importance of transition planning.

Recommendation 2: Foster parents should be treated as foster parents regardless of their employment. DCS should remind staff that if there are issues or concerns with a foster parent, the licensing agency needs to be contacted and made aware so that they can attempt to address it from their end.

DCS Response: Staff discussed utilizing and communicating to the licensing agency or foster care unit if there are questions or concerns. DCS advised that the local office staff has already put this into practice in other cases to help resolve issues.

Recommendation 3: DCS staff is not expected to know every service provider and services available throughout the state. DCS staff needs education on how and when to contact the DCS Service Coordinators. Consulting with a Service Coordinator would have allowed services to be provided in a timelier manner and would have resulted in less work for the FCM, who made numerous referrals, which were rejected.

DCS Response: DCS staff was educated on who the Service Coordinator is and how and when to contact the coordinator.

Recommendation 4: It is strongly recommended DCS provide the mother with domestic violence education services. This was recommended in the Parenting Assessment and discussed several times throughout the case. It is understandable that DCS did not view this service as a priority due to the mother and father ending their relationship; however, domestic violence education will be helpful in assisting the mother in evaluating relationships moving forward and seeing warning signs of unhealthy relationships.

DCS Response: DCS connected the mother with a domestic violence service in her area to provide education and advocacy. The mother attended intake there. DCS staff was also educated on domestic violence providers in the area and how to find domestic violence providers.

Case Example #5 Diligent Search/Relative Placement

The complainant alleged DCS failed to provide the paternal aunt with written notification of the children's removal. The complainant alleged the paternal aunt was not considered for placement of the children.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation that the paternal aunt was not provided with written notification of the children's removal. Per case documentation, the paternal aunt had been notified verbally of the children's removal in February 2020; however, they were not provided with written notification pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 2.26: Diligent Search*

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation that DCS failed to consider the paternal aunt for placement. The paternal aunt was considered for placement in October 2020; however, it was determined to not be in the best interest of the children. DCS case actions/discussions have been/continue to be in alignment with child welfare policies, and the children's safety has been ensured. The children's placement has been and continues to be in accordance with the Court Order. DCS must abide by the Court's order. This office has no jurisdiction over court matters and/or court orders.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.23: Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants** to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMSs.

*The policy changed from *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 2.26: Diligent Search* to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.23: Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants* effective February 1, 2022.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policy was discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting. Staff signed the policy acknowledgment form at the meeting.

Case Example #6 Removal

The complainant alleged DCS wrongly removed the children from the relative placement after a false-positive drug screen. The complainant contends that the relative's medication caused a false-positive for methamphetamine.

Finding(s):

There was no merit to the allegation DCS wrongly removed the children. The relative was prescribed Adderall; other screens were negative for methamphetamine, but positive for amphetamine due to the prescription. The removal was Court ordered. Merit was found in part though, as the children should not have been placed with the relative upon removal. The relative has substantiated history, which was missed during the emergency background check. This was due to the relative having two profiles in MaGIK; one flagged as being a foster parent, the other flagged for CPI. The profiles also had different birthdates. DCS became aware and attempted to correct the issue in court by arguing for a change of placement; however, the Court ordered continued placement. It was also found the relative never completed fingerprinting during the eleven months they had placement. DCS policy states it should be done within five days of the Triple I check.

Recommendations and DCS Responses:

Recommendation 1: It was recommended that DCS contact the help desk to merge the duplicates so they are all under one profile to prevent future confusion should a background check on the relative be needed in the future.

DCS Response: The help desk was unable to merge the profiles; however, the birthdate on the profile that had substantiated history was corrected and now both profiles have the same date of birth. This should make it easier to identify both profiles are for the same person.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended DCS review with staff Indiana Child Welfare Policy 13.11: *Conducting Background Checks for Emergency Unlicensed Placements* regarding the timeliness in which fingerprints should be conducted.

DCS Response: The local office held an all-staff meeting where this policy was reviewed.

Case Example #7 Safety

The complainant stated DCS failed to timely interview the child's sibling who was at the home at the time of the alleged abuse or neglect.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation the child's sibling was not interviewed. The assessment was staffed through SafeACT. Per case documentation, the child stated they were in trouble because they wouldn't help their sibling with a game, which indicated the child was in the home at the time of the reported incident. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.9: Interviewing Children*, "The Indiana Child Services (DCS) will conduct or arrange an individual face-to-face interview with: ... 2. All other children living in the home (including children who live in the home part-time due to a custody arrangement or who have visitation in the home); and 3. Any child not living in the home who were present at the time of the alleged incident, regardless of the allegation."

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.9: Interviewing Children* to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Responses(s):

The LOD reported the policy was discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting.

Case Example #8 Relative Placement

The complainant alleged the out-of-state relative was not considered for placement of the child despite an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) being approved.

Findings(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to place and/or consider placing the child with the grandmother despite an ICPC request being approved. The complainant alleged DCS placed the child's sibling with the grandmother. Per court documentation and the case management system, the child's sibling was reunified with their father. The sibling was ordered by the Court to be placed with the father and not the grandmother. The child's ICPC request was approved; however, placement would not have been in the best interest of the child as the permanency plan was reunification and the move out-of-state would not have supported reunification efforts. The child is well adapted and bonded with the foster family. The child's placement ensures their safety and meets their needs pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.43: Meaningful Contacts* and the Court Order. The child's placement has been and continues to be in accordance

with the Court Order. The local office has also scheduled supervised visits between the child, sibling, and grandmother.

Upon case review the DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the concern Form 100B was not submitted to close the ICPC request, per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 9.3: Initial Placement/Placement Changes*. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 9.3: Initial Placement/Placement Changes*, "For initial placements, placement changes, and ICPC closures involving Indiana children, the Family Case Manager (FCM) will: 1. Complete an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Report on Child's Placement Status (SF 26174) and retain one (1) copy for the case file...."

Upon case review the DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the concern pertinent contacts between the grandmother, FCM, FCMS, and foster parents were not documented in MaGIK pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*. Per *ICWP 5.2: Gathering Case Information*, "The FCM Supervisor will: (1.) ensure all pertinent information is gathered and entered in the case management system within three (3) business days of receiving the information...."

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information* and *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 9.3: Initial Placement/Placement Changes* to ensure these policies are understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policies were discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting. The LOD also spoke with the FCM and FCMS regarding the case and concerns.

Case Example #9 Diligent Search/Relative Placement

The complainant alleged the out-of-state relatives were not considered by DCS for placement of the child. The complainant alleged DCS stopped visitation between the relatives and the child. The complainant alleged DCS failed to provide the paternal aunt with written notification of the children's removal. The complainant alleged DCS failed to mention the relatives in Court documents.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to consider the relatives for placement of the child. DCS has considered the relative placement pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.1: Selecting a Placement* and *9.1: Request to Place an Indiana Child in Another State*. An ICPC was completed in April 2021; however, it was determined it was not in the best interest of the child as the permanency plan was reunification and the move to Florida would not have supported reunification efforts. The child has been in the foster family home (FFH) for almost two years. The child is well adapted and bonded with the family. The child's parents have signed consent for adoption documents. The child's placement ensures their safety and meets their needs pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.43: Meaningful Contacts* and the Court Order.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the concern that visitation between the relatives and the child was stopped without cause. Visitation was stopped due to reports from the FFH and therapist the visits were negatively affecting the child. The visits were not court ordered and not required pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.12: Developing the Visitation Plan*.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation DCS failed to notify the relatives in writing of the child's removal pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 2.26 (V3): Diligent Search*. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 2.26 (V3): Diligent Search*, "In the event of a removal, the FCM will: ... (4) Provide each individual with written notice of the removal using Notice to Relatives (SF 55211) within 30 days of the removal." Effective February 1, 2022, the policy was changed to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.23: Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants*.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to mention the relatives in court documents. The relatives have intervened in the case and have been mentioned in the Progress Report as wanting placement of the child and they filed an adoption petition. The Department has stated they are not in agreement of the relatives having placement or adopting the child at this present time, per court document. This office also has no jurisdiction over court matters.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.23: Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants** to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

*The policy changed from *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 2.26: Diligent Search* to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.23: Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants* effective February 1, 2022.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policy was discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting. The LOD also reviewed the policy during the management meeting.

Case Example #10 Visitation

The complainant alleged the children should not have been removed. The complainant alleged the mother is not receiving visits and DCS is not assisting with reunification. The complainant alleged DCS did not complete due diligence in attempting to locate family members for placement of the children.

Finding(s):

No merit was found regarding the appropriateness of the removal. The children were removed from their temporary guardian and then returned to her care. When the guardian was no longer able to care for the children, they were placed in foster care. The removal was ordered by the Court.

Biological parents were involved but did not have stable housing and did not want to comply with services. Additionally, mother was screening positive for methamphetamine. Initially, there were no relatives that were suitable for placement. A paternal cousin stepped forward later; however, she was only nineteen and resided in an efficiency apartment that was not adequate for the children. DCS considered the placement; however, DCS determined it to be in the children's best interest to remain in foster care.

Parents' visits were suspended by the Court upon a motion by DCS in April 2021 due to noncompliance and inappropriate behavior. The parents have not completed services.

Merit was found regarding documentation of contacts in the MaGIK case. Numerous contacts were not

documented by the FCM in the case management system pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*.

Recommendation(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau recommends the local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information* regarding documentation of contacts in the case management system.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported this was discussed and reviewed at a staff meeting.

Case Example #11 False Reporting/Criminal History Check/Reversal of Determination

The complainant requested a second party review of a DCSSO case from 2021 regarding false reporting that was filed involving the same case. That case was reviewed and the decision of the DCSSO Bureau was upheld.

The complainant alleged DCS did not complete a criminal history check on one of the alleged perpetrators in the case.

The complainant alleged DCS did not overturn the determination of substantiation of the assessment after an appeal overturned the Child in Need of Services determination.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau reviewed the previously investigated matter regarding false reporting in this same case and upheld the finding of no merit.

There was merit found to the allegation DCS did not complete a criminal history check on one of the alleged perpetrators in the assessment. This is a requirement in the investigation according to the *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.03: Conducting the Assessment – Overview*. This finding did not have significant impact on the results of the investigation.

There was no merit found to the allegation regarding reversing the substantiation of the report in question. The report involved a different child than the CHINS case that was overturned. In addition, the burden of proof in an assessment determination is a preponderance of the evidence versus a burden of clear and convincing evidence in a Child in Need of Services ruling.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the DCS staff review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.03: Conducting the Assessment – Overview* to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The Local Office Director advised staff completed a review of the recommended policy and signed acknowledgement forms.

Case Example #12 Relative Placement/Conflict of Interest

The complainant alleged DCS failed to assess a relative for possible placement and DCS was giving preferential treatment to a Foster Family Home (FFH) they knew personally.

Finding(s):

The relative on the father's side did not receive notice the child was placed outside the home. Merit was found to this part of the allegation as this relative should have received written notice. When DCS was made aware this relative was interested, they did a thorough investigation. After considering this relative as a placement, it was decided it was not in the best interest of the child to make a change of placement.

No merit was found to the allegation DCS was giving preferential treatment to a FFH due to a personal relationship. This matter had been investigated previously by the local office and no evidence was found to support this assertion.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended that DCS review policy regarding notification of relatives following removal in *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.28: Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians*.

DCS Response(s):

LOD reported in an all-staff meeting the recommended policy was discussed. Policy and the relative letter were printed and distributed for all staff, and it was reviewed.

Case Example # 13 DCS Case Plan

The complainant alleged the child was removed when he was seventeen due to abuse by the father. Complainant alleged the FCM persuaded the child to recant their statement. Complainant states that the child turned eighteen while in foster care, where they still reside. Complainant states DCS is denying Collaborative Care, despite offering it previously.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau was unable to determine the validity of the allegation the FCM persuaded the child to recant, as there were no other witnesses or recordings of the conversation. There was merit to the allegation DCS was denying Collaborative Care (CC) after offering it. There was a miscommunication/misunderstanding between the local office and the CC Unit. The local office was under the impression the child was not CC eligible, but they were. This issue has also been resolved, as the child now has a CC case open.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended DCS take the Collaborative Care Unit up on their offer for training. It was also recommended that DCS review assessment policies with staff regarding documentation.

DCS Response(s):

LOD reported the Collaborative Care Unit will do a presentation at the next all-staff meeting. LOD also advised the assessment policies have been reviewed with staff to remind them of what documentation needs to be uploaded into MaGIK.

Case Investigation #14 Safety/Case Plan

The complainant alleged DCS failed to ensure Child B's safety while in relative placement.

The complainant alleged DCS allowed a sex offender to reside with relative placement while Child B, Child C, and Child D were placed in the home.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation DCS failed to ensure the child's safety as DCS failed to visit the child pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in an Out-of-Home Care* and a substantiated assessment of neglect and sexual abuse occurred while the child was in the home. Per case documentation, DCS failed to visit Child B within three business days of placement and failed to visit the children while they were placed in the home. It was also noted the fingerprinting for relative placement was not completed pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 13.5: Conducting Background Checks for Nonemergency Unlicensed Placements* and *13.11: Conducting Background Checks for Emergency Unlicensed Placements*, respectively. Additionally, the background checks were not uploaded into the case management system. Pursuant to *13.5*, "The Family Case Manager (FCM) will: ... 8. Document all information gathered in the case management system." Per the local office, the FCM obtained information concerning the home through third parties (i.e., service providers and Relative Support Specialist (RSS)).

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS allowed a sex offender to reside with relative placement while Child B, Child C, and Child D were placed in the home as there is no evidence the perpetrator was living in the home or that the perpetrator was a sex offender. As noted above, DCS was unaware that Child B had a boyfriend while living with relative placement. Relative placement failed to inform DCS of the perpetrator's involvement with Child B until removal from their home.

Upon case review it was found DCS failed to visit the children pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care* and *8.10: Minimum Contact*. Child A was placed in the relative's home in November 2021 upon removal. FCM stated they visited Child A during a supervised visit in December 2021 and February 2022. The FCM did not visit Child A in January 2022 and forgot to reschedule a home visit in February 2022. FCM did not visit the child's placement until four months after placement. It was also found DCS failed to visit any of the children within three days after being placed in foster family homes. Per the Progress Report dated March 2022, DCS visited the children during the term of the report on dates that were all placement changes, and there is little information documented in the contacts regarding these dates.

Upon case review, the case management system had no pictures of the children or their placement homes. The local office reported they had made no efforts to photograph the children throughout the case pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.14: Examining and Photographing a Child and/or Trauma* and *8.10: Minimum Contact*. After contacting the local office, a case note was added, which has pictures of Child C and Child D at their relative's home in another state. The children's casebook profiles did not include pictures. No pictures of Child A or Child B had been uploaded into the case management system. This is concerning because if the case were transferred to another FCM they would not know if they were visiting the correct children and pictures show evidence of physically visiting the children.

Upon reviewing the case management system and Progress Reports, it was found some information documented in the Progress Reports were not documented in the case management system and contact notes did not include pertinent information pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*. Per the case management system, DCS documented they visited the children; however, the notes did not contain any specific information pertaining to the visit or have pictures uploaded into the note pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.10: Minimum Contact*. The contact notes documented throughout this case have been vague and hard to determine the status of the children's safety and/or well-being. It should also be noted that an ICPC was requested and documented with the Court but not documented in the case management system.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended the local office update the DCS Ombudsman Bureau once policies 5.2: *Gathering Case Information*, 8.9: *Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care*, 8.10: *Minimum Contact*, 13:05: *Conducting Background Checks for Nonemergency Unlicensed Placements*, and 13.11: *Conducting Background Checks for Emergency Unlicensed Placements* have been reviewed with all staff.

It was recommended the local office staff upload any gathered information pertaining to the background checks/fingerprinting into the case management system.

It was recommended the local office update the children's case book profiles with pictures of the children.

It was recommended the local office staff review the Indiana Codes regarding this policy.

DCS Response(s):

Indiana Child Welfare Policies: 5.2, 8.9, 8.10, 13.5, and 13.11 were reviewed at the all-staff meeting, along with policies 4.14 (*Examining and Photographing a Child*) and 7.3 (*Minimum Contact in Home*) and *Tool 5.C* (*Face-to-Face Contact Guide Tool*). For those who were unable to make it to the meeting, they were provide a packet of the policies for review. Staff signed policy acknowledgement forms after reviewing the policy. Background check information that was provided has been uploaded into the MaGIK case. LOD reviewed with staff at another all-staff meeting that all background checks are to be uploaded into the MaGIK system with a contact outlining the outcome of the checks. Pictures in casebook have been updated. LOD reviewed at the all-staff meeting that staff will update casebook profiles with pictures of their children. After reviewing the IC codes and policy, staff will sign the acknowledgement form and turn in.

Case Example #15 Safety

The complainant alleged DCS failed to assess allegations of abuse while the children were in the foster family home (FFH). The complainant alleged DCS should not have removed the children from the mother's home. The complainant alleged DCS failed to progress visitation. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau had concerns for the oldest child's placement as contact note information stated the child was placed with the grandparent when the placement location had not changed. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau had concern the FCM did not visit the children after placing in another relative care home. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau had concern that documentation was not put into MaGIK pursuant to policy.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation regarding the children being abused while in an FFH. The allegations were assessed by DCS through three assessments. The children were removed from the FFH and placed in another relative care home, which was approved by the Court. The children's safety was assessed through monthly visits at the FFH pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.43: Meaningful Contacts*. The children have also been forensically interviewed.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation concerning the children's removal. The children were removed from the home pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 4.28: Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians*. The children were removed from the home due to safety concerns, educational neglect, and controlled substance usage in the home. The children's removal has been and continues to be in accordance with the court order.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation concerning the progression of visitation. The Dispositional Decree was ordered by the Court in March. Per case documentation, visitation may increase as the parents consistently and successfully engage in services ordered by the Court. Visitation has been and continues to be provided pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.13: Implementing the Visitation Plan*.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the concern of the child's placement. Per the local office and case notes, the child was placed with the grandfather; however, he was immediately removed once the Court ordered the child not be placed in the home. The child's placement is in accordance with the Court Order and ensures the child's safety.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the concern the children were not visited by the FCM at the FFH within three business days of placement pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care*. Per case documentation, the children were visited by the FCM five business days after placement. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care*, "The FCM will ... (6.) Conduct a face-to-face contact with the child and resource parent within three (3) business days following placement."

Upon review of the case, the Assistant Ombudsman did have concern that case documentation was not being put into MaGIK pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information* by the FCM. This office was unable to determine what was occurring in real time because case notes had not been created. For example, pertinent incidents/contacts that occurred in May were not documented until June. Case notes including pictures created in May did not include any description as to where the pictures were taken and no case note(s). No recommendation was made for this concern as the case notes are documented in MaGIK at this time.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care* to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policy was discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting.

Case Example #16 Visitation

The complainant alleged DCS failed to progress the visitation to unsupervised. The complainant alleged the Foster Family Home (FFH) has not been flexible with the visitation schedule which caused missed visits.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to allegation as visitation has been provided pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.13: Implementing the Visitation Plan*. Per the local office, therapeutic visits have occurred since May 2022 when able to due to new service referrals, staff being available, and communication with the FFH. Per the local office, visitation was discussed during the CFTM in June and is being scheduled once the child's football schedule is finalized.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the concern the therapeutic visitations that reportedly occurred in May, June, and July are not documented in the case management system pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*. The last case note in the case management system was

created a month prior to these findings, with no case updates since that time. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information*, "The Family Case Manager (FCM) will: ... 3. Record all pertinent contacts and information gathered pertaining to the...case in the case management system within three (3) business days of the contact or receipt of the information." It was also reported a CFTM occurred in June 2022, and it was not documented pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.7: Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings*. Per *ICWP 5.7: Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings*, "The Family Case Manager (FCM) will: ... 15. Ensure the CFT Meeting notes are distributed to all appropriate parties, including the CASA/GAL if not present at the meeting, and entered in case management system within seven (7) calendar days of the CFT Meeting...."

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.2: Gathering Case Information* and *5.7: Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings* to ensure these policies are understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policies were discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting. Notes were updated in case management system.

Case Example #17 Placement

The complainant alleged the children were placed in the foster home for nine months and then moved to kinship care. The kinship placement then disrupted and the complainant states DCS refused to consider the former foster home for placement, in violation of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. The complainant alleged while the children were in the home, the FCM only visited the home three times. The complainant alleged DCS is retaliating against the foster family and refusing to place the children in the home because the foster parents voiced concerns and DCS is discriminating against them for sexual orientation.

Finding(s):

Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.1: Selecting a Placement Option* and the Foster Parent Bill of Rights, DCS must consider placement with a previous foster in cases where the child's placement disrupts, or the child comes back into care. DCS did consider the previous foster family, but DCS and CASA had safety concerns that led to the decision to not pursue placement. There is no evidence to support that this was retaliatory or discriminatory. For this reason, there was no merit to this allegation.

DCS is required to make monthly contact with the children. These contacts may alternate between the home and the community. Policy also requires DCS have face-to-face contact with the foster parents, at minimum, every other month. DCS saw the children monthly, which is supported by DCS case notes, and four of those monthly visits were in the foster home. There should have been a visit in the foster home for the month of November; the complainant alleges that this did not occur. DCS advised that this visit did occur but was not documented.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended DCS discuss with staff the importance of completing the face-to-face forms for monthly visits pursuant to policy *8.10: Minimum Contact* and document all visits with the children in MaGIK.

DCS Response(s):

DCS advised the importance of documenting all visits was discussed in team staffing and again in an office-wide staffing. It was noted by the DCS Ombudsman Bureau staff that after the recommendation was made, DCS policy changed and FCMs are no longer required to complete the face-to-face forms. For this reason, this part of the recommendation was withdrawn.

Case Example #18 Services

The complainant alleged DCS should not have listed the mother as an alleged perpetrator because she was not home at the time of the incident. The complainant alleged DCS failed to refer the father to appropriate services based on the substantiated abuse.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found no merit to the allegation regarding the mother being listed as an alleged perpetrator as she was reported pursuant to the hotline report and not knowing who caused the injury.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the allegation DCS failed to refer the father to appropriate services and failed to monitor the progress pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.10: Family Services*. Per the Court Order dated July 2021, the father was to complete an intake for a domestic batterer's program. Per the local office, the provider was to provide the treatment through his existing treatment through drug court. However, the provider discharged him in September 2021 and DCS failed to refer to a program prior to the case closure in January 2022. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.10: Family Services*, "The FCM will: ... 7. Complete appropriate provider referrals in KidTraks for the family within 10 business days of identifying the service needed.... 14. Document in the case management system the family's progress, reasons for service type or intensity changes, and if applicable, reasons why services were not offered or were stopped." Per MaGIK, the only contact the FCM had with the provider was the information provided in the Progress Report dated September 2021. In January 2022, the Court granted the motion to discharge the parties while knowing the father did not complete the program previously ordered. This office has no jurisdiction over court orders and DCS must abide by court orders.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.10: Family Services* to ensure this policy is understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported the policy was discussed and reviewed during an all-staff meeting.

Case Example #19 Placement/Visitation

The complainant alleged DCS would not complete a background check for maternal grandmother but completed one for paternal grandmother. The complainant had concerns the placement was physically unable to properly care for the children. The complainant was concerned that DCS terminated mother's visits without cause.

Finding(s):

DCS completed appropriate emergency background checks on the paternal grandmother and ensured fingerprints were completed timely. The maternal grandmother would not have been eligible to complete

emergency background checks as it had been determined that the paternal grandmother would be the emergency placement. Though paternal grandmother used friends and family as supports, there was no indication that she was unable to properly care for the children and ensure their safety.

It was found the Court authorized parenting time with mother in August 2021. The Court noted parenting time could begin upon the lifting of the NCO; however, there was no NCO that existed. Thus, mother was entitled to visits beginning on or around August 2021. Mother's first visit with the children, however, occurred at the end of August 2021 - more than two weeks after Court authorization. The Bureau found merit to this concern.

Recommendation(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau recommended the local office consider working with the mother to establish a schedule to make up the visits that were missed due to DCS error.

DCS Response(s):

The LOD reported DCS would work with mother to make up visits that were missed during the two weeks.

Case Example #20 CANS Assessment/ School / Privacy

The complainant alleged DCS did not provide the foster family home (FFH) with the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment until the child was in the home for two months. The complainant alleged DCS failed to notify the school of placement, which resulted in child missing a week of school. The complainant alleged the FFH was not notified upon placement that the child had just been released from the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC). The complainant alleged DCS failed to take the FFH requests to remove the child's cell phone or limit its use to protect the location of the foster home and the children residing in it.

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation DCS failed to provide the FFH with the CANS Assessment pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care*. Per documentation, no evidence exists indicating the FCM discussed the CANS Assessment with the FFH upon initial placement. The CANS Assessment was also not distributed and/or discussed during the CFTM three weeks after placement, pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.19: Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment*.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to notify the school of placement. DCS notified the school of placement pursuant to *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.22: School Notifications and Legal Settlement*. Per the school records, child missed two days of school.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to notify the FFH of the child being placed in the JDC. The child was placed in the JDC for one day to prevent the child from leaving the state with the father.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau found no merit to the allegation DCS failed to remove the child's cell phone or limit its use. Per case documentation, FCM discussed this concern with the child and the FFH. The child also agreed to allow the FCM and FFH to review their phone.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.19: Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment* and *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.9: Placing a Child in Out-of-Home Care* to ensure these policies are understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The local office staff covered *Indiana Child Welfare Policy: 8.9* and *5.19*. Staff were given materials related to the policies as well. Attendance was taken and those not present have been provided the materials and information. The DCS Regional Manager was also present for the meeting.

Case Example #21 CANS Assessment/ Placement / Safety

The complainant alleged DCS failed to protect the child's safety by placing the child in the home with their birth father on a trial home visit (THV).

Finding(s):

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the allegation DCS has failed to ensure the child's safety by placing the child in the home without a court order and without completing the Safety/Risk Assessment pursuant to policy. Per the local office and court documentation, a request for a THV was not submitted to the Court, thus an order for the THV was not approved by the Court. Per the local office this was discovered four months after the child was placed back in home, then an affidavit was filed and approved by the Court. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.39: Trial Home Visits*, "DCS will obtain a court order approving a THV.... The FCM will work with the DCS Staff Attorney to make a recommendation to the court and seek court approval for the THV if it is determined a THV is appropriate."

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the concern DCS failed to update the Case Plan upon the THV. A Case Plan was created in March and September, which is 180 days between the updates; however, policy states the Case Plan should be updated anytime there is a significant change in the child and or family needs. Therefore, a Case Plan update should have been completed prior to the THV, per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 5.8: Developing the Case Plan*.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the concern an Out-of-Home Risk and Safety Reassessment and a CANS were not completed prior to the THV. Per MaGIK and the local office a Safety/Risk Assessment was not completed, and the most recent CANS was completed four months prior to the THV. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 8.39: Trial Home Visits*, "Prior to the THV, the Family Case Manager (FCM) will: ... (2) complete the Out-of-Home Risk and Safety Reassessment and a new Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment and review the Assessments with the FCM Supervisor."

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau has found merit to the concern DCS has failed to submit a Progress Report to the Court. Per *Indiana Child Welfare Policy 6.8: Three Month Progress Report*, "DCS will prepare and submit to the court a Progress Report for every child with an open CHINS case under the care and supervision of DCS, as follows: 1. Every three (3) months after the Dispositional Decree." The Dispositional Decree was ordered in March, which ordered the department to file a report every three (3) months from this date on the progress made in implementing the decree, and a Progress Report has not been submitted.

Recommendation(s):

It is recommended the DCS local office review *Indiana Child Welfare Policies 5.8: Developing the Case Plan, 6.8: Three Month Progress Report, and 8.39: Trial Home Visits* to ensure these policies are understood and implemented by FCMs and FCMS alike.

DCS Response(s):

The local office reviewed *Indiana Child Welfare Policies 5.8: Developing the Case Plan, 6.8: Three Month Progress Report, and 8.39: Trial Home Visits* and provided examples during the all-staff meeting.

Case Example #22 Placement

The complainant alleged DCS refused to place the child with a maternal relative who wants placement, and DCS is instead moving toward adoption with a non-relative foster family.

Finding(s):

No merit was found regarding DCS's refusal to place with the relative in question. DCS considered this maternal relative as required by policy; however, DCS had legitimate concerns and it was decided that DCS would not pursue placement with this relative. The Court also denied placement with this relative. DCS Ombudsman Bureau found merit to the allegation that DCS had not considered all relatives for placement/permanency prior to considering foster care. An out-of-state relative came forward at the beginning of the case for placement. At that time, DCS did not pursue placement, as the team was actively working toward reunification and the distance would be a barrier. The plan has since changed to termination of parental rights (TPR)/adoption; however, DCS had not contacted the out-of-state relative about adoption.

Recommendation(s):

It was recommended DCS reach out to the relative in another state for placement/adoption.

DCS Response(s):

DCS contacted the relative from out of state. The relative is interested in placement/adoption but understands another move could be traumatic for the child. The relative wants whatever is best for the child. DCS has started an ICPC, in case the judge decides that the relative placement is in the child's best interest.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Pursuant to IC 4-13-19-5(b) (2), (4), and (6), the DCS Ombudsman Bureau may also review relevant policies and procedures with a view toward the safety and welfare of children, recommend changes in procedures for investigating reports of abuse and neglect, make recommendations concerning the welfare of children under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court, examine policies and procedures, and evaluate the effectiveness of the child protection system. DCS responds to systemic recommendations made by the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. The recommendations are based on information derived from the volumes of information reviewed in the course of case reviews and investigations with systemic implications, in addition to information gleaned from various reports and discussions with stakeholders. No specific systemic recommendations were made to DCS during 2022.

DCS Ombudsman Bureau

Reflections and Future Initiatives

Agency Response

During 2022 the burden of the global pandemic continued to affect services to children and families to varying degrees. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau maintained the mission of responding to complaints concerning DCS actions or omissions by providing problem resolution services, independent case reviews, and recommendations to improve DCS service delivery, thereby promoting public confidence. Services and supports were delivered to DCS Ombudsman Bureau constituents in a timely, efficient, and effective manner.

Diligent efforts were made to provide services and monitoring to children and their families during the continued pandemic and accompanying barriers. Parents and adults working with children during this difficult time continued to struggle to meet the basic needs of children and provide them with an education, health care, social and financial supports, and good mental health. Constituents and partners in Indiana contributed to maintaining the best safety net for children that we could considering the circumstances. Gratitude is extended to DCS leadership and staff as they continue to steer the agency toward their goals of safety and in support of families in Indiana. It was, and continues to be, a time of high risk for families and children, and we appreciate the community partners that assist in Indiana's ability to respond to needs of our communities despite suffering the effects of a shrinking workforce in the human services field.

Open communication between the DCS Ombudsman Bureau and DCS at the state and local level has been supported by all parties and DCSSO hopes to increase that in 2023. The use of Assists as a viable tool to foster communication and resolve concerns between complainants and the local offices continues to allow DCS Ombudsman Bureau staff to focus on more complex case reviews and investigations. DCS continues to respond to the requests for Assists in a timely professional manner and that provides much quicker response to constituents. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau continues to work closely with DCS to include the DCS Foster Care Liaison and Kinship Care Navigator in Assists, Case Reviews, and Investigations to support and engage foster and kinship caregivers in their concerns. This is an area that continues to be identified as needing improved levels of communication and training.

DCS Ombudsman Bureau Initiatives

Staffing

The responsibilities of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau require experienced staff proficient in the areas of child welfare and criminal justice issues, problem resolution, research, public policy, law and best practice, and application of the same to constituent concerns. Additionally, the individuals must have above average oral and written communication skills and provide excellent customer service while engaging stakeholders with diverse needs and expectations.

Since its inception in 2009, there has been substantive change specific to the staffing needs for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. The agency was originally budgeted for one .5 full-time equivalent (FTE)

Assistant Ombudsman (AO) position. The position was increased to one FTE in the Spring of 2012, and one additional FTE AO was added in the Fall of the same year. While staffing with two full-time AO positions remained constant, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau experienced significant turnover from 2013 to 2015 at the AO level. The continued recruitment and training of AOs during this time negatively impacted the Bureau's ability to retain staff and respond timely to clients' needs.

Efforts to address staffing concerns and retain talent continued in 2016. Effective April 2017, the AO classification status was adjusted from an Administrative Assistant 2 to a Program Director 2 with a 4.5% increase in salary. This important action contributed favorably to the DCS Ombudsman Bureau's ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. However, as constituent concerns continued to increase due to successful outreach efforts, agency response to constituent challenges continued under the AO staffing structure of two FTE positions. In response to these challenges, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau requested and was granted approval for a staffing increase of one additional FTE AO position. This staff addition, and the experience level of the individuals in the positions, has led to greater expertise and stability in the AO roles. We are fortunate to have a competent, qualified staff that operates efficiently and meticulously. Staff also received a salary adjustment in 2022 following the Comprehensive Compensation Study conducted at the request of Governor Holcomb. We were grateful for this change as we expect it to assist with retention and reward for excellent service.

Electronic Case Management and Data Tracking

In 2019, IDOA charged the DCS Ombudsman Bureau with the task of addressing the challenges of utilizing technology to manage cases and data while resolving space and storage concerns resulting from the agency's steady nine-year growth. As a member of the United States Ombudsman Association, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau surveyed member child welfare ombudsman agencies regarding their case management systems. Additionally, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau reached out to the State IT for direction for consultation. Information from both entities were compiled and next steps to identify, develop, and implement an electronic case management/data tracking system continued into 2020. The new data and case management system was in its first full year of use during 2021. DCS is in the process of joining in the same system within the next eighteen months to two years.

Our Bureau obtained approval of our plan for retention by the Indiana Archives and Records Administration. In 2022 we completed scanning and transferred all our documents for storage in archives. This eliminated our paper files, and those files were disposed per Indiana Archives and Records Retention policy. This accomplishment added one more level of confidentiality of our records and will ensure they are available for future use and data collection. Confidentiality is a critical aspect of our work and highly valued.

Acknowledgements

2022 was a year that called for continued efforts toward recovery from the negative effects of the pandemic on our world. Despite struggles with maintaining staff and being unable to be present one-on-one with our families as much as we would have preferred, the mission of DCS continued to drive the agency forward. We acknowledge the dedication and leadership of DCS managers and front-line staff who do earnest and professional work with our families and children. The DCS Ombudsman Bureau acknowledges the many individuals who submitted their concerns for resolution. The willingness of these stakeholders to align their efforts with the resources of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau to resolve concerns is greatly appreciated. Additionally, the efforts of the Department of Child Services under the direction of Terry Stigdon at the state and local level are appreciated and commended during another difficult year. The agency continues the commitment to address identified concerns and participate in intentional dialogue around program strengths and challenges with the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. This dedication to furthering the goals of best practice services and support to vulnerable families and children in Indiana is evident in the constant improvements being implemented to better the system.

The DCS Ombudsman Bureau specifically acknowledges the continued support of the Indiana Department of Administration under the leadership of Commissioner Dr. Rebecca Holwerda. Appreciation is also given to Department of Child Services Director Terry J. Stigdon. As the 2022 calendar year ended, the DCS Ombudsman Bureau reviewed our work, planned for continued advancements in the administration of our work, and committed to be available and receptive to resolving issues between families and the Department of Child Services wherever possible. We sincerely appreciate the relationship that continues to be developed with DCS toward that goal.

Finally, much gratitude and appreciation are given to the Assistant Ombudspersons Jessica Stier, Amanda Fassnacht and Chandler Meyer. Their work ethic, expertise, and experience are evident daily in the work they produce and the commitment they demonstrate to children and families in Indiana. Their contributions are valued tremendously.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

DCS Ombudsman Bureau Staff

Director

Shoshanna Everhart assumed the position of the DCS Ombudsman in September 2020. She brings over 40 years of child welfare experience in the public and private sector to her role. Director Everhart worked at the DCS local level in Indiana as a child services case worker, supervisor, trainer, and local officer director. She has served children, families, and individuals in a variety of settings as a clinical social worker working in the systems of hospitals, schools, and community agencies. She has specialized in working with children in the areas of trauma and loss and in training professionals. Ms. Everhart was an instructor for Indiana University as an Adjunct Faculty member for many years and has been an active community member serving on many and varied youth serving boards and initiatives.

Director Everhart graduated with a B.S. from the University of Indianapolis and a M.S.W. from Indiana University. She currently holds a clinical license in social work in Indiana and is a member of the United States Ombudsman Association.

Assistant Ombudsmans

Jessica Stier is native to the Indianapolis area. She graduated from Bishop Chatard High School and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) in 2011. She was hired as an Assistant Ombudsman in August 2011 and divided her time between the DCS Ombudsman and the DOC Ombudsman offices. She began working for the DCS Ombudsman full time in March 2012. In addition to conducting reviews and investigations, Jessica has taken on the role of managing the agency's data system and coaching new staff members.

Amanda Fassnacht (formerly Bennett) grew up in Brownsburg, IN. She graduated from Brownsburg High School and holds a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from IUPUI. Amanda was employed as the Assistant Ombudsman for the Department of Corrections Ombudsman Bureau from 2012 to 2019 where she enjoyed assisting offenders and their loved ones. Amanda joined the DCS Ombudsman Bureau in September 2019.

Chandler Meyer grew up in Greenwood, Indiana. He graduated from Center Grove High School and received a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Indiana State University in 2022. Shortly after graduating, he started working full time for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau in August 2022. Although he originally planned to be a detective, he has found Ombudsman work to be compelling as a means to help better people's lives.

Appendix B

Rules of Engagement

DCS Ombudsman Guidelines

*Agency and Complainant Rights and Responsibilities
in the DCS Ombudsman Bureau Complaint Process*

Complainant Rights

Complainants are entitled to:

- A timely response acknowledging receipt of the complaint.
- Professional and respectful communication from agency staff.
- An impartial review.
- A credible review process.
- Contact by the Bureau if additional information is required.
- Communication regarding the outcome of the review.



Complainant Responsibilities

Complainants shall:

- Attempt to resolve problems with the local office prior to filing a complaint.
- Complete the complaint form as directed.
- Ensure that the allegations in the complaint are pertinent to the role of the ombudsman.
- Ensure the accuracy and timeliness of requested information.
- Communicate respectfully with agency staff.

DCS Ombudsman Bureau Rights

The Bureau may:

- Decline to accept a complaint that does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Bureau.
- Determine the level of review, the documentation, and interviews necessary for gathering the information required to determine findings.
- Expect the complainant to provide any additional information requested.
- Determine when a case requires no further action.

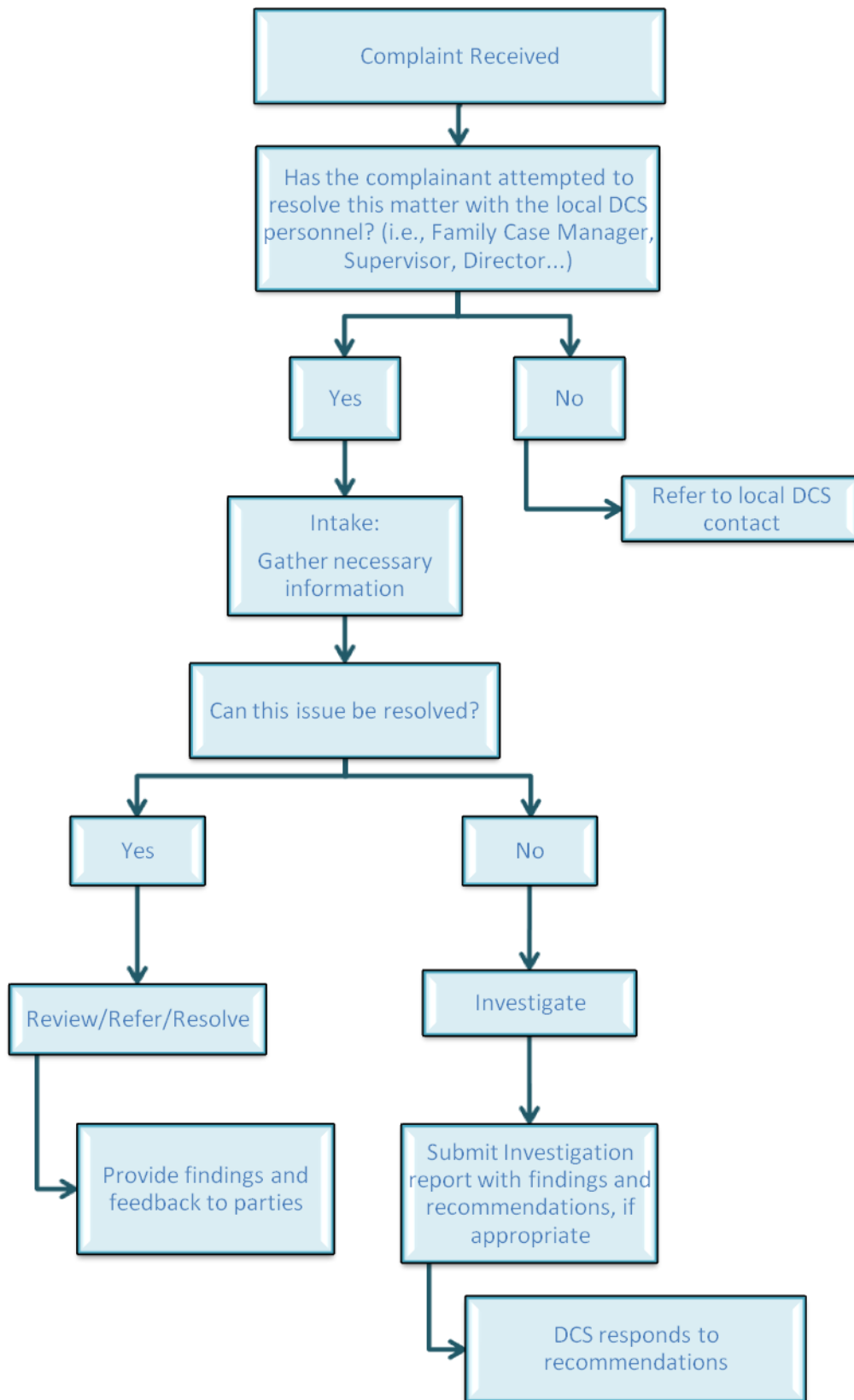
DCS Ombudsman Bureau Responsibilities

The Bureau shall:

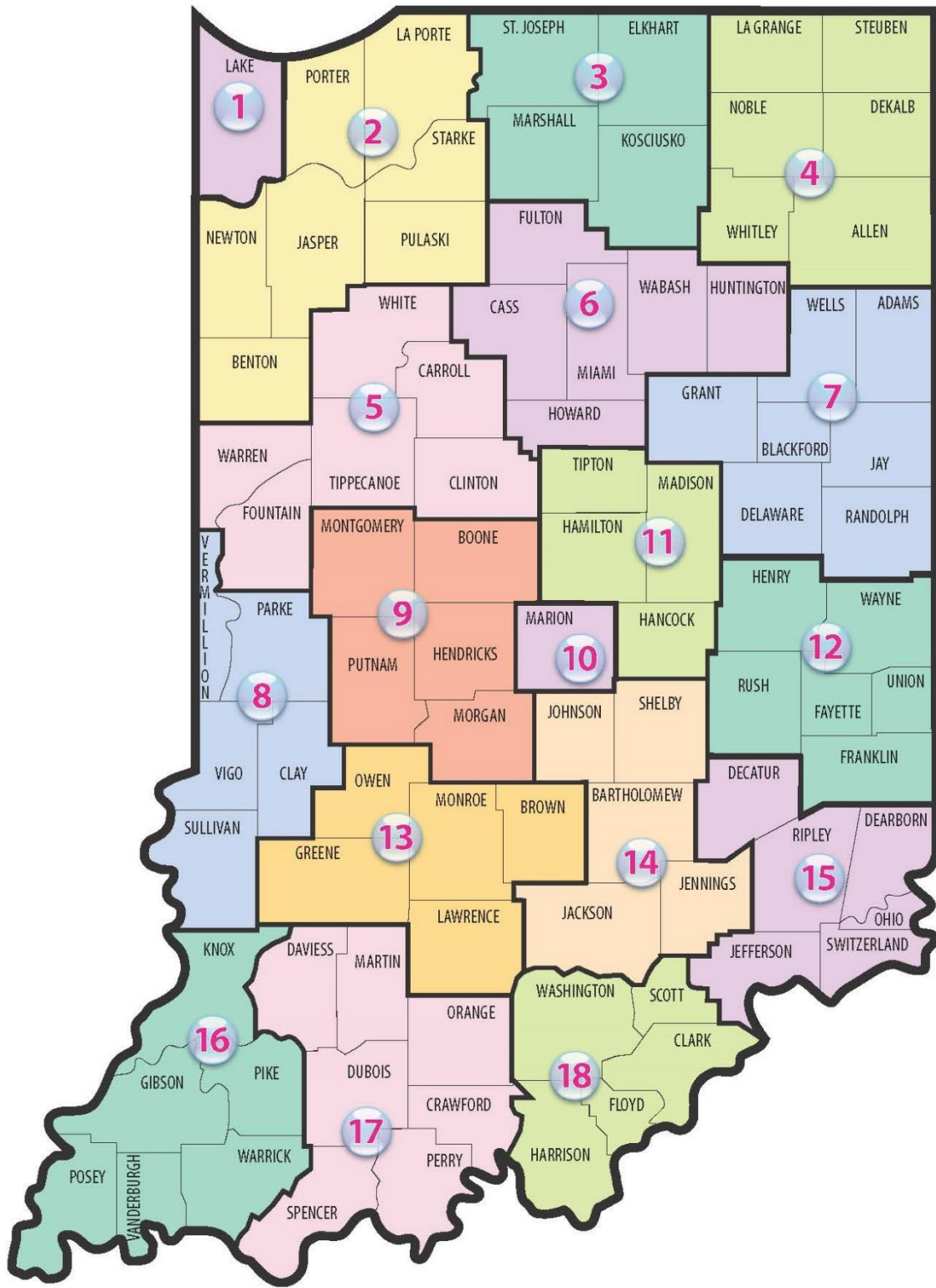
- Complete reviews in a timely manner.
- Complete a thorough and impartial review.
- Ensure professional and respectful communication.
- Provide the results of the review to the complainant in accordance with IC 4-13-19-5.

Appendix C

How We Work



Appendix D Regional Map



DCS Ombudsman Bureau

Office Hours

8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Telephone Numbers

Local: 317-234-7361
Toll-Free: 877-682-0101
Fax: 317-232-3154

Ombudsman E-mail

DCSOmbudsman@idoa.in.gov

Ombudsman Website

www.in.gov/idoa/2610.htm

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402 W Washington, Room 462
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