

Office of the Children's Ombudsman

Quarterly Report: Fiscal Year 2024, Q4

The OCO has statutory authority to receive complaints regarding cases involving children who (i) have been alleged to have been abused or neglected, (ii) are receiving child protective services, (iii) are in foster care, or (iv) are awaiting adoption.

The OCO can receive and investigate complaints alleging that an agency's action was:

- in violation of a law, rule, or policy;
- imposed without an adequate statement of reason; or
- based on irrelevant, immaterial, or erroneous grounds.

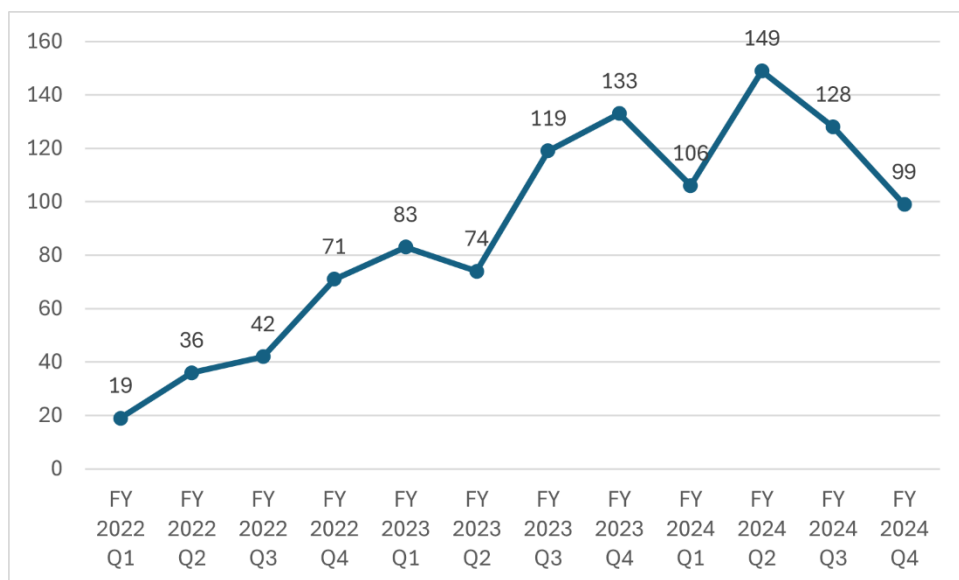
The OCO may investigate child fatality cases that occurred or are alleged to have occurred due to abuse or neglect of a child in the following situations:

- A child died during an active child protective services investigation or open services case, or there was a valid or invalid child protective services complaint within 12 months immediately preceding the child's death.
- A child died while in foster care, unless the death is determined to have resulted from natural causes and there were no prior child protective services or licensing complaints concerning the foster home.
- A child was returned home from foster care and there is an active foster care case.
- A foster care case involving the deceased child or sibling was closed within 24 months immediately preceding the child's death.

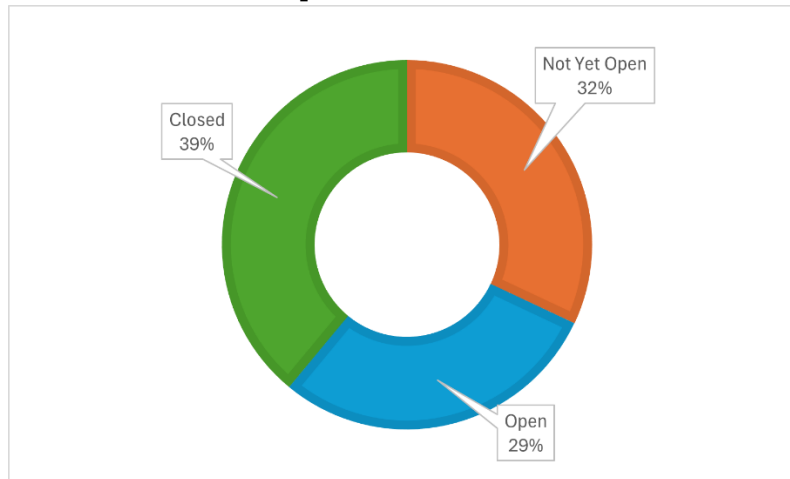
Total **Complaints** received in Q4 FY2024: **99**

Total **Notifications of Child Fatalities** in Q4 FY2024: **17**

Number of complaints received per FY quarter since June 2021:



Stage and Status of Complaints Received During Q4 FY2024



- **Intake: 35**

- Not yet open- Awaiting complaint form: 32
- Closed: 3
 - Lack of Jurisdiction: 1
 - No active CPS or foster care cases: 1
 - Duplicate complaint: 1

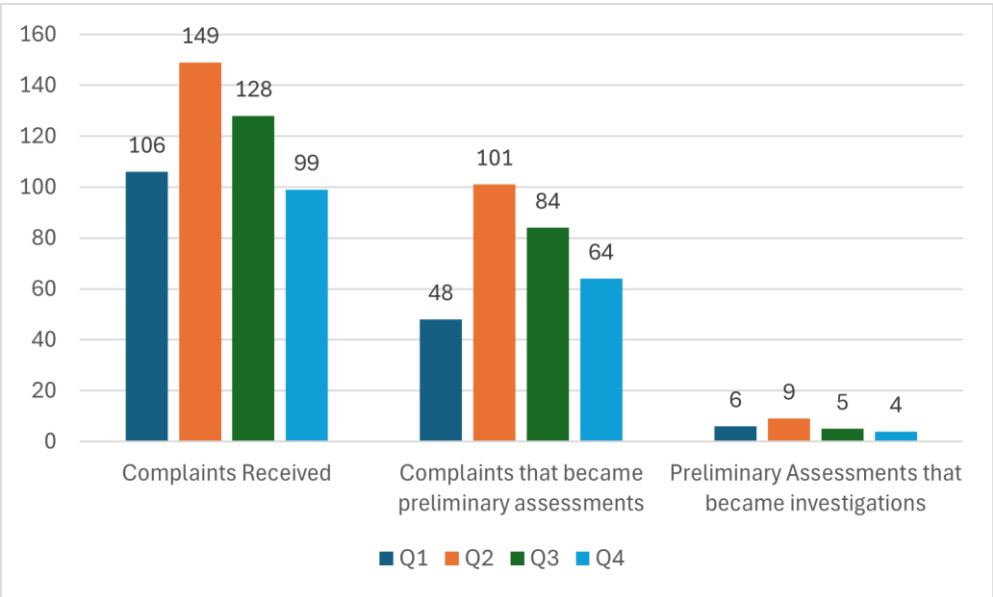
- **Preliminary Assessment: 64**

- Closed: 39
 - Assistance Provided: 2
 - Complainant was provided information about their case: 17
 - Complainant did not respond to intake phone call attempts: 6
 - OCO declined to investigate – no active CPS or foster care cases: 10
 - Referred to another agency: 3
 - Closed at request of complainant: 1
- Open: 25
 - Conducting initial assessment: 4
 - Assigned to investigator: 5
 - Awaiting Response from Agency: 1
 - Awaiting Response from Complainant: 1
 - Scheduling Intake Phone Call: 6
 - Pending closeout notification: 8
 -

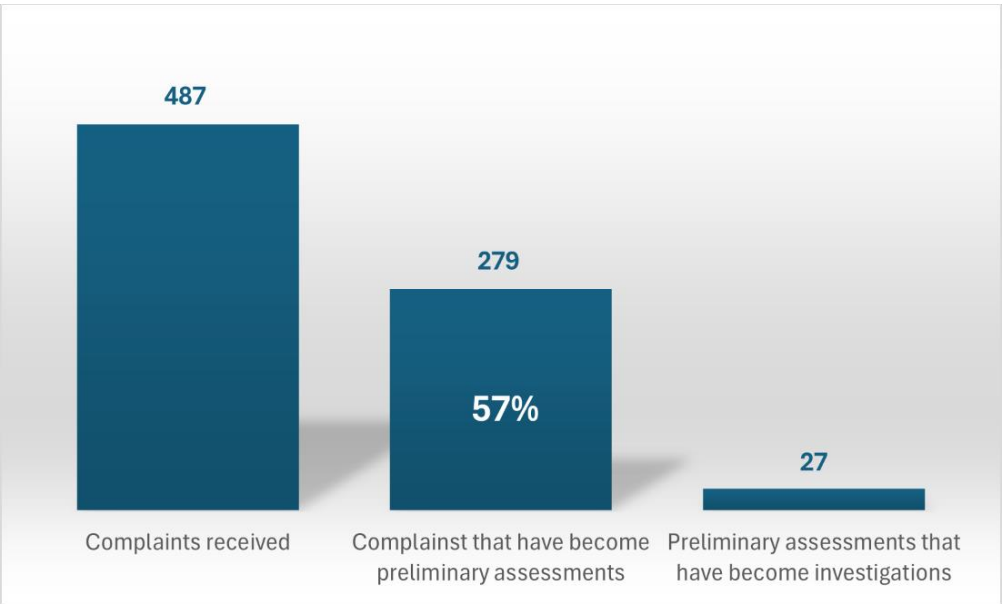
- **Investigation: 4**

- Open: 4

The chart below reflects the path that complaints take during a particular quarter. This shows the number of complaints received during that quarter that become preliminary assessments, and then the number that become investigations during each quarter.

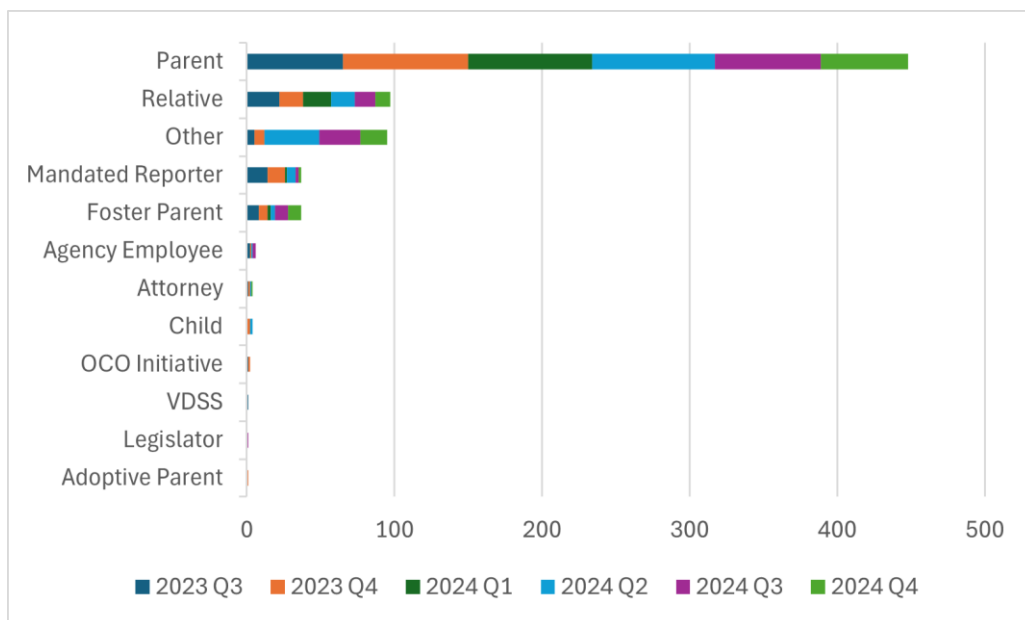


The chart below reflects the path that complaints have taken during FY 2024. This includes complaints received between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.



Complaint Source comparison: Q3 FY 2023 – present

Claimant Type	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4
Parent	65	85	84	83	72	59
Relative	22	16	19	16	14	10
Other	5	7	0	37	28	18
Foster Parent	8	6	2	3	9	9
Mandated Reporter	14	12	1	6	2	2
Agency Employee	2	1	0	1	2	0
Child	0	2	0	2	0	0
Attorney	1	1	0	1	0	1
OCO Initiative	1	1	0	0	0	0
Adoptive Parent	0	1	0	0	0	0
Legislator	0	0	0	0	1	0
VDSS	1	0	0	0	0	0



Case Closures During Q4

(includes cases opened prior to Q4)

- **The OCO concluded 120 cases during Q4 FY2024**
 - 150 cases concluded during Q3 FY 2024
 - 131 cases concluded during Q2 FY2024
 - 123 cases concluded during Q1 FY 2024
 - 106 cases concluded during Q4 FY 2023
 - 84 cases concluded during Q3 FY 2023
- **Average case age (time between date received and date concluded): 98 days**
 - 94 days during Q3 FY 2024
 - 114 days during Q2 FY2024
 - 91 days during Q1 FY2024
 - 77 days during Q4 FY2023
 - 110 days during Q3 FY2023
- **The OCO concluded 81 preliminary assessments and 4 investigations during Q4.**
- **Preliminary Assessments concluded by:**
 - Assistance provided to complainant: 5
 - Declined to investigate – No Active Cases*: 15
 - Complainant was provided information about their case: 38
 - No response from complainant to schedule call: 7
 - Practice recommendations made to agency: 10
 - Referred to another agency: 4
 - OCO discretion: 1
 - Closed at request of complainant: 1

*There were no active CPS or foster care cases related to the complaint submitted

Allegations Made in Complaints Received – Q4

Allegations listed are complainants' issues initially raised in their complaint but were not necessarily substantiated.

Agency Issues	Agency staff were biased against the complainant	6
	Communication/collaboration with LPCA	1
	Agency culture	1
	Documentation	1
	Lack of responsiveness from agency staff	5
	Records contain false information	2
	Inaccurate information presented in court by agency	1
	Supervision deficiencies	1
	Worker changes	1
Alternate Living Arrangements (In-Home Services)	Inappropriate or inadequate support or services to ALA caregiver	2
	Inappropriate or inadequate support or services to child	1
	Inappropriate or inadequate support or services to parent	3
	Placement decision	1
Child Protective Services	Family Assessment process	15
	Inadequate services	2
	Inappropriate services	1
	Investigation process	29
	Removal process	6
	Safety plans	2
	Validation process	15
Family Engagement	Family Partnership Meetings	6
	Inadequate relative contact	10
	Inadequate trauma informed care/practices	3
Foster Care	Child's evaluations	3
	Foster Care licensing	1
	Foster parents' expectations	4
	Permanency goal	1
	Inadequate case management	3
	Inadequate permanency efforts (for non-reunification permanency goal)	1
	Inadequate reunification efforts	8
	Inadequate services	15
	Inappropriate services	4
	Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)	1
	Normalcy	1
	Post-Adoption Contact and Communication Agreement (PACCA)	1
	Placement decision	7
	School issues	1
	Service Plan issues	1
	Sibling placement	2
	Visitation issues	7
Miscellaneous Items – Beyond the Scope of OCO Jurisdiction	Confidentiality of Records	1
	Contested custody	3
	Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	1
	Guardian Ad Litem concerns	1
	Inadequate Parents' legal representation	2
	Judicial concerns	1

Findings Made During OCO Investigations in Q4

Findings are allegations made by complainants that were substantiated or issues identified by the OCO.

- CPS: Assessments and Investigations were not conducted according to policy:
 - No documented interview with alleged abuser
 - Parents were not notified after children were interviewed at school
- CPS: Lack of Support for ALA Caregivers
 - No financial support
 - ALA Caregivers directed to file petition for custody without explanation
- CPS: Non-custodial parent was not notified of CPS involvement
- CPS: Safety Plan Issues
 - Copies of safety plan not provided to all involved parties
 - Placement disruptions due to unclear safety plan expectations
 - No communication regarding safety plan duration/expectations
- Foster Care: Delayed visits between parents and children
- Foster Care: Family Engagement
 - Denial of relative visits with children
 - Denial of relative placement
 - Family Partnership Meetings (FPM) not held at critical decision points