

State of California  
Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson

Calendar Year 2024  
Annual Report Data Summary  
Issued March 2026



California Department of Social Services  
Office of Equity

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State of California  
The Office of The Foster Care Ombudsperson  
Annual Report  
Calendar Year 2024

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## Legislative Mandate

In 1998, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) was mandated by the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 933 to establish a California Foster Care Ombudsperson Program. This was in response to concerns regarding the need for an autonomous and independent entity to resolve issues related to care, placement, and services to youth in foster care.

The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO) was created in August 2000, and is empowered to investigate the care, placement, and services for youth in care; as well as make recommendations to promote the safety and delivery of appropriate services and safeguard the personal rights of these youth. The OFCO also must offer training regarding Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS) and disseminate standardized age-appropriate information and training materials.

Assembly Bill (AB) 175 (2019) went into effect in January 2020, expanding the Foster Youth Bill of Rights to 41 rights and clarifying the role of the OFCO to provide training and technical assistance on the rights of children and youth in foster care, RPPS, and services provided by the office. As a result, the OFCO updated the training curriculum and developed digital and printed publications in preparation for statewide in-person trainings to meet this requirement.

Welfare and Institutions Code section 16164 requires the OFCO to compile and make available to the Legislature data collected over the course of the year, including, but not limited to: the number of contacts to the office, the number of complaints made (including the type and source of those complaints), the number of investigations performed by the office, the trends and issues that arose in the course of investigating complaints, the number of referrals made, the number of pending complaints, and a summary of the data received from the California Department of Education. The office is also required to include recommendations consistent with this data for improving the child welfare system.

AB 317 and AB 1140 were signed in September of 2021. AB 317 strengthened the OFCO's autonomy and confidentiality of information gathered during the OFCO's investigations and improved the OFCO's access to foster youth and their records. Through these two bills the OFCO's jurisdiction was explicitly extended to include children in the custody of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) living in California licensed homes and facilities.

In September of 2022, AB 1735 was signed requiring translation of certain documents for youth including translation of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights to the youth's primary language.

## Message from the California Foster Care Ombudsman



In 2024, there was a noticeable shift in how the public contacted the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO). For the OFCO's entire history the phone line had been the primary way the public connected with the OFCO. In 2024, website-based contacts jumped significantly. Not only were web and email contacts higher than phone contacts, but there were also close to twice as many phone contacts.

This represents great success for the OFCO team in outreach. It indicates more people involved with the foster system are learning about the OFCO and contacting the OFCO. There was a sharp increase in requests for Foster Youth Verification Letters (FYVL). The rising number of FYVL requests substantially impacted the OFCO. However, the office was able to investigate many cases and substantiated issues in many cases.

Foster youth continued to be challenged by many of the same issues which have impacted foster youth for many years and decades. System improvements in the form of changes of law, policy improvements, and culture shifts are making foster care better than it was in the past and California is a leader in many reforms. The decision by the CDSS and the Legislature to stop placing foster youth in out-of-state congregate facilities was a huge step forward for the safety of foster youth. However, few other states have followed the lead of California on this issue. Many counties and juvenile courts have improperly placed blame on this change for challenges faced in finding good homes for foster youth, especially those with high needs. Those challenges existed prior to the moratorium on out-of-state placements. The perception that they are worse is not based on data or facts.

In mid-July of 2024, the OFCO learned of insurance coverage challenges impacting Foster Family Agencies (FFAs). Resource families and FFAs reached out to the OFCO and the CDSS when insurers refused to renew policies for homes with swimming pools or open water on the property. This was the foreshadowing of what has been named the FFA insurance crisis. FFAs have faced massive increases in insurance premiums. FFAs generally operate on thin margins, and the costs have led some to close. In the meantime, the Legislature has acted to assist with funding for FFAs so that this resource for foster care placement continues to exist. The Tiered Rate Structure coming in 2026 may offer a solution. However, this is a complex multifaceted problem.

### Executive Summary

This annual report provides an overview of the activities of the OFCO during calendar year 2024 and contains an analysis of the number, type, and scope of complaints received and investigated. In addition to quantitative data, several issues related to foster youth rights have been identified by the OFCO as trends or key topics and are presented in more qualitative detail. Recommendations for system improvements are discussed in these areas.

## OFCO 2024 Highlights

### 2024 and 2023 At a Glance Comparison

Activity	2024 Count	2023 Count	Variance
<b>Calls Processed</b>	16,999	12,990	30.86%
<b>Cases Opened</b>	8,325	6,585	26.42%
<b>Issues Reviewed</b>	1,413	883	60.02%
<b>Investigations Conducted</b>	229	110	108.18%
<b>Verification Letters Provided</b>	3,210	2,307	39.14%
<b>Training Classes Taught</b>	44	23	91.30%
<b>Training Participants Number</b>	1,782	3,170	-43.79%
<b>Publications Sent</b>	49,984	57,985	-13.80%

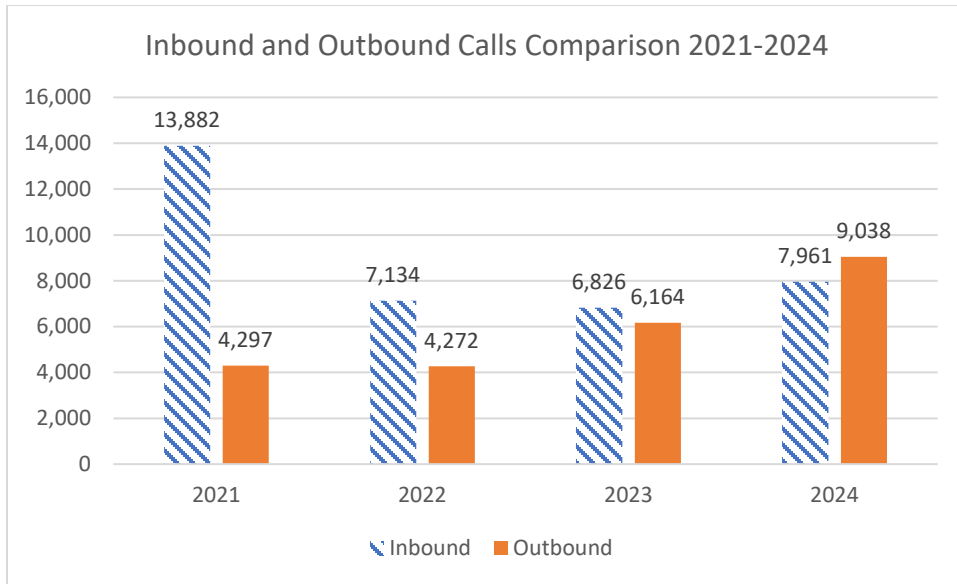
Data from the [California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\)](#) showed a decrease in youth entering care in the California Foster Care System over the past five years. However, the OFCO has continued to see an increase in complaints, requests, and technical assistance, except for publications requested and number of training participants. The OFCO continued to see a significant increase of over thirty-nine percent in FYVL provided in 2024. The increase in FYVLs requested required staff time and shifting of resources. The high volume of FYVL requests required work to be diverted from other activities including training, investigations and preparation of this report.

### OFCO Data Summary

#### Number of 2024 Helpline Contacts

In 2024, the OFCO Helpline received a total of 16,999 contacts. Of these, 7,961 were inbound contacts (initiated by complaints), and 9,038 were outbound contacts (initiated by the OFCO staff). This is the first time outbound calls have exceeded inbound calls. This directly corresponds to the trend described below regarding phone-based contacts and web-based contacts. Most web-based or email contacts will require an outgoing phone call to aid the person contacting the OFCO.

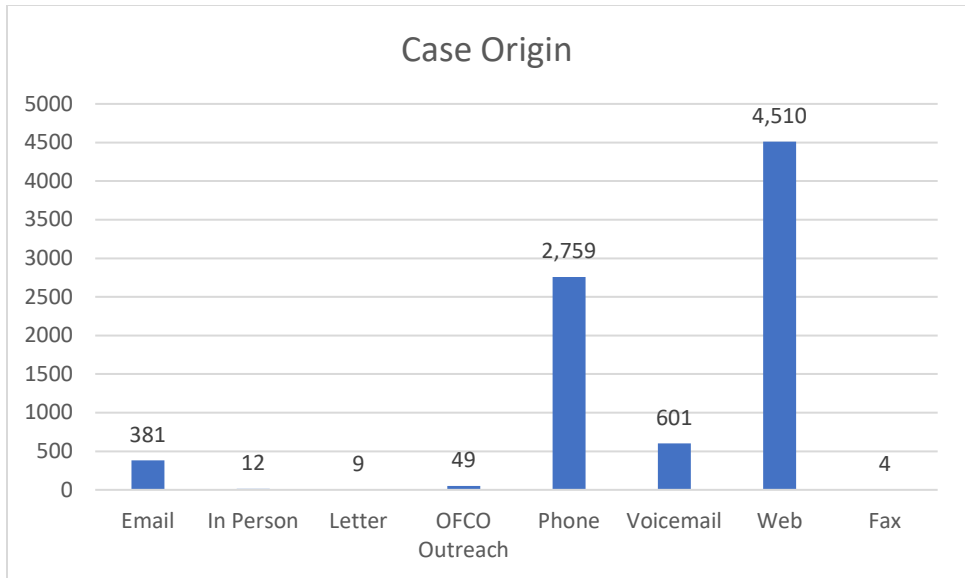
Call Type	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Inbound</b>	13,882	7,134	6,826	7,961
<b>Outbound</b>	4,297	4,272	6,164	9,038



## Number and Type of Contacts Opened New Cases

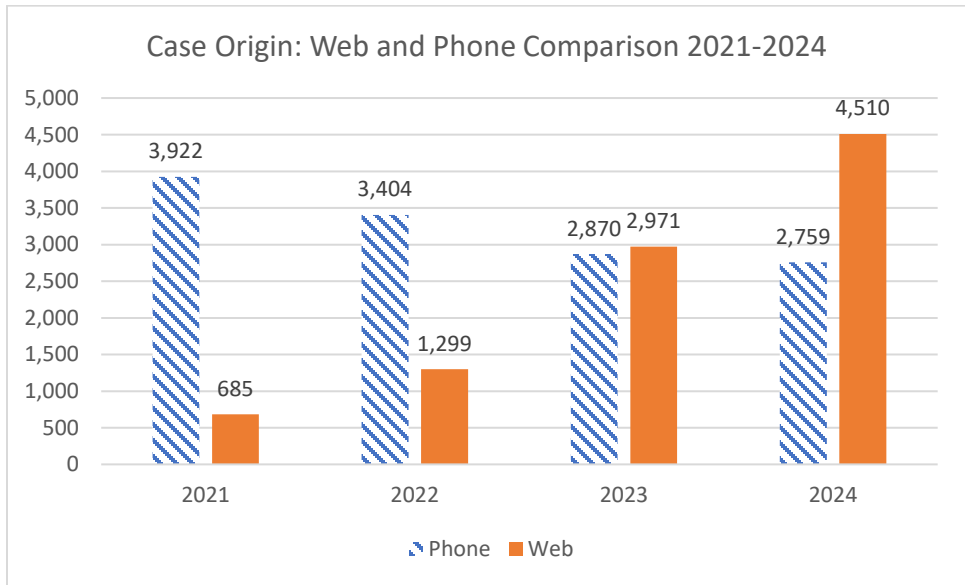
The OFCO receives contacts from several sources. Each contact from the public is an opportunity for the OFCO to respond to issues impacting youth in foster care. The OFCO primarily receives communication via phone, web, and email inquiries. The OFCO recorded a 52% increase in web cases submitted in 2024 (2,971 in 2023). Case originating from web and email contacts are nearly double those from phone contacts. Web and email cases require an outgoing phone call. This corresponds with outbound calls more than doubling since 2021. Connecting via outbound calls can require many attempts and is more time consuming than receiving cases by incoming calls. The [FosterYouthHelp.ca.gov](https://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov) website is available 24-hours a day for constituents to file a complaint, request a verification letter, training or publications. Most complaints and requests are responded to by the next business day. The OFCO's goal is to make the office as accessible as possible to foster youth. However, there needs to be a solution to address workload increases.

Case Origin	Record Count
Email	381
In Person	12
Letter	9
OFCO Outreach	49
Phone	2,759
Voicemail	601
Web	4,510
Fax	4



### Case Origin: Web and Phone Comparison 2021-2024

Case Origin	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Phone</b>	3,922	3,404	2,870	2,759
<b>Web</b>	685	1,299	2,971	4,510



### Number of Cases by Record Type

The OFCO opened 8,325 cases across eight case types, as detailed in the table below. In 2024, the highest case types received were verification letters, general complaints, information and referrals, and publication requests. Youth Complaints are those

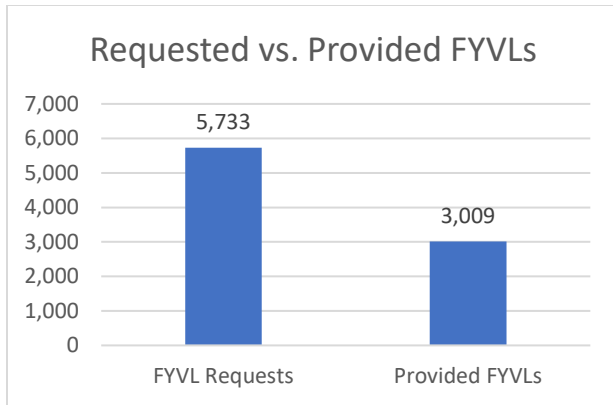
received from a child in care. Complaints from anyone else are classified as General Complaints. Youth Complaints and Training Requests continue to increase.

Case Record Type	Record Count
<b>Verification Letter Requests</b>	5,733
<b>General Complaint</b>	879
<b>Information and Referral</b>	875
<b>Publication Request</b>	457
<b>Youth Complaint</b>	247
<b>Training Request</b>	95
<b>Background Check</b>	29
<b>Controlled Correspondence</b>	10
<b>Total</b>	8,325

### Verification Letters Requested and Provided Comparison

The OFCO experienced a vast increase in Foster Youth Verification Letter (FYVL) requests over the last four years. This is a positive indicator that OFCO outreach is working. Youth are learning about the availability of FYVL and various benefits which can be accessed by former foster youth. Another positive indicator is that most requests are to assist with higher education indicating that more former foster youth are pursuing college degrees. However, the increase has impacted the workload within the OFCO and caused work to be shifted from activities such as training, investigations, and the preparation of the annual report. Equally, challenging is the increase in letter requests where the OFCO does not issue a letter. Almost half of FYVL requests result in the OFCO not issuing a letter. There are various reasons why the OFCO is unable to issue a FYVL. The OFCO has legal authority to issue verification letters only to youth who are no longer in foster care. Youth who contact the OFCO for a FYVL while still in foster care are referred to their social worker or probation officer to obtain the letter directly from their county of jurisdiction. Other reasons for not issuing a letter include the lack of documentation of the requestor being in care in the child welfare database, the requestor was in legal guardianship, the requestor cannot be contacted or no longer needs the letter. The OFCO is in the process of learning why there are so many requests which do not result in a letter.

FYVL Cases	Record Count
<b>Opened FYVL Cases</b>	5,733
<b>Provided FYVL</b>	3,009



## Source of Complaint

The OFCO receives calls from individuals concerned about the care, placement, services, and rights of children and youth in foster care. During this calendar year, the OFCO received complaints, primarily from biological parents, relatives, and resource parents.

Relationship to Child	Record Count
<b>Bio Parents*</b>	387
<b>Relatives</b>	181
<b>Resource Parent</b>	91
<b>Other</b>	126
<b>Professional**</b>	54
<b>Community Member</b>	19
<b>Adoptive Parent</b>	11
<b>Placement Staff</b>	5
<b>Legal Guardian</b>	4
<b>Non-Minor Dependent</b>	3

\*Relatives include maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, maternal aunt, paternal grandmother, paternal grandfather, paternal aunt, other relatives, siblings, and stepparents

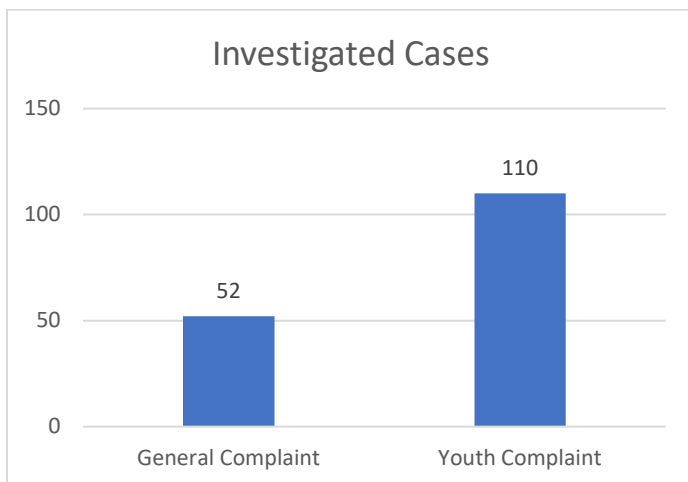
\*\*Professional may include child welfare professionals in addition to attorneys, Child Welfare Social Workers and staff, placement workers, Independent Living Program Staff, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), therapists, and others

## Investigated Cases

After the OFCO receives a complaint, it is screened to determine if it meets the requirement to warrant a full investigation. All youth complaints are investigated.

Reasons for not investigating range from outside of jurisdiction, the OFCO has no appropriate resolution or remedy and lack of resources. During this reporting period, the OFCO investigated 110 youth complaints and 52 general complaints regarding youth in care. All youth complaints are prioritized over other cases.

Case Type	Record Count
<b>General Complaint</b>	52
<b>Youth Complaint</b>	110

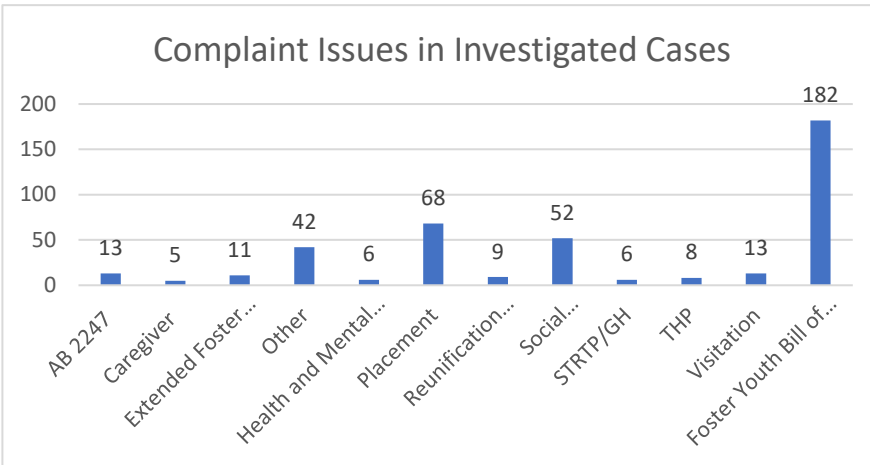


## Complaint Issues in Investigated Cases

When a complaint is received, the OFCO identifies and tracks issues by category. The issue corresponds to the right identified in the California Foster Youth Bill of Rights (FYBORs). Most complaints include more than one issue, and issues may be added or changed during the investigation process. In 2024, the OFCO investigated 145 complaint issues. Most cases involved Foster Youth Rights (FYR), followed by concerns related to social worker responsibilities, and placement issues.

Complaint Issue	Record Count
<b>Placement preservation or 14-day notice</b>	13
<b>Caregiver</b>	5
<b>Extended Foster Care</b>	11
<b>Other</b>	42
<b>Placement</b>	68
<b>Health and Mental Health Services</b>	6
<b>Reunification Services</b>	9
<b>Social Worker/Probation Officer/Agency Responsibility</b>	52

<b>STRTP</b>	6
<b>Transitional Housing Program</b>	8
<b>Visitation</b>	13
<b>FYBOR Violations</b>	182



### FYBORs Violations

The OFCO prioritizes and investigates all complaints from foster youth. In 2024, the OFCO received 182 possible FYBOR violations. The OFCO received a high number of complaints regarding Family and Social Connections Rights. Youth are permitted to have contact with family members and other people in their lives while they are in foster care, unless prohibited by a judge. The OFCO continues to see examples of the social workers providing caregivers list of people the youth is allowed to call, rather than a list of people the youth is not allowed to call.

Foster Youth Right Complaint	Record Count
<b>CFT</b>	5
<b>Court</b>	13
<b>Education</b>	1
<b>Case Plan</b>	2
<b>Adulthood and Money Management</b>	1
<b>Family and Social Connections</b>	20
<b>General Health</b>	9
<b>Mental Health</b>	10
<b>Personal Rights</b>	113
<b>ICWA</b>	6
<b>SOGIE</b>	2

## Complaints Received by County

When the OFCO opens a complaint-related case, it identifies the county of jurisdiction (the county that placed the foster child or youth into care). This data reflects the total number of complaints received which is influenced by the total youth in care in each county. Also, this data does not account for which complaints were screened out, referred to the County Ombudsperson, or otherwise not investigated and duplicate complaints about the same situation. Hence it should not be used alone to assess the quality of care, placement, or services in each county.

County of Jurisdiction	Record Count
Alameda	30
Alpine	0
Amador	7
Butte	12
Calaveras	3
Colusa	1
Contra Costa	26
Del Norte	2
El Dorado	7
Fresno	26
Glenn	4
Humboldt	17
Imperial	2
Inyo	0
Kern	38
Kings	14
Lake	5
Lassen	2
Los Angeles	173
Madera	10
Marin	3
Mariposa	1
Mendocino	7
Merced	14
Modoc	2
Mono	2
Monterey	2
Napa	2

<b>Nevada</b>	3
<b>Orange</b>	34
<b>Placer</b>	9
<b>Plumas</b>	6
<b>Riverside</b>	81
<b>Sacramento</b>	48
<b>San Benito</b>	5
<b>San Bernardino</b>	128
<b>San Diego</b>	27
<b>San Francisco</b>	15
<b>San Joaquin</b>	14
<b>San Luis Obispo</b>	3
<b>Santa Barbara</b>	10
<b>Santa Clara</b>	8
<b>Santa Cruz</b>	3
<b>Shasta</b>	15
<b>Siskiyou</b>	4
<b>Solano</b>	11
<b>Sonoma</b>	5
<b>Stanislaus</b>	10
<b>Sutter</b>	4
<b>Tehama</b>	5
<b>Trinity</b>	2
<b>Tulare</b>	12
<b>Tuolumne</b>	8
<b>Ventura</b>	7
<b>Yolo</b>	10
<b>Yuba</b>	4

## Publications

### Distribution

The OFCO did see a decline in publication requests in 2024, and believes youth are still not being provided with a copy of their rights in accordance with California Law, based on contact with youth, case screening and data gathered by the Los Angeles County STRTP Ombudsperson (LACSO).<sup>i</sup>

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[1162436\\_2024-06-12 Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTP Semi-Annual Report.pdf](#)

<sup>i</sup> (pp.6-7)

## Updates and Translation

In accordance with AB 1735 and the California Health and Human Services (CalHHS) Language Access Policy, the OFCO made updates to all publications to ensure language access. Updates and translations were ongoing during 2024 and continued into 2025. Legislative changes included the right for young people to access their FYBOR, court documents, Transitional Independent Living Plan, and case plan in their preferred language. Modifications to the FYBOR materials were also made to make translation easier. For example, in the coloring book, a word search was converted to a maze to allow ease of translation. The OFCO expects to have all updates and translated publications available to the public by early 2026.

<b>Comparison of Publications Sent 2023 and 2024</b>	<b>2023 Quantity</b>	<b>2024 Quantity</b>
<b>Wallet (English)</b>	13,044	13,848
<b>Handbook (English)</b>	14,624	10,472
<b>Coloring Book (English)</b>	13,471	7,389
<b>Wallet (Spanish)</b>	5,600	5,285
<b>Handbook (Spanish)</b>	4,525	5,620
<b>Poster (English)</b>	1,204	2,043
<b>Coloring Book (Spanish)</b>	5,065	4,115
<b>Poster (Spanish)</b>	4,52	1,212
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,985</b>	<b>49,984</b>

## County and Agency letters

After a thorough investigation process takes place and it's determined that an issue is substantiated, the OFCO may issue a formal recommendation to the relevant county agency or parties involved. In accordance with WIC Section 16165(d), when recommendations are made, the state or local agency must respond to the OFCO within 30 days, outlining the actions taken or plan to prevent the recurrence of the identified issue. The OFCO issued six letters for cases opened in 2024.

## Controlled Correspondence

Controlled Correspondence (CC) is an Executive assignment to the CDSS coming from the California Governor's Office, a Legislative Office, HHS Agency, or CDSS Director's Office (DO). These assignments are tracked by the DO to ensure that CDSS reports back to the constituent. In 2024, the OFCO reviewed and completed several complaints

and responded to constituents with resources and information to assist with concerns reported to the OFCO.

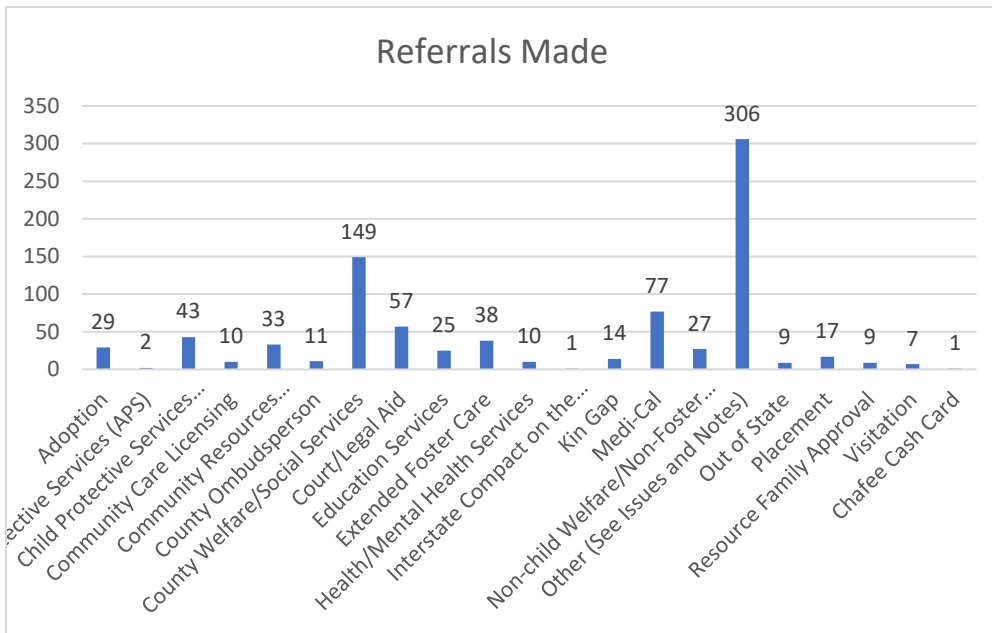
## Referrals Made

The OFCO provides general child welfare information and makes referrals to other agencies and local resources. Correspondents are encouraged to take direct action to attempt to resolve issues themselves before engaging the OFCO in a complaint. This prompts self-advocacy and creates opportunities to involve the public in understanding and upholding the rights of foster youth. Education of the public and empowerment of those interacting with the foster care system are an important role played by the OFCO.

In 2024, the OFCO processed 758 cases where it provided resources or referrals. Most of these cases involved providing more than one resource or referral. The 306 “other” resources that were provided included information for the Welfare Fraud hotline; Independent Living Programs (ILP), Transitional age youth information, County contact information; Foster Youth Bill of Rights publications, and county CPS and law enforcement contact information. The OFCO also received many requests for assistance with filing taxes for youth who qualify for the foster youth tax credit. The OFCO is not qualified to provide tax advice, consequently all such requests were referred to the appropriate tax authority and community partners. Requests related to Medi-Cal were also frequent and referred to the County or to the California Medi-Cal Managed Care and Mental Health Office of the Ombudsman.

Information and Referral Categories	Record Count
<b>Adoption</b>	29
<b>Adult Protective Services (APS)</b>	2
<b>Child Protective Services Emergency Response (CPS)</b>	43
<b>Community Care Licensing</b>	10
<b>Community Resources (Housing, Financial, etc.)</b>	33
<b>County Ombudsperson</b>	11
<b>County Welfare/Social Services</b>	149
<b>Court/Legal Aid</b>	57
<b>Education Services</b>	25
<b>Extended Foster Care</b>	38
<b>Health/Mental Health Services</b>	10
<b>Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)</b>	1
<b>Kin Gap</b>	14
<b>Medi-Cal</b>	77

<b>Non-child Welfare/Non-Foster Care Related Referral</b>	27
<b>Other (See Issues and Notes)</b>	306
<b>Out of State</b>	9
<b>Placement</b>	17
<b>Resource Family Approval</b>	9
<b>Visitation</b>	7



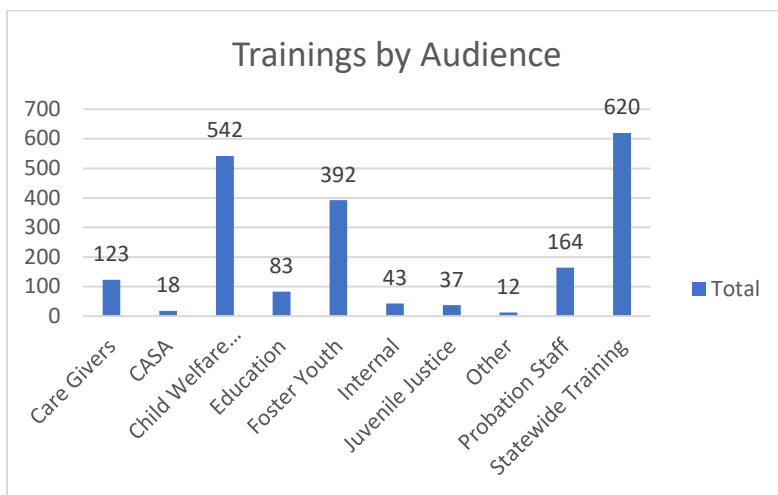
## Training Activity

The OFCO is mandated to provide training on the California FYBOR and Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS). In 2024, the OFCO received 96 requests for training. Out of the 96 training courses that were requested, the OFCO provided 47 training courses to 2,034 participants. The number of training courses provided increased from 2023, but the total number of participants decreased. Continued outreach is necessary to ensure foster youth focused agencies are aware of the training provided by the OFCO.

In 2024, the office trained 392 youth on their rights at 12 different training and outreach events. The OFCO continues to seek opportunities to work directly with the youth and educate them on their rights. Every month, the OFCO provides instructor-led virtual training on the FYBORs and RPPS referred to as our statewide training. These trainings are available to anyone who works with or cares for youth in foster care in California, such as social workers, probation officers, resources parents, caregivers, CASAs, Short-term Residential Therapeutic Program STRTP and Foster Family Agency staff, and CDSS staff.”

The target audience includes resource families, social workers, probations officers, advocates and others involved in the foster care system. In 2024, 620 people attended virtual statewide training. The OFCO also had the opportunity to speak at the Technical Assistance for Resource Family Agencies (TARFA) quarterly meeting in which 450 Resource Family Approval (RFA) Unit Staff and Leadership were informed on the FYBOR and RPPS.

The OFCO co-hosted the 2024 United States Ombudsman Association Conference in Oceanside, California alongside LASCO. The OFCO presented in partnership with the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) on the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and Juvenile Justice Bill of Rights.



Trainings By Audience	Total
<b>Caregivers</b>	123
<b>CASA</b>	18
<b>Child Welfare Staff</b>	542
<b>Education Staff</b>	83
<b>Foster Youth</b>	392
<b>Internal Staff</b>	43
<b>Juvenile Justice Staff</b>	37
<b>Other</b>	12
<b>Probation Staff</b>	164
<b>Statewide Training Attendees</b>	620

## Statewide Juvenile Justice and Education Specialist

In 2024 the OFCO Statewide Juvenile Justice and Education Specialist continued outreach efforts and provided training on the FYBORs and specialized training related

to education and juvenile justice. The audience included child welfare, probation and juvenile justice professionals, CASA's, Tribes, advisory committees, education liaisons, and foster youth including those involved in the juvenile justice system.

The role of the OFCO Juvenile Justice and Education Specialist has increased outreach by providing a specific point of contact within the OFCO for more complex cases and resolutions. In the beginning of 2024, the Juvenile Justice and Education Specialist was selected by leadership in the Children and Family Services Division (CFSD) of the CDSS to participate in "From the Ground Up," a statewide initiative that was created to analyze the California child welfare system and identify issues to be addressed in statewide system improvement efforts. The purpose of this initiative is for solutions to emerge out of the knowledge embedded in our communities, collective wisdom and cultures which also encompasses child welfare and probation professionals and other internal partners or consultants. This workgroup includes the wisdom of those with lived experience and/or has been directly impacted by the system. The goal was to create a space for solutions to be addressed and put into practice.

The Specialist worked with the CDSS Assistant Director of Equity and Inclusion to address the inequities of foster youth who have had justice involvement by being placed in juvenile hall due to lack of viable foster care placements. In addition, the Specialist conducted multiple in-person and virtual school trainings in districts in Northern and Southern California which provided technical assistance to Foster Youth Liaisons and their staff when working with foster youth and/or juvenile justice impacted youth. In 2024, the Specialist focused on more complex juvenile justice cases in the office which include violations of Dual Status and presented to local justice associations in Northern California such as Movement for Life, an organization that works with at risk youth and the Prison Education Project.

The Specialist continues to work closely with the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) and Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) to ensure all youth in care receive the same level of resources and access to advocacy.

## OFCO's Mission for Equity

In 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Executive Order N-16-22 that directed state agencies and departments to embed policies and practices in their strategic plans to advance equity and identify opportunities to address disparities in access and outcomes. In 2023, the OFCO, in partnership with the Office of Equity (OOE) Division, began to draft an OFCO Equity Plan (EP). The EP includes internal workforce goals and impact program goals, along with plans for evaluation and accountability measures, improving outcomes for program participants. The OFCO identified goals focused on the following categories: training and communication, workforce, data, external partner engagement, and programmatic outcomes. In 2024, the OFCO increased partner engagement by reaching out to community partners to discuss the OFCO's mission and discuss opportunities for the OFCO to support the LGBTQIA+ youth. Additionally, the

OFCO focused on developing a training curriculum on the Foster Youth Bill of Rights to Youth in the LGBTQIA+ community, including the RPPS training to professionals engaging with LGBTQIA+ youth. The OFCO also reviewed and updated the Foster Youth Bill of Rights publications with comprehensible language for diverse participants. The OFCO collaborated with the Office of Tribal Affairs (OTA) to ensure publications align and support the policies, procedures, and programs that serve American Indian children and families.

In 2024, the OFCO created and finalized an OFCO equity plan (EP) with goals including expanding recruitment efforts to state colleges and universities offering programs engaging current and former youth in care, providing FYBOR training, and sharing job opportunities to strengthen the knowledge and representation of the OFCO's workforce, reflecting the population and communities the OFCO serves. The OFCO received an additional bilingual position to enhance the efficiency and timeliness of investigations, site visits, Foster Youth Bill of Rights training and Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard training, and specialized training. The OFCO continues to address disparities in access and outcomes by meeting with community partners and stakeholders regularly and updating the EP with new program goals.

## OFCO Success and Impact Stories

The OFCO continues to be strong advocates for children and youth in care. Our team is committed to ensuring that foster youth's rights are upheld and are being protected and safe while in care. There have been many times where we've intervened on behalf of the youth and have seen very positive outcomes.

In 2024, a youth that was placed in a resource family home called our office reporting that since being in placement, the resource family failed to address the youth by their preferred name and pronouns. The OFCO analyst worked alongside the youth's social worker, attorney, and Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) to address the issues. The county placement agency was notified that the violations were substantiated. To address the violations the agency provided training to resource families on the FYBOR. When the OFCO analyst checked in with the youth they reported things had improved and they were now happy with their placement.

In 2024, OFCO training and outreach team conducted outreach with nearly 300 youth, which contributed to an influx of former foster youth requesting Foster Youth Verification Letters (FYVLs) for education and housing. FYVL request continues to increase. These letters allow former foster youth to access resources.

## Recommendations

Below are written policy recommendations based on trends that the OFCO has tracked during 2024.

### Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression (SOGIE) Rights Not Being Upheld

The OFCO received numerous calls from youth in care being misgendered, not being able to express their gender identity and expressions through their attire, and/or being in a placement that does not know how to care for LGBTQ+ youth. Existing laws require placement types to demonstrate an ability and willingness to meet the needs of a child, regardless of the child's sexual orientation, or gender expression, as specified in WIC section 16001.9. Senate Bill 407 was passed and signed in 2023. The CDSS released guidance as combined [All County Letter 24-69 / Provider Information Notice 24-14 CRP](#) stressing the need for deeper discussion and exploration to ensure resource homes are equipped with a clear understanding of working and caring for LGBTQ+ youth.

Young people in care reporting their rights being violated regarding Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) continues to be a growing trend. Resource Family Approval Programs should ensure that a thorough assessment is conducted in the Resource Home approval interview to ensure that resource families are trained and understand how to work with LGBTQ+ youth from a trauma informed lens.

### Accountability for Social Workers and Probation Officers to Provide and Discuss Foster Youth Rights

The law requires social workers and probation officers to discuss the FYBOR and provide the youth with a copy of the OFCO created FYBOR material every six months or at the time of a new placement. Further, the social worker or probation officer is required to document this activity in the case plan. However, from speaking with youth and surveys conducted by partners<sup>ii</sup>, the rights are not discussed, and case plans do not contain documentation of the efforts. Documentation of discussion of the rights and specific information about what material was provided to the youth should be easily input in the new CARES case management system. Ultimately, the law should be changed to require documentation in CARES, not in the case plan, to make compliance easily documented and easily access data on compliance. CARES is not immediately available, and it is too late to add anything to version one. Juvenile Court judges and attorneys need to incorporate a review of case plans during court hearings and reject case plans which do not document this activity.

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<sup>ii</sup> [LA County Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPS Semi-Annual Report](#), June 2024, pp. 6-7

## Ensure Foster Youth (especially those with disabilities) do not remain in Juvenile Hall due to lack of placement

The OFCO continues to encounter situations where foster youth remain in Juvenile Hall because their county is unable to locate a home for them. This is a violation of Foster Youth Rights, but more importantly it is a violation of their Civil Rights. Frequently, youth in this situation have disabilities and are people of color. The law is clear that youth cannot remain in detention simply because of a lack of a placement, yet this continues to occur and be a source of complaints to the OFCO. The Children and Family Services Division has issued [All County Information Notice I-34-25](#) to address this issue. In many instances where the OFCO has learned of this happening the youth is a Regional Center Client, on the Autism Spectrum, a person with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or another disability. Youth who have been found not competent to stand trial on the alleged offences are remaining locked in juvenile hall by Juvenile Court judges, because the child welfare agency cannot locate a suitable home. It is absolutely an unacceptable and inhumane situation for a young person who cannot even be afforded the right to a fair trial to remain incarcerated due to the lack of a home.

## Conclusion

As we look forward, the OFCO will continue to prioritize the rights of foster youth as we work together and with the counties to ensure they have access to quality and age-appropriate services and have the information provided in their native language. In addition, we look forward to expanding our community outreach and training programs to better inform the youth, their caregivers, social workers, and probation officers of their rights and responsibilities.