



OYCR

Office of Youth and  
Community Restoration

2024

OYCR  
Ombudsperson  
Report to the  
Legislature

# Message from the Ombudsperson

## To the Legislature:

The establishment of the OYCR Ombuds Division marks a new chapter in California's youth justice system. For the first time, California has an impartial state-level agency with the ability to investigate allegations of rights violations and harmful practices relating to the care of incarcerated youth in county-run facilities.

Standing up the Ombuds Division was a priority of OYCR since its inception in January 2022. This has required hiring and training staff, creating policies and procedures for complaint investigation, developing an infrastructure to receive complaints and document investigations, and publicizing the availability of the new resource to youth, families, and advocates. When I took on the role of Ombudsperson in January 2024, this groundwork was well underway thanks to the expertise, hard work, and dedication of current and former Ombuds Division staff, OYCR leadership and staff, and a special consultant.

The positive impact that the Ombuds Division can achieve for incarcerated youth is not possible without probation departments working with us to achieve those results. I acknowledge the many Chief Probation Officers, facility directors, and facility staff who have enabled our confidential meetings with youth and access to facilities and records and who, in many cases, have been ready to resolve the complaints and implement our recommendations from a youth-centered perspective and in the spirit of continuous improvement.

Finally and most importantly, I acknowledge all of those who have entrusted us with their concerns and desired outcomes, in particular incarcerated youth and their families. This takes courage and hope. Every day we strive to honor your voice and be worthy of your trust.

**ALISA HARTZ**

OYCR Ombudsperson

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# Highlights 2022-2024

## Ombuds Division by the Numbers (2024)

### 296

Complaints  
received

### 154

Complaints closed

Decline to  
investigate – 84

Unsubstantiated – 25

Substantiated – 21

No findings – 18

Inconclusive – 4

Referred out - 2

### 84

Site visits

### 5,711

Youth Bill of Rights  
posters provided

### 39,315

Youth Bill of Rights  
brochures provided

### 2,490

Helpline calls (in-  
and out-bound)



Recruited and hired six-person team



Created Procedures and Case Practices to ensure  
consistent and robust complaint investigations, and  
revised them consistent with AB 505



Developed and implemented a sophisticated Case  
Management System to track and document  
complaint investigations



Developed a telephone helpline to receive  
complaints and upgraded the system to a  
sustainable call center product



Developed and disseminated age-appropriate Youth  
Bill of Rights materials



Visited each of the state's juvenile facilities at least  
once, and some of them multiple times

# Background/Authority of the OYCR Ombuds Division

[SB 823](#) (*Stats 202 c. 337*) created OYCR effective July 1, 2021, and set out the basic contours of the Ombudsperson’s authorities that continue today, giving them jurisdiction to investigate complaints relating to youth in juvenile facilities from youth, families, staff, and others “about harmful conditions or practices, violations of laws and regulations governing facilities, and circumstances presenting an emergency situation.” It further gave the Ombudsperson the discretion to decide whether to investigate complaints and to refer them out, and the mandate to “[r]esolve complaints when possible, collaborating with facility administrators and staff to develop resolutions that may include training.” It also required the Ombudsperson to publish regular reports to the legislature.

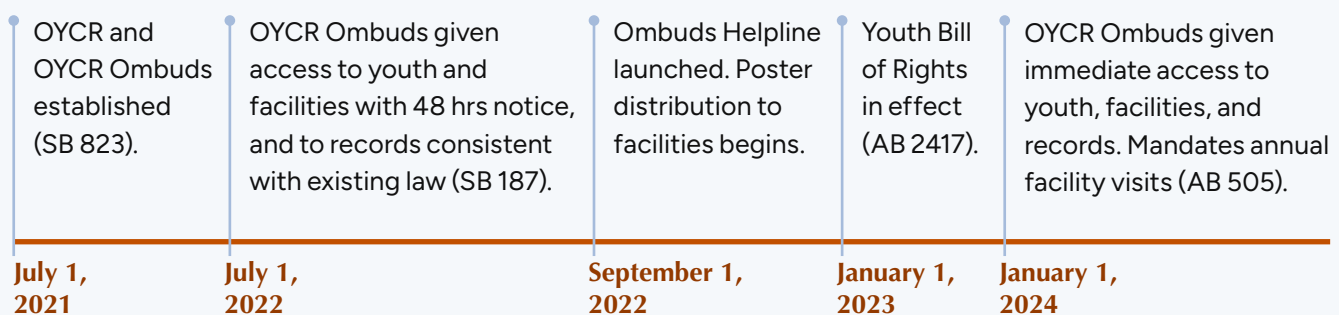
[SB 187](#) (*Stats 2022 c.50*), effective on July 1, 2022, expanded the authorities of the Ombudsperson by explicitly allowing them access to youth, facilities, and youth records with 48 hours notice to the facilities. It also added several sections defining Ombudsperson notice requirements to complainants and facility chiefs; protections of Ombuds staff from being deposed and their records being used in court proceedings (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.2*); providing specificity on what data should be reported to the Legislature (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.5*); and establishing a hiring preference for persons with juvenile justice background (*Welf. &*

*Inst. Code § 2200.7*). This expanded authority went into effect on July 1, 2022.

[AB 2417](#) (*Stats 2022 c.786*), effective on January 1, 2023, created the first Youth Bill of Rights for all youth in local juvenile justice facilities. The Youth Bill of Rights, codified in *Welf. & Inst. Code § 224.71*, summarizes the existing rights of youth in juvenile facilities, bringing together a range of rights covering areas of importance for incarcerated youth. The new law requires that the Youth Bill of Rights be posted in each juvenile facility and be provided to youth and their families at intake (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 224.72*), and it charged OYCR with developing these materials in consultation with youth, youth advocate and support groups, and groups representing children, families, children’s facilities, and other interested parties, and disseminating these materials by July 1, 2023.

[AB 505](#) (*Stats. 2023 c.528*), which went into effect on January 1, 2024, further provided the Ombudsperson with investigative tools. AB 505 provided the Ombudsperson immediate access, without notice, to youth in facilities, facilities, and records. AB 505 also added the Ombudsperson to *Welf. & Inst. Code sec. 827*, clarifying that the Ombudsperson may access the juvenile court files of each youth without needing to apply for a court order. It also mandated that the Ombudsperson visit each juvenile facility at least once per year.

## Ombuds Division Timeline



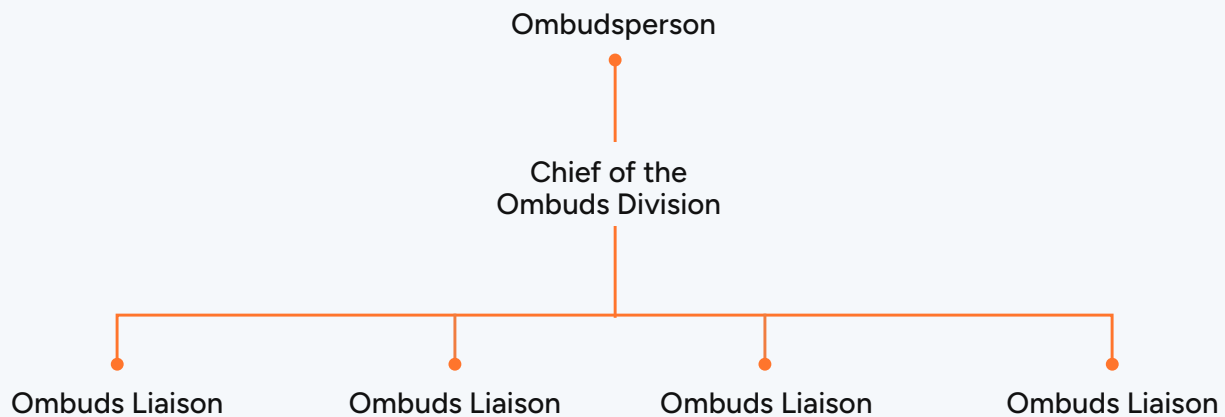
# Division Structure

The Ombuds Division is part of the Office of Youth and Community Restoration within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS).

The OYCR Ombuds Division was allotted 6 positions in the initial OYCR organizational chart, on the understanding that the division would likely need to expand. The current structure includes the Ombudsperson, the Chief of the Ombuds Division, and four Ombuds Liaisons. Because the Ombuds Division has statewide jurisdiction, the Ombuds Liaisons are strategically located around the state, to easily and efficiently visit any of the state's 62 juvenile facilities.

As of November 2024, the Ombuds Division has filled the originally allocated six positions. The Ombuds team includes staff with a range of professional experience, including probation, child welfare, juvenile justice advocacy, and law. Consistent with the statutory directive to give priority to people formerly incarcerated in the juvenile system (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.7*), half of the current Division staff have lived expertise in the juvenile justice system.

## Ombuds Division Organizational Chart



To support statewide coverage and easy access to youth facilities, Ombuds staff are spread across the state.

# Ombuds Mandates

The Ombuds Division has four primary areas of responsibility: complaint investigations, annual site visits, Youth Bill of Rights dissemination and education, and reporting.

## Complaint Investigations

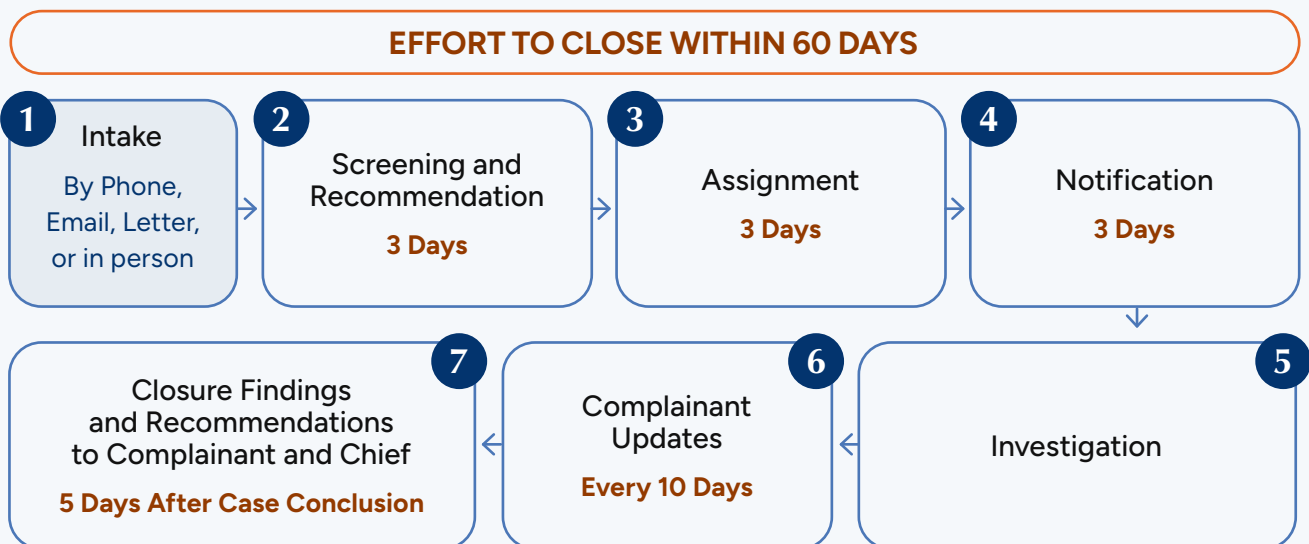
The Ombudsperson has jurisdiction to investigate complaints relating to youth detained in or committed to juvenile facilities. Any party can make a complaint, including youth, families, staff, or community members. The Ombudsperson has discretion to investigate a complaint, decline to investigate it, or refer it to another entity for investigation.

In 2023 the OYCR Ombuds Division developed a 46-page Procedures and Case Practices manual which sets out the OYCR Ombuds approach to complaints consistent with the OYCR authorizing authorities and the standards of practice for the ombudsperson profession. These Procedures and Case Practices were updated in 2024 to reflect the statutory changes and additional mandates of AB 505.

The Procedures and Case Practices guide staff in handling complaints from intake to closure, including intake interviews, screening, investigation, and closure. They set forth target timelines for the investigative process including complaint resolution, communications with complainants, and communications with Probation Departments.

In April of 2024, the Ombuds Division launched its new Case Management System (CMS), a secure electronic tracking system that allows more detailed data capture and reporting than was previously possible. With the CMS, the Division can track its success at meeting the target timelines outlines in the Procedures and Case Practices for continuous improvement purposes and can more easily provide detailed reports on the Division's work.

### OYCR Ombuds Division Complaint Investigation Process

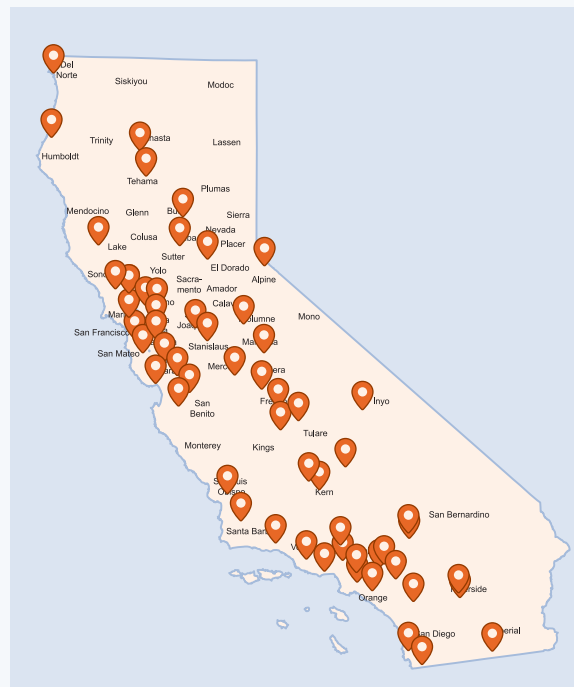


# Annual Site Visits

*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200(d)(9)* requires Ombuds staff to visit each juvenile facility at least once a year.

This annual site visit requirement went into effect on January 1, 2024, and in 2024, Ombuds staff carried out the required visits of each of the facilities, thereby achieving full compliance with site visits. In 2024, there were 132 facilities registered with the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), located at 62 distinct addresses in 43 counties. At each site visit, Ombuds staff received a tour of the full facility, met facility staff, and answered staff questions about the Ombuds process. Ombuds staff tested the OYCR Ombuds Helpline from youth phones and observed the placement of Youth Bill of Rights posters. Most importantly, Ombuds staff met confidentially with youth to introduce themselves and the Ombuds Helpline, discuss the Youth Bill of Rights, and get a sense of youth's experience in the facility.

## Map of Juvenile Facilities



California's local juvenile facilities are spread across the state. In 2024, there were 50 Secure Youth Treatment Facilities, 39 Camps/Ranches, 44 Juvenile Halls, and 3 Special Purpose Juvenile Halls.

# Youth Bill of Rights

The Youth Bill of Rights codifies the rights of youth confined in juvenile facilities in California, consistent with existing law and regulation. These rights cover personal rights; discipline; phone, mail, and visits; searches; confidential communications; recreation; court, medical, education; relation and spiritual; pregnant and parenting youth; non-discrimination; and abuse (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 224.71*).

Each juvenile facility must provide a developmentally appropriate orientation that includes an explanation and copy of these rights. They must be posted in conspicuous locations, including classrooms and living units. They must also be provided to parents and guardians.

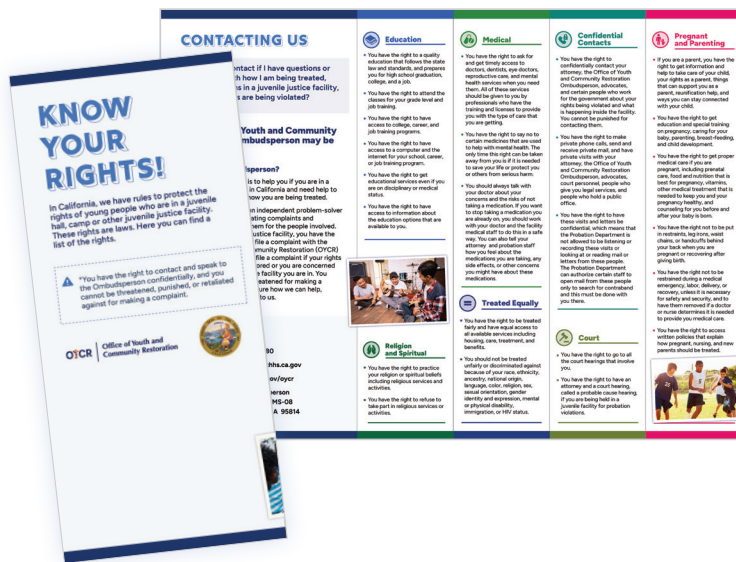
The Ombuds Division was charged with developing age-appropriate standardized materials explaining these rights in consultation with youth, youth advocate

and support groups, and groups representing children, families, and other interested parties. The Ombuds Division carried this out throughout 2023. To develop this version of the Youth Bill of Rights, OYCR drafted youth-friendly materials and undertook extensive public engagement including open public comment on the materials, soliciting feedback from probation departments, and conducting in-person sessions with currently incarcerated youth.



A large-scale poster and a foldable brochure were printed and distributed to all juvenile facilities in the state in May 2024. Additional copies of these materials have been provided to juvenile facilities, community groups, public defenders, and others. Materials are available free of cost and can be requested by emailing [OYCRombuds@chhs.ca.gov](mailto:OYCRombuds@chhs.ca.gov) or calling 1-844-402-1880.

The Youth Bill of Rights in poster and wallet-sized brochure formats



In 2024, the Ombuds Division offered 8 presentations on the Ombuds Complaint process and how the Ombudsperson can help youth to a range of audiences, including educators, youth justice community members, and probation leadership and administrators.



# Reporting

The Ombudsperson is required by statute to publish and provide regular reports to the Legislature. The Ombudsperson may also issue data, findings, or other reports (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.5*).

# 2024 Data Summary

**Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.5 requires the Ombudsperson to publish regular reports to the Legislature including the following data:**

*contacts to the office, reports on chronic absenteeism,<sup>1</sup> complaints received, including the type and source of those complaints, investigations performed by the ombudsperson, the time to investigate and resolve*

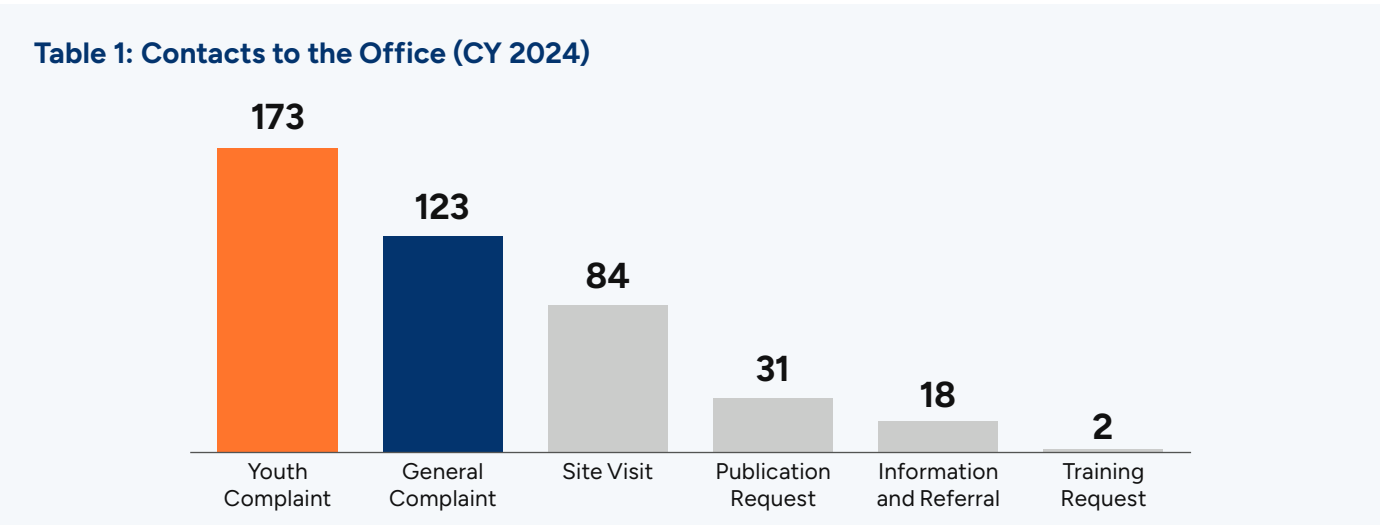
*complaints, the number and types of complaints referred to other agencies, the trends and issues that arose in the course of investigating complaints, pending complaints, and subsequent findings and actions taken, and a summary of the data received by the ombudsperson. Data shall be disaggregated by gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity of the complainants to the extent this information is available.*

## Contacts to the Office

This section provides detailed reporting on complaint investigations and outcomes in calendar year 2024. Data from 2022-2023 complaints and investigations are provided in the Appendix and are not discussed in this section. There are several reasons for this primary focus. First, on January 1, 2024, AB 505 went into effect, giving the Ombudsperson clear authority to youth, facilities, and youth and facility records. These expanded authorities have eased access to youth, facilities, and records needed to conduct meaningful complaint investigations. As a result of the increased access and authority clarifications, the investigations

undertaken in 2022-2023 cannot be readily compared to those undertaken in 2024. Second, in April 2024 the Ombuds Division, launched a new, sophisticated case management system with flexible data fields and reporting features that can capture the data requested by the legislature and more, and has markedly improved our ability to provide regular, nuanced reports.

Table 1 shows all the contacts to the Office, including complaints, publication and training requests, and requests for information. It also includes all site visits.<sup>2</sup>



1. The requirement to report on chronic absenteeism data was introduced by AB 2176 and went into effect on January 1, 2025. The Ombudsperson will publish regular reports on chronic absenteeism that may be separate from the reports on complaint investigations and outcomes.

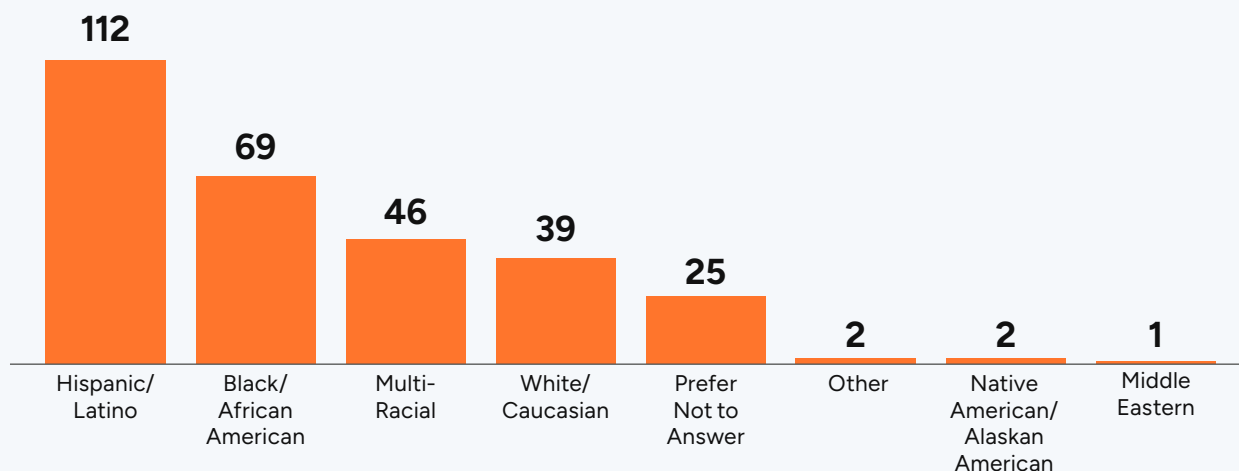
2. Note on terminology: A Youth Complaint is a complaint made by a youth currently confined in a county probation facility. A General Complaint is a complaint made in relation to a youth by a parent, relative, attorney, advocate, or concerned citizen.

# Demographics of Referenced Youth

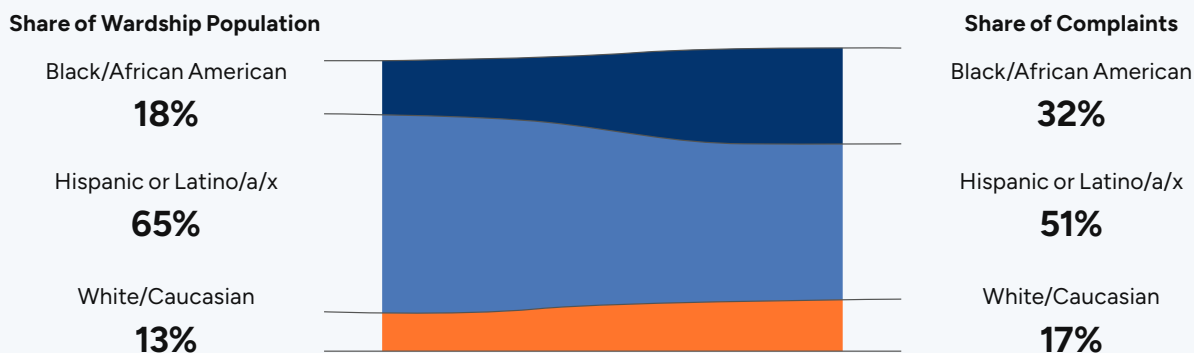
Youth of color are disproportionately represented throughout the different decision points in California’s juvenile legal system.<sup>3</sup> Of the 296 complaints received in 2024, 78% (230) related to identified youth of color (including 38% [112] Latino and 23% [69] Black) and 13% related to White youth (*Table 2*). Black youth are over-represented in complaints compared to their share of youth on wardship probation,<sup>4</sup> while Hispanic youth file complaints at a lower rate than White youth (*Table 3*).

With respect to gender, 72% (214) of the 296 complaints related to male youth and 17% (51) to female youth. Two complaints related to transgender youth (*Table 4*). While male youth make up the largest share of juvenile detention population and complaints, female and transgender youth file complaints at a higher rate than other incarcerated youth, making up only 10% of the population but 17% of complaints (*Table 5*).

**Table 2: Race/Ethnicity of Referenced Youth (CY 2024)**



**Table 3: Referenced Youth in Complaints & CA Youth Wardship Population by Race**

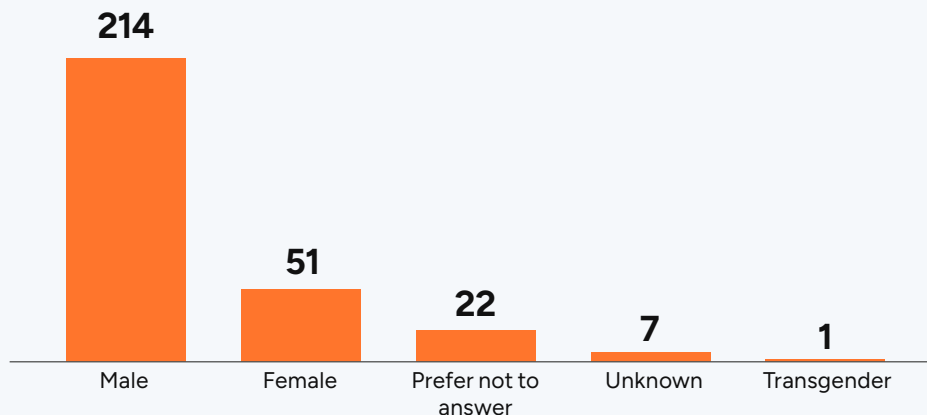


Source for Wardship Data: [California Department of Justice. \(2024\). \*Juvenile Justice in California, 2023\* \(Table 20: Juvenile Court Dispositions, p. 77\).](#)

3. [Office of Youth and Community Restoration. \(2024, May 1\). \*AB 102 Report\* \(p. 9\).](#)

4. Using wardship probation data is the most appropriate comparison point for analyzing Ombuds complaints by race because it reflects the population of youth who are actively under court-ordered supervision, many of whom are placed in facilities where complaints are most likely to arise.

**Table 4: Gender of Referenced Youth (CY 2024)**



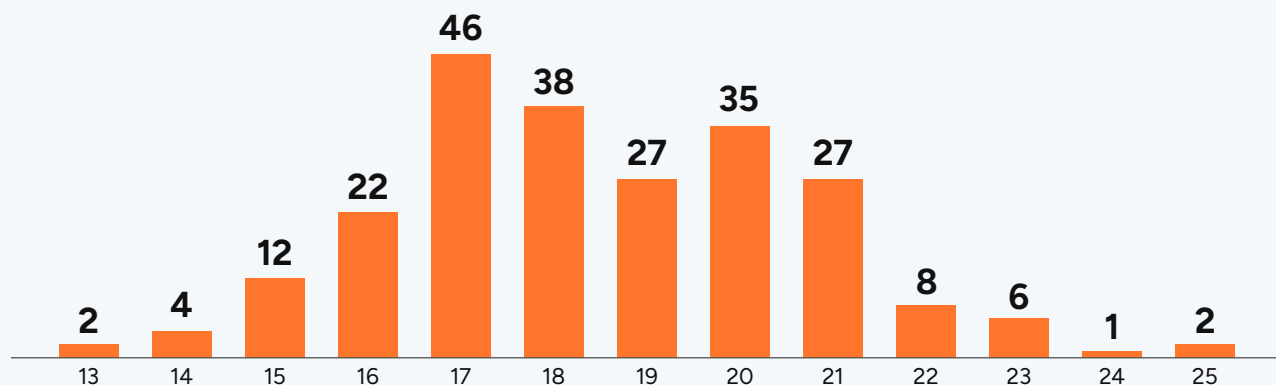
**Table 5: Comparing Referenced Youth in Complaints & BSCC Total Average Daily Population (ADP) by Gender**



Data source: [California Board of State and Community Corrections. \(n.d.\). \*Juvenile Detention Profile Survey \(JDPS\) data dashboard\*](#). OYCR Ombuds complaint data and BSCC Juvenile Detention Profile Survey (JDPS) data offer a way to examine whether the gender distribution of complaints aligns with the gender breakdown of the BSCC's Average Daily Population (ADP). For this analysis, we used the most recent data available from 2024. We calculated total ADP by combining pre- and post-disposition counts for males and females across all facility types and counties. However, direct comparisons have limitations: the BSCC data only covers January through September 2024 and reflects quarterly average daily population figures, while the Ombuds complaints span the full calendar year and are based on individual complaint counts.

**Table 6: Age of Referenced Youth (CY 2024)**

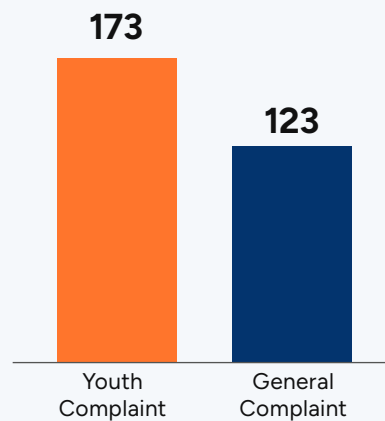
Note: This table excludes 66 complaints that were either multi-youth complaints or youth for whom no age was recorded.



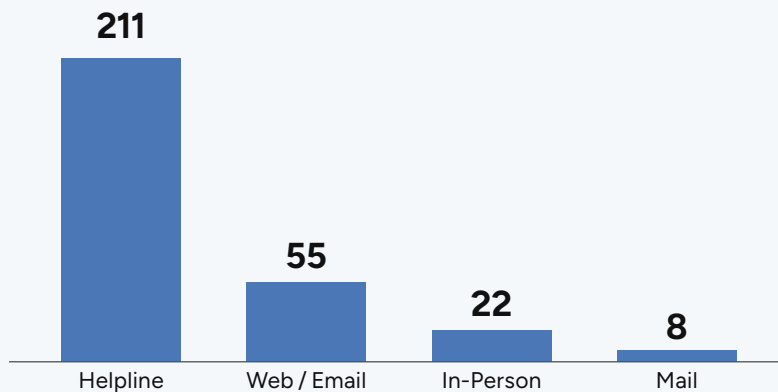
## Complaints Received, Including the Type and Source

Complaints are categorized as “youth complaints,” which come from incarcerated youth, or “general complaints,” which can be submitted by any person regarding the care of incarcerated youth. 296 complaints in total were received in 2024. 58% (173) of those complaints came from incarcerated youth, and 42% (123) were general complaints (*Table 7*). The OYCR Ombuds Help Line was the most used means of initiating the complaint (72%) (*Table 8*). The vast majority of complaints from youth (85%) came through the Help Line (*Table 9*). General complaints were initiated nearly equally through the Help Line (52%) or electronically through the web complaint submission form or email (44%) (*Table 10*). Parents submitted 41% (50) of the General Complaints, followed by attorneys (13%) (16) and educators (12%) (15) (*Table 11*).

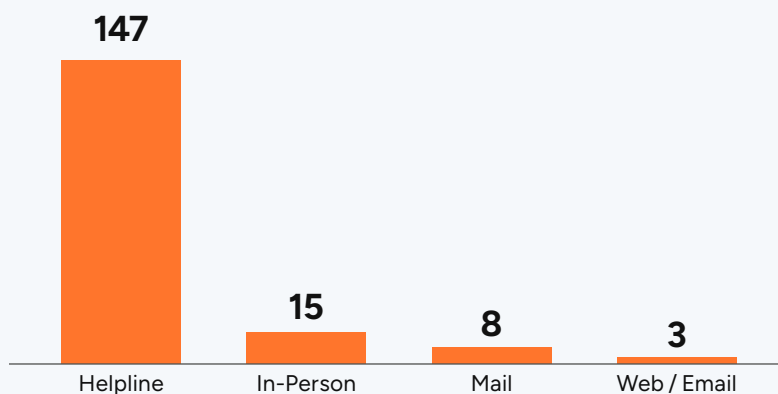
**Table 7: Complaints by Type (CY 2024)**



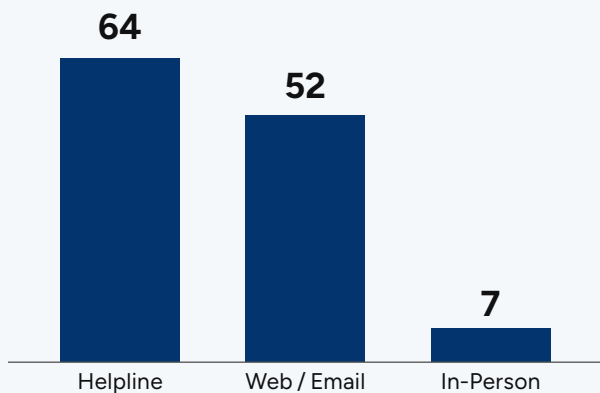
**Table 8: Complaint Origin - All Complaints (CY 2024)**



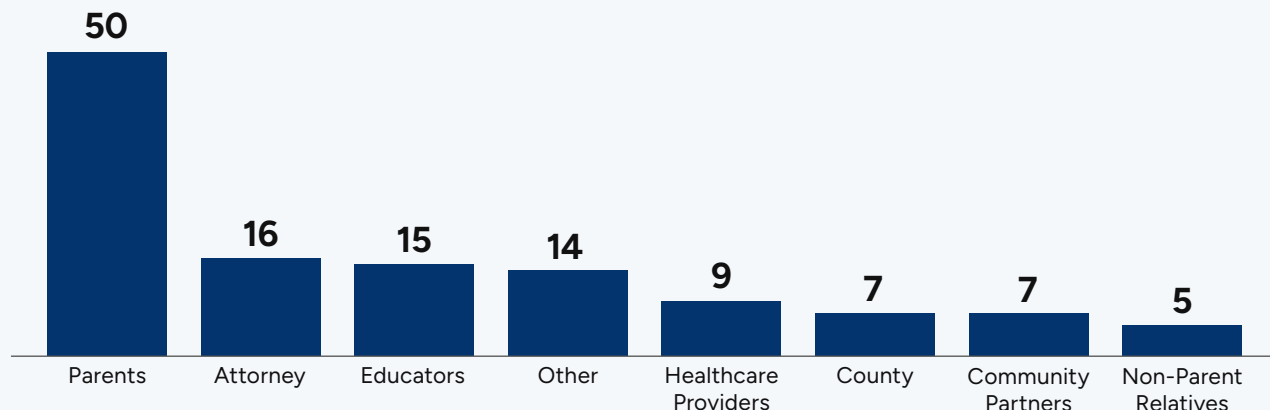
**Table 9: Complaint Origin – Youth Complaints (CY 2024)**



**Table 10: Complaint Origin – General Complaints (CY 2024)**



**Table 11: Complaint Origin – General Complaints – Relationship to Youth (CY 2024)**



## Complaints Referred to Other Agencies and Investigations Performed

The Ombudsperson has the discretion to decide whether to investigate a complaint and to refer it out (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200(d)(2)*). Reasons for declining to investigate a complaint may include one or more of the following:

- The timeliness of the complaint.
- The complaint is outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsperson.
- The complainant has another feasible and available remedy or channel they could reasonably be expected to use.
- The Ombudsperson cannot address the remedy sought by the complainant.
- The complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious, or not made in good faith.
- The complainant does not provide or refuses to provide, without good reason, information in the complainant's possession or knowledge which is requested by the Ombudsperson.
- A previous determination has been made by the Ombudsperson regarding the subject matter of the complaint.

- The complaint has been resolved due to a change in the complainant's circumstances or in the law, or due to an action taken by an agency during the preliminary review and inquiry of the complaint.

Declining to investigate a case does not necessarily mean that the Ombuds team does not work on the complaint. It means, for instance, that prior to sending a notification letter to the Chief, the issue was resolved, or the youth was released. In the 2025 report to the Legislature, the Ombudsperson will provide more nuanced data on the "decline to investigate" category of cases, distinguishing between complaints that the Ombudsperson was impeded from investigating and complaints that the Ombudsperson elected not to investigate.

When the Ombudsperson investigates a complaint, they make a finding regarding the allegation referring to a standard of substantial evidence, which means that the degree of all the relevant evidence collected would lead a reasonable person to accept as adequate to support the conclusion. The Ombudsperson makes one of the following findings in each case investigated:

- **Substantiated:** There is enough documented evidence to lead a reasonable person to accept the allegation as true. A substantiated finding may occur even if the conduct or issue is not a violation of law or policy, notably if the issue is related to harmful conditions or practices in a juvenile facility.
- **Unsubstantiated:** Facts and evidence support the conclusion that the allegation is untrue or invalid.
- **Inconclusive:** The Ombudsperson is unable to determine if the allegation is substantiated under a substantial evidence standard. For instance, there may be no records or documentation, no impartial witnesses, the action occurred too long ago, or there is a dispute of facts that cannot be resolved.
- **No findings:** An investigation may sometimes be closed without a finding. Some reasons for doing so may include the following:
  - The issues have been resolved without any or very little intervention from the Ombudsperson
  - The complaint is withdrawn by the complainant
  - The Ombudsperson cannot get in contact with the complainant
  - The complainant does not provide sufficient information for the investigation to continue

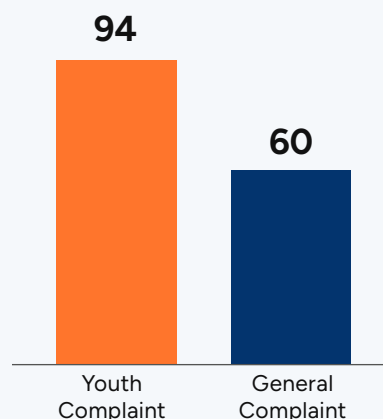
Of the 296 complaints received in 2024, the Ombuds Division declined to investigate approximately 28% (84 complaints, 4 of which were submitted in 2023) and referred out 2 (*Table 13*). For some cases, at the time of screening, the OYCR Ombuds will cross-refer a case to another agency while its own investigation is ongoing (*Table 14*). The Ombuds Division fully investigated and closed 68 cases in 2024.

Of the 68 cases that were investigated and closed in 2024, 37% (25) were found to be unsubstantiated and 31% (21) were found to be substantiated. 26% (18) of cases had no findings, and 6% (4) were inconclusive (*Table 13*). For cases where there were no findings, the most common reasons were that the issue was resolved without any or with very little intervention of the Ombudsperson or that the complainant could not be reached.

Of the 68 complaints fully investigated and closed in 2024, 49 were Youth Complaints and 19 were General Complaints. For those Youth Complaints, 31% (15) were substantiated, 32% (16) were unsubstantiated, and 6% (3) were inconclusive. For those General Complaints, 32% (6) were substantiated, 47% (9) were unsubstantiated, and 5% (1) were inconclusive (*Table 15*). Examples of complaints in each of these findings categories can be found in the Impact Narratives section on page 27.

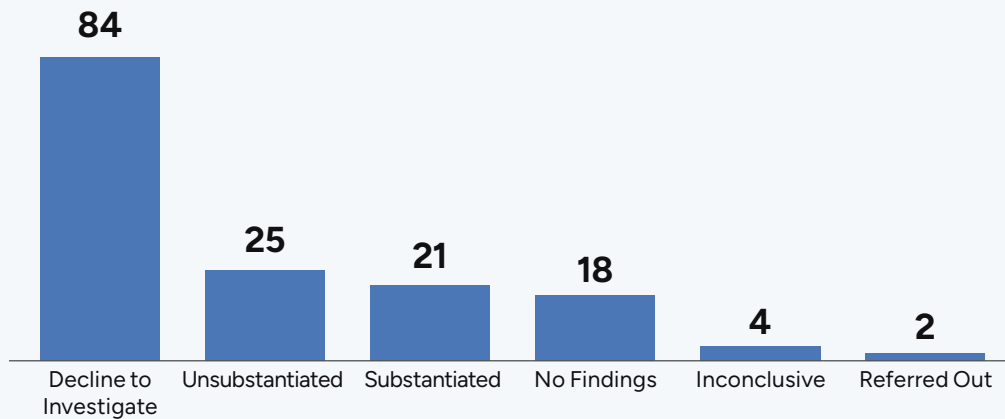
Table 16 shows the number of complaints submitted in each county in 2024 and Table 17 shows the closure findings for cases closed in each county in 2024.

**Table 12: Closed Cases in 2024 (CY 2024)**

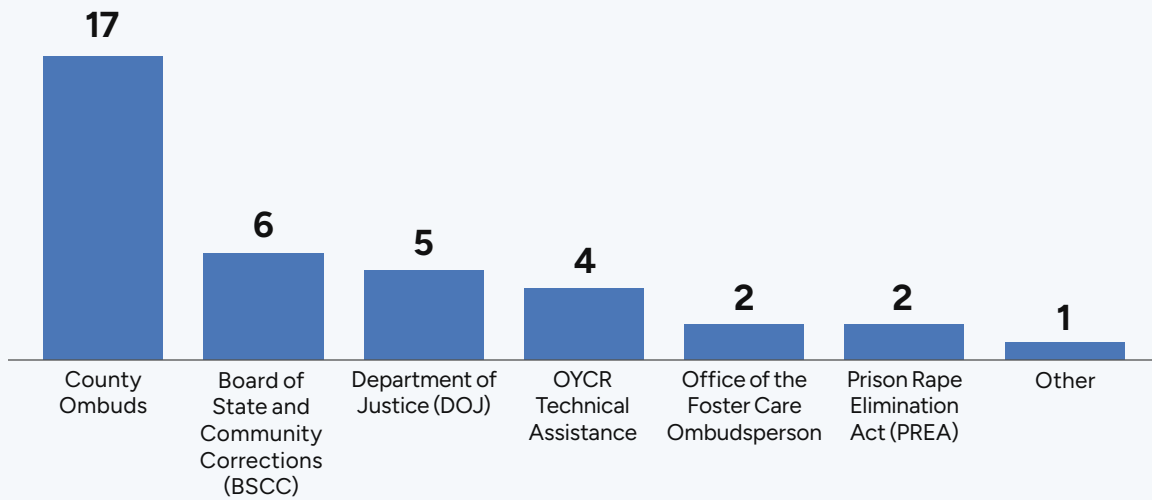




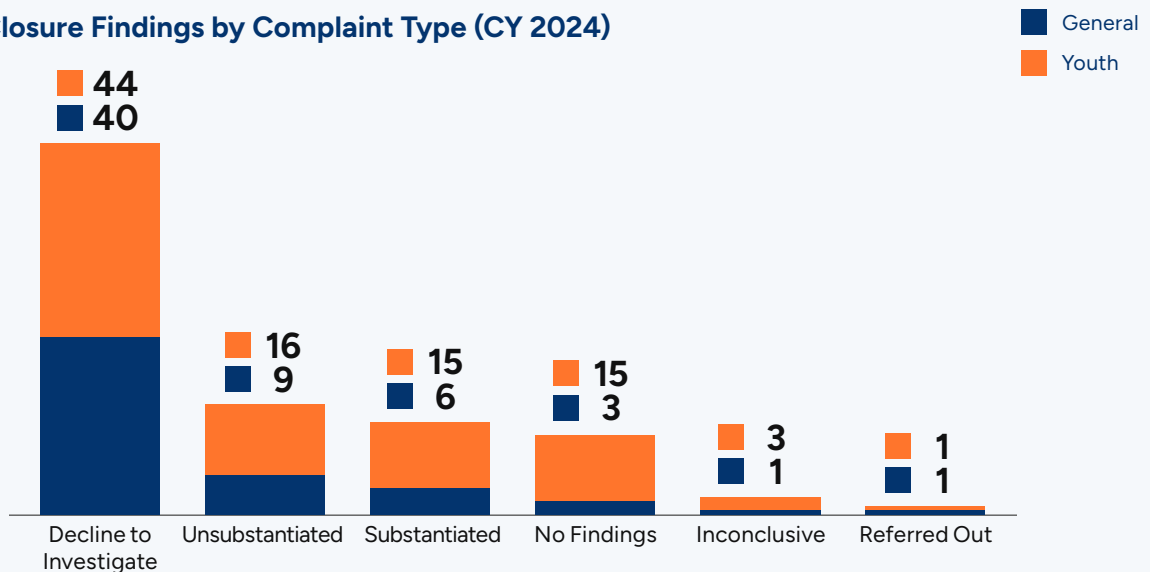
**Table 13: Closure Findings (CY 2024)**



**Table 14: Cross Report upon Screening (CY 2024)**



**Table 15: Closure Findings by Complaint Type (CY 2024)**



**Table 16: Complaints Received by County (2024)**

County	Case Record Type	Count	Total
Alameda	General Complaint	3	12
	Youth Complaint	9	
Butte	Youth Complaint	2	2
Contra Costa	General Complaint	3	9
	Youth Complaint	6	
Fresno	General Complaint	2	5
	Youth Complaint	3	
Humboldt	General Complaint	2	2
Kern	General Complaint	3	6
	Youth Complaint	3	
Kings	General Complaint	2	7
	Youth Complaint	5	
Los Angeles	General Complaint	37	59
	Youth Complaint	22	
Madera	Youth Complaint	2	2
Merced	Youth Complaint	3	3
Monterey	General Complaint	3	4
	Youth Complaint	1	
Napa	Youth Complaint	2	2
Orange	Youth Complaint	2	2
Riverside	General Complaint	1	6
	Youth Complaint	5	
Sacramento	General Complaint	13	21
	Youth Complaint	8	
San Benito	General Complaint	1	1
San Bernardino	Youth Complaint	9	9
San Diego	General Complaint	33	67
	Youth Complaint	34	
San Francisco	General Complaint	4	4

County	Case Record Type	Count	Total
San Joaquin	General Complaint	3	11
	Youth Complaint	8	
San Mateo	General Complaint	2	2
Santa Barbara	General Complaint	1	3
	Youth Complaint	2	
Santa Clara	Youth Complaint	2	2
Santa Cruz	Youth Complaint	1	1
Shasta	General Complaint	2	2
Solano	General Complaint	1	2
	Youth Complaint	1	
Sonoma	General Complaint	1	6
	Youth Complaint	5	
Stanislaus	Youth Complaint	7	7
Statewide	Youth Complaint	1	1
Tulare	General Complaint	1	21
	Youth Complaint	20	
Tuolumne	Youth Complaint	3	3
Ventura	General Complaint	5	9
	Youth Complaint	4	
Yolo	Youth Complaint	1	1
Yuba	Youth Complaint	2	2
Total <sup>5</sup>		296	

5. Counties not listed had zero complaints.

**Table 17: Closure Findings by County (2024)**

County	Closure Finding	Record Count
Alameda	Decline to investigate	6
	Unsubstantiated	2
Butte	Decline to investigate	2
Contra Costa	No findings	4
	Decline to investigate	2
Fresno	Decline to investigate	1
Humboldt	Substantiated	1
	Decline to investigate	1
Kern	Unsubstantiated	1
	Decline to investigate	1
Kings	Substantiated	2
	No Findings	1
Los Angeles	Decline to investigate	8
	Substantiated	8
	Unsubstantiated	3
	Referred Out	2
	Inconclusive	2
	No findings	2
Merced	Decline to investigate	2
Monterey	Decline to investigate	4
Napa	Decline to investigate	1
Riverside	Decline to investigate	4
	Unsubstantiated	1
	Substantiated	1
	No Findings	1
Sacramento	Decline to investigate	6
	Unsubstantiated	2
San Bernardino	Unsubstantiated	5
	Substantiated	1
	No findings	1
	Decline to investigate	1

County	Closure Finding	Record Count
Santa Barbara	Substantiated	1
San Diego	Decline to investigate	27
	No findings	4
	Unsubstantiated	4
	Substantiated	2
San Francisco	Decline to investigate	1
San Joaquin	Decline to investigate	3
	Unsubstantiated	2
	Substantiated	2
San Mateo	Decline to investigate	2
Santa Clara	Substantiated	1
Shasta	Decline to investigate	2
Solano	No findings	1
	Decline to investigate	1
Sonoma	Unsubstantiated	2
<del>Stanislaus</del>	<del>Substantiated</del>	<del>1</del>
Tulare	Unsubstantiated	2
	Inconclusive	2
	Decline to investigate	3
	Substantiated	1
Tuolumne	Decline to investigate	2
Ventura	Decline to investigate	4
	No findings	2
	Unsubstantiated	1
Yuba	No findings	2
Total		154

Due to an administrative error, Table 17 erroneously included a substantiated finding for Stanislaus County for a case that should have been categorized not as a complaint but as an information and referral. Stanislaus County did not have any complaints that were closed in 2024 with findings.

# Time to Investigate and Resolve Complaints

As outlined in our Operating Procedures and Case Practices, the Ombuds Division makes an effort to close cases within 60 days. There are multiple reasons why a complaint may take longer to resolve.

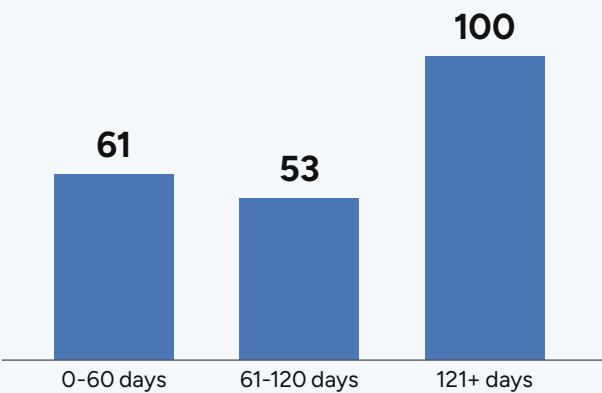
- The Ombuds Division may have completed an investigation but is holding a complaint open until the Department carries out the recommended action, such as updating a policy document.
- The Ombuds Division may be waiting for necessary information has been received. In 2024, the Ombuds Division did experience delays in receiving records from a few counties. The addition of the OYCR Ombuds to Welf. & Inst. Code § 827, allowing access to youth case files without a court order, only came into effect on January 1, 2024. We believe that in 2025, the county Departments that were slower to

provide records will provide them more quickly now that they have had the opportunity to work with their county counsel to understand the scope of our authority to access records and the types of records that are most commonly requested. In our 2025 Legislative Report, we will report on any departments that regularly took longer than 30 days to provide access to records.

- In 2024, some closure delays stemmed from the reality of setting up a new office with new staff, and not having a fully staffed team until December 2024.

We are closely monitoring our case closure times. It remains a priority of OYCR Ombuds office to thoroughly investigate and resolve complaints swiftly.

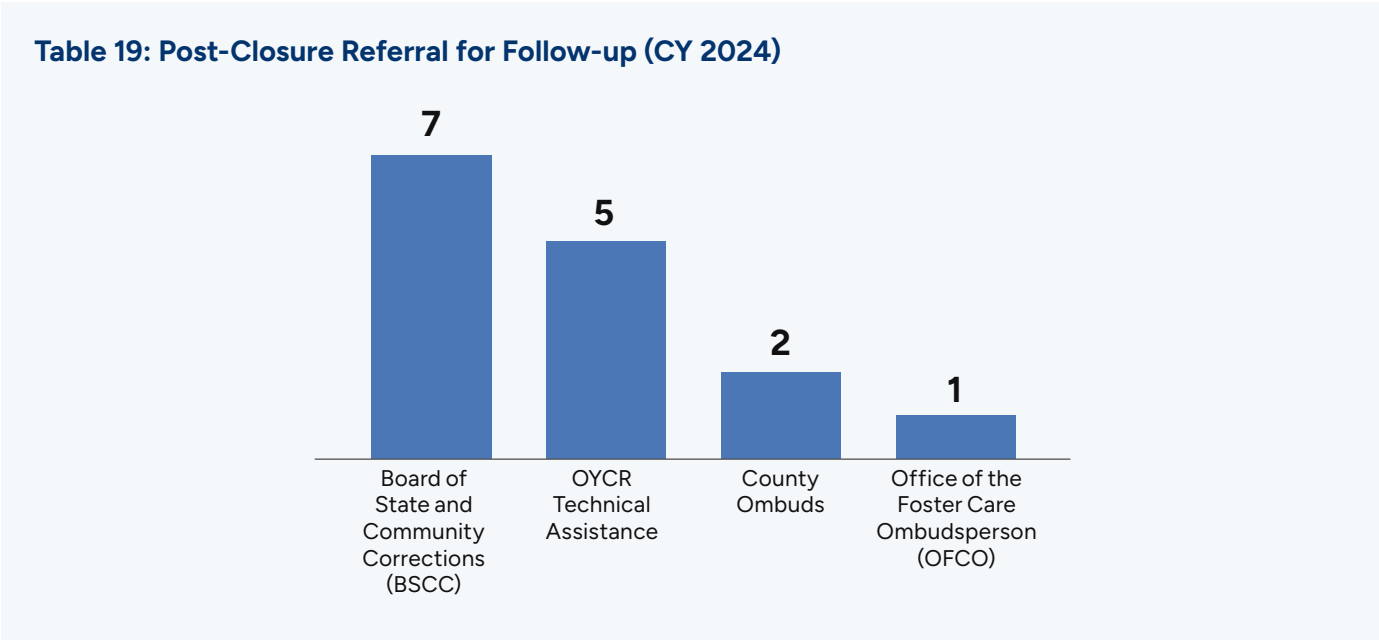
Table 18: Time to Investigate and Resolve Complaints (CY 2024)



# Subsequent Findings and Actions Taken

In closing a case, the Ombudsperson may make recommendations for practice changes. Additionally, at the close of a case, the OYCR Ombuds may refer a case to another entity for follow up or technical assistance. For instance, for substantiated Title 15 violations, the OYCR Ombuds refers the findings to the BSCC to follow up. After it has followed up, BSCC reports back to the OYCR Ombuds about any steps it has taken. Where an

issue is identified that would benefit from technical assistance, the OYCR Ombuds will refer the matter to the OYCR technical assistance staff with expertise in the complaint issue area and may work with the county to identify TA expertise and resources outside of OYCR. Most post-closure referrals are to the BSCC or to OYCR technical assistance (*Table 19*).



## Trends and Issues

Table 20 shows the issues identified in complaints from 2024. A complaint may have more than one issue, so the number of issues (441) exceeds the total number of complaints received (296). The issues identified in the table reflect allegations only, not substantiated findings.

Current definitions of case issue categories are described below. Issue categories are being refined such that future reports may contain additional detail.

- **Abuse/Excessive Force:** Concerns about physical, emotional, or verbal mistreatment by staff or peers, including excessive use of force or pepper spray.
- **Staffing:** Issues related to staff availability, qualifications, training, or conduct that may affect youth care and supervision.
- **Family Engagement:** Barriers to maintaining meaningful contact with family members include limited phone calls, visits, or communication access.
- **Medical Health:** Complaints about inadequate or delayed access to physical healthcare, including emergencies, chronic conditions, or follow-up care.
- **Programming/Incentives:** Lack of access to rehabilitation and community reentry programs, activities, or rewards intended to encourage positive behavior and development.

- **Education:** Concerns about educational services' quality, availability, or appropriateness, including special education, post-secondary education, or access to materials and resources.
- **Food/Nutrition:** Complaints regarding food quantity, quality, timing, or nutritional value, as well as unmet dietary needs.
- **Discipline:** Issues with unfair, excessive, inconsistent, unrelated disciplinary actions with established policies or recommended by behavioral health professionals.
- **Confidential Communications:** Interference with private communications such as legal calls, letters, or conversations with advocates, attorneys, and the OYCR Ombuds Division.
- **Retaliation:** Allegations of punishment or mistreatment in response to youth raising concerns, filing grievances, speaking out, contacting the OYCR Ombuds Division, or attorneys.
- **Grievance Processes and Responses:** Problems with how complaints are filed, investigated, or responded to, including delays or lack of follow-through.
- **Hygiene:** Lack of access to basic hygiene products, clean clothing, showers, or laundry services.
- **Healthy Environment:** Concerns about facility conditions, such as cleanliness, air quality, temperature, or presence of mold, pests, or hazards.
- **Mental Health:** Insufficient or inappropriate mental health services, including therapy, assessments, or crisis interventions.
- **Court Hearings:** Barriers to participating in legal proceedings including missed hearings, lack of notice, or inadequate preparation/support.
- **Exercise/Recreation:** Limited or no access to required physical activity, outdoor time, or recreational opportunities.
- **Property:** Loss, damage, or withholding of personal belongings or facility-issued property without justification.
- **Detention Rights:** Rights violations while in custody include due process, legal access, or personal dignity.
- **Clothing:** Inadequate or inappropriate clothing provided, such as wrong sizes, poor condition, or lack of seasonal items.
- **Discrimination:** Treatment that is unfair or biased based on race, gender identity, religion, disability, or other protected characteristics.
- **Searches:** Concerns about how personal or room searches are conducted, including invasiveness, frequency, or lack of respect.
- **Safety and Security:** Fears or incidents of violence, bullying, or unsafe conditions within the facility, staff toward youth, and youth toward youth.
- **Religion:** Barriers to practicing faith or accessing religious materials, services, or accommodations.
- **Medication:** Issues with timely access to prescribed medications, incorrect dosages, or lack of informed consent.
- **Youth Bill of Rights Materials:** Lack of access to or awareness of the rights guaranteed to youth in detention, including the OYCR publication materials. (Youth Bill of Rights posters and brochures)
- **Bedding:** Inadequate bedding supplies, such as mattresses, sheets, pillows, or uncomfortable or unsanitary blankets.
- **Parenting:** Support or rights of youth who are parents, including contact with their children, parenting resources, or reunification services.



**Table 20: Complaint Issues (CY 2024)**

Abuse/Excessive Force	53
Staffing	50
Family Engagement	44
Medical Health	31
Programming/Incentives	30
Education	29
Food/Nutrition	26
Discipline	26
Confidential Communications	24
Retaliation	18
Grievance Processes and Responses	17
Hygiene	15
Healthy Environment	14
Mental Health	12
Court Hearings	7

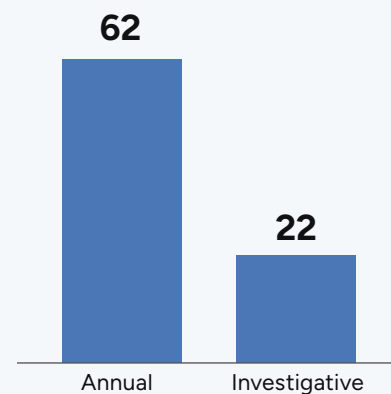
Exercise/Recreation	6
Property	6
Detention Rights	5
Clothing	5
Discrimination	5
Searches	4
Safety and Security	4
Religion	3
Medication	3
Youth Bill of Rights Materials	2
Bedding	1
Parenting	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>441</b>

## Pending Complaints

As of January 1, 2025, there were 83 complaints that remained open. In the last quarter of 2024, 79 complaints were opened. Additional reasons for complaints remaining open longer than 60 days are stated in the Time to Investigate and Resolve Complaints section on page 22.

## Site Visits

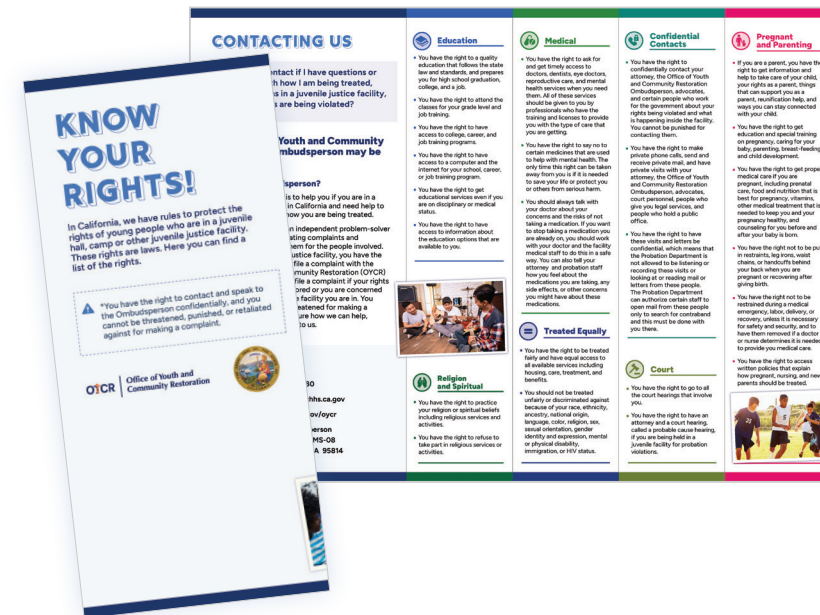
As explained in the Annual Site Visits section on page 8, the Ombudsperson is required to visit each facility each year. These are referred to as Annual Site Visits. Additionally, Ombuds staff visit facilities during complaint investigations. These are referred to as Investigative Site Visits and are usually unannounced.

**Table 21: Site Visits (CY 2024)**

# Delivered Publications

As discussed in the Youth Bill of Rights section on page 8, the Ombudsman developed and had printed two types of Youth Bill of Rights materials: a large poster and a pocket-sized folding brochure. These materials were available to facilities for the first time in May 2024 and were mailed out directly. Additionally, we received requests from community-based organizations, attorneys, educators, and others for copies of the materials and we distributed them at presentations and conferences. Some Probation Departments also requested additional materials. All materials are mailed out free of cost upon request.

The Youth Bill of Rights in poster and wallet-sized brochure formats



**39,315**  
Youth Bill of Rights brochures and

**5,711**  
Youth Bill of Rights posters have been provided to facilities and other requesting parties.



# Impact Narratives

The Ombudsperson has the authority to “resolve complaints, when possible, collaborating with facility administrators and staff to develop resolutions that may include training” and to “recommend changes to improve services or to correct systemic issues.” (*Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200.2(d)-(e)*). Substantiated complaints are referred to the BSCC for follow-up when they involve Title 15 violations.

## Sample of substantiated complaints:

- An allegation that youth are only permitted to keep their legal documents in their rooms for three days was substantiated. The agency undertook the revision of the facility mail policy relating to possession, storage, and access to legal mail to include a check-in/check-out process allowing youth to have access to their legal documents upon request throughout their time in the facility.
- An allegation that a youth who was pending a transfer hearing was removed from a mentoring program because that program was reserved for youth committed to the Secure Youth Treatment Facility was substantiated. The following business day, the agency reinstated the youth in the mentoring program and updated the facility policy regarding which youth have access to the mentoring program.
- An allegation that an agency had a policy to regularly strip search youth returning from college furloughs without specific reasonable suspicion was substantiated. The agency updated the policy so that youth returning from furloughs will undergo pat searches and walk through a metal detector.
- An allegation that youth were subject to extended time in their rooms during a particular week was substantiated. The finding was that the room confinement had occurred due to short staffing. This finding was referred to the BSCC for follow-up.
- An allegation that a youth was held in an Intake Booking Area for 5 days without access to programming, education (post-secondary), positive interventions, or showers was substantiated. The finding was that the youth was held in isolation to coerce him into submitting to an x-ray body scan. The finding was referred to the BSCC for follow-up. The BSCC conducted a targeted inspection, provided technical assistance on room confinement, and confirmed that the agency had revised its policy and was in compliance with the room confinement regulations.
- An allegation that a youth was not informed of the outcome of an internal affairs investigation relating to excessive use of OC spray was substantiated. Ombuds staff recommended that youth be informed of the outcome of internal affairs investigations when the conduct primarily impacts them and recommended regular training to staff on the use of OC spray.
- An allegation that all of a youth's belongings, including family phone numbers and personal photographs, were lost when he returned from a hospitalization for an overdose was substantiated. The property was not located. Ombuds staff recommended that the agency develop protocols to track, store, and return youth property.
- An allegation that a youth's clothing item was missing after the youth was transferred from the juvenile hall to a commitment program was substantiated. The local probation Ombudsperson searched for and eventually located the clothing item which had been separated for donation.

## Sample of unsubstantiated complaints:

- An allegation that a parent was not being properly informed about their child's treatment and care while in the facility was unsubstantiated. Ombuds staff reviewed hundreds of pages of records and made a finding that the parent had been appropriately notified and kept apprised of their child's care.
- An allegation that a youth was provided insufficient dental care and was inappropriately housed in the facility was unsubstantiated. The issue was referred to the OYCR County Coordination Unit which worked with Ombuds staff to support the youth's community placement.
- An allegation that a youth was arbitrarily denied furloughs was unsubstantiated. Furloughs were being provided progressively consistent with the youth's safety and positive behavior achievements.
- An allegation that a youth was not permitted in-person visits with his children was unsubstantiated. The Department had attempted to facilitate visits including by outreach to the youth's extended family to support the visits, and had also provided virtual visits with the children.
- An allegation that a youth had not been provided court-ordered medication was unsubstantiated. There was no court order for medication in effect. Ombuds staff recommended that the youth undergo a new mental health assessment to determine if medications are needed.

## Sample of complaints with no findings:

- Ombuds staff received a complaint that a parent's visitation time had been reduced. The parent had previously had four in-person visits per week but was notified that one of those visits would be converted to a family therapy visit. Ombuds staff notified the Department which agreed to maintain the parent's four weekly visit and add family therapy as an additional visit. There was no finding in this matter because there was no rights violation or harmful practice at issue.

- Ombuds staff investigated an allegation that a youth was not receiving sufficient visits with his child or access to parenting classes. There was no finding in this matter because the Department was already training staff to provide parenting classes and was in the process of scheduling visits with the youth's child.
- A complaint alleging that a youth's mother was not able to participate in his family therapy due to her distance from the facility was closed with no findings due to an inability to engage with the youth who was no longer in the facility.
- A complaint alleging that a youth's fiancée was not permitted to visit him was closed with no findings. The Department was already working on updating its visitation policy which would address visitation for married or engaged youth.

## Sample of inconclusive complaints:

- An allegation that a representative of a community-based organization had revealed a youth's offense in a group setting was found to be inconclusive. The Department contested the facts of the allegation. Ombuds staff reviewed evidence including video, audio, and documents which did not corroborate whether the comments had been made and found that there was a factual dispute that could not be resolved. The Department affirmed that the organization was no longer providing services within the facility. Ombuds staff recommended that the Department continue to emphasize the requirement to maintain confidentiality of youth charges to all community partners.
- An allegation that a youth's pain was inadequately treated was found to be inconclusive due to a factual dispute that could not be resolved.

# Recommendations

The OYCR Ombudsperson is required to make recommendations to the Legislature for improving the youth and community restoration system. The following recommendations derive from an overarching analysis of the Division’s complaint investigations and site visits.

## Room confinement

The Board of State and Community Corrections should continue to support departments in understanding the very limited circumstances in which a youth can be locked in a room during daytime hours.

## Food

Food is an especially important part of the life of any adolescent or emerging adult. Some facilities have developed innovative approaches to enhancing youth’s experience of institutional food. For example, some facilities solicit youth input on preferred meals, offer a robust canteen program with youth input on popular items, offer on-demand healthy snacks, and/or allow families to bring food in on occasion.

## Visiting

Facilities should review visitation policies to ensure that youth, in particular youth with long-term stays, have meaningful engagement with family including siblings who are under 18 and supportive adults. Some facilities do not permit regular visitation by visitors under 21. Facilities should develop policies that preserve facility safety and security while also supporting engagement with family members of all ages. They should to the greatest extent possible consistent with operational needs and security considerations offer youth the ability to engage with families by telephone, virtual visitation, and in-person visitation.

## Pregnant youth

Facilities should have a plan for caring for pregnant youth, including but not limited to pre-and post-natal care, breast feeding and parenting education,

availability of breast pump and lactation plan, suitable clothing, mattress, and food. consistent with Cal. Code Regs, title 15 §§ 1417, 1461, 1480, and 1483.

## Mechanical restraints policies and procedures

Facilities should review their policy and procedures on use of mechanical restraints for transport to ensure that they comply with Welf. & Inst. Code § 210.6(a). That statute provides that mechanical restraints may be used on a youth detained in or committed to a local secure juvenile facility during transportation outside of the facility “only upon a determination made by the probation department, in consultation with the transporting agency, that the mechanical restraints are necessary” for one of two specified reasons:

1. to *prevent physical harm* to the juvenile or another person or
2. due to a *substantial risk of flight*.

The least restrictive restraint necessary shall be used “consistent with the legitimate security needs of *each juvenile*” (emphasis added) and once the department chooses to use mechanical restraints, other than handcuffs, the reasons must be documented. Some counties appear to justify the use of mechanical restraints based on the youth’s offense without a youth-specific determination. The fact that a youth is in custody for a serious or violent offense does not automatically mean they pose a current threat of physical harm to themselves or to another, or that they pose a substantial risk of flight. Agencies should ensure that their decision to use mechanical restraints is based on an individualized consideration of each youth and their recent behaviors to determine whether they are a risk to themselves or to another or a pose substantial flight risk.



## Voting rights

Elections Code § 2105.7 places an affirmative obligation on Probation Departments to identify youth in their facility who are eligible to vote; provide them a registration application; assist each eligible person to register unless they decline; and assist in returning any paper registration applications to the appropriate authorities. Some facilities are taking innovative steps such as bringing county elections officials into the facilities or transporting youth into the community to vote in person. Facilities should review their policies to ensure that they are complying with these affirmative obligations.

## Higher education

Facilities should review their policies to ensure compliance with Welf. & Inst. Code § 858(b)(2) which, among other things, requires probation departments to ensure that youth in their care with high school diplomas or the equivalent “have access to, and can choose to participate in, public postsecondary academic and career technical courses and programs . . .” This statute, which went into effect on January 1, 2020, and was amended in July 2023, supersedes Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15 § 1370(h), which requires probation departments only to, “whenever possible, collaborate with local post-secondary education providers to facility access to educational and vocational opportunities for youth . . .”). Facilities should also review their computer use policies

to ensure that youth are not being deprived of their right to higher education as part of a disciplinary response. If youth need computers for higher education, they should not be barred from computer access as a facility disciplinary measure.

## Youth councils and advisory boards

Youth in facilities with youth councils (or other types of advisory boards that incorporate youth voice) expressed positive experiences and empowerment in the opportunity to make their views known to facility leadership.

## Informing youth of internal affairs investigation outcomes

The Ombuds Division received at least two complaints from youth in different counties who had been interviewed by department Internal Affairs staff relating to an incident that directly impacted them, but they were not informed of the outcome of the Internal Affairs investigation. We recommend that Departments review their practices relating to notifying youth of the outcomes of Internal Affairs investigations and provide youth with as much information as possible consistent with law and collective bargaining agreements. This will provide the youth closure on difficult or serious incidents and demonstrates to youth how the system is holding itself accountable.

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# Looking Ahead

In 2025, the Ombuds Division is prioritizing the following areas and will report to the Legislature on all of these goals:

- **Decreasing complaint response times**
- **Increasing the percentage of complaints investigated**
- **Increasing our collaboration with OYCR technical assistance experts to assist in resolving complaints based on evidence and data**

# Appendix

## 2022-2023 Data Summary

The data collection process has developed significantly from 2022-2023 to 2024-2025, adjusting how data is collected on investigations. As such this data may appear different in the variables presented in the 2024 data reporting. Given this is first report to the Legislature, it is still included to ensure transparency of multi-year data.

### COMPLAINT CASES

	2022	2023
General	6	84
Youth	8	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>203</b>

### ORIGIN OF GENERAL AND YOUTH COMPLAINTS

	2022	2023
Help Line	8	87
In-Person	0	66
Email	3	31
Staff Cell	1	16
Mail	2	2
OYCR Referral	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>203</b>

### RELATIONSHIP TO YOUTH

	2022	2023
Other	8	87
Parent	0	66
Professional	3	31
Attorney	1	16
Self	2	2
Staff	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>203</b>

### RACE/ETHNICITY OF YOUTH

	2022	2023
Black	3	13
Hispanic	0	26
White	1	4
Indigenous	0	2
Multiracial	0	1
N/A, Unknown, & Blank	4	69
Iranian	0	2
Vietnamese	0	1
Afghan	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>119</b>

### SEX OF YOUTH

	2022	2023
Male	5	100
Female	1	9
N/A, Unknown, & Blank	1	10
Prefer not to say	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>119</b>

## GENDER IDENTITY OF YOUTH

	2022	2023
Man	4	56
Woman	0	7
Transgender Woman / Transgender Feminine	1	3
N/A, Unknown, & Blank	1	52
Prefer not to say	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>119</b>

## AGE OF YOUTH

	2022	2023
14	0	0
15	0	0
16	1	3
17	1	6
18	0	22
19	1	19
20	1	13
21	1	7
22	0	5
23	0	3
24	0	6
N/A, Unknown, & Blank	3	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>119</b>

## LENGTH OF COMPLAINTS

	2022	2023
0-60 days	2	47
61-120 days	4	41
121+ days	0	84
Blank	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>173</b>

## SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS

	2022	2023
Decline to investigate	11	14
Investigate	2	136
Refer to another agency	1	4
Provide information	0	3
Blank	0	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>181</b>



## COMPLAINT ISSUES 2022

Staffing	5
Conditions of Confinement	4
Communication Access	3
Programming	3
Retaliation	2
Discrimination	2
Education	2
Grievance Process & Responses	1
Mental Health	1
Physical Health Care	1
Health Care	1
Safety	1

## COMPLAINT ISSUES 2023

Conditions of Confinement	83
Staffing	65
Immediate Safety	52
Programming	44
Communication Access	34
Grievance Process & Responses	18
Physical Health Care	16
Mental Health Care	16
Education	14
Facility Conditions	10
N/A	12
Issues of Detention	7
Transfer and Criminal Court Filings	5
Retaliation	4
Physical Health Care	3
Discrimination	2
Education	2
Information Request	2
Youth did not complete the call	1
Training Request	1
Case plan	1
Visits with parents	1
Use of Force	1
Other	1
Court issues	1
Community Resources	1
Unprofessional Conduct	1
Publications Request	1
Visits with sibling	1
Retaliation	1
Transfer and Criminal Court Filings	1







Dear Ombudsperson:  
We ALL mess up  
But we ARE ALL  
Still Human, Never  
Perfect.



TO:  
The California Youth  
OMBUDSPERSON  
1215 O Street, MS-08,  
Sacramento, CA 95814



JAN 16 '24 PM 1:32

TO:  
The California Youth  
OMBUDSPERSON  
1215 O Street, MS-08,  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ombudsperson:  
13 JAN 2024  
I hope you  
could help  
~~our~~ US by  
coming  
frequently.  
Sincerely,





Office of Youth and  
Community Restoration

## Contact Us

**HELP LINE:**

1 (844) 402-1880

**EMAIL:**

[OYCRombuds@chhs.ca.gov](mailto:OYCRombuds@chhs.ca.gov)

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