

Washington State  
Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds

**2024 OFCO Annual Report-**  
**Presentation to the DCYF Oversight Board**  
Friday, January 17, 2025

Patrick Dowd, OFCO Director

# OFCO's Duties

Oversight of child welfare system.

- ▶ Respond to inquiries
- ▶ Investigate complaints
- ▶ Child Fatality & Near Fatality Reviews
- ▶ Identify systemic issues and make recommendations

*(RCW 43.06A)*

# OFCO 2024 Annual Report Presentation

Key Points and Systemic Issues:

Complaint Issues and Adverse Findings

Placement Exceptions

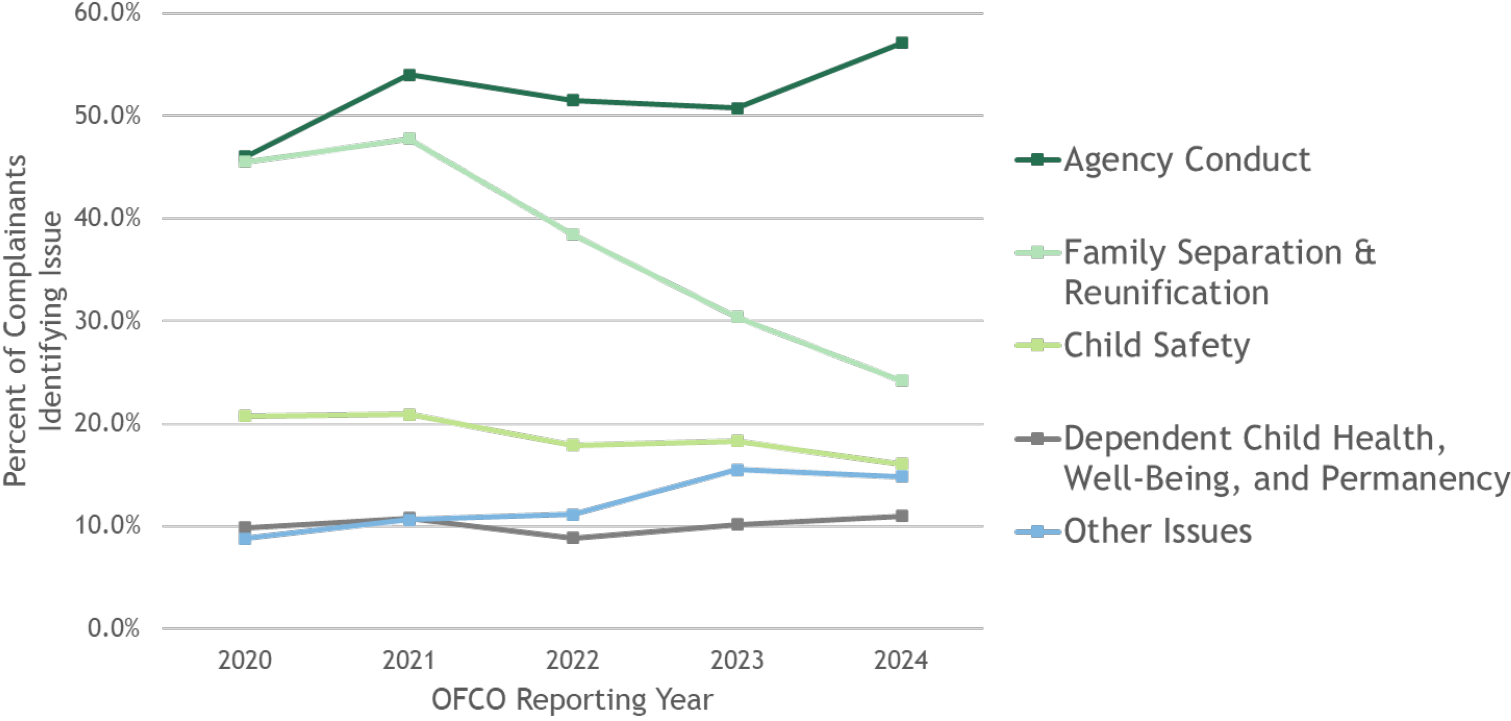
Juvenile Rehabilitation

Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities

# OFCO Complaint Issues

713 Complaints received in 2023-24

Figure 12: Categories of Issues Identified by Complainants



# OFCO Complaint Investigation Outcomes

No violation of law, policy or court order 65%

OFCO monitored complaint to ensure resolution 14%

OFCO intervened to ensure compliance with  
Law, Policy or Court Order 12%

Complaint resolved without OFCO action 6%

Complaint outside OFCO's jurisdiction 3%

# OFCO Complaint Investigations- Adverse Findings

OFCO made 39 Adverse Findings in 18 investigations

<i>Child Safety</i>	<i>14 findings</i>
<i>Parents' Rights</i>	<i>14 findings</i>
<i>Casework Practice</i>	<i>5 findings</i>
<i>Family Separation</i>	<i>3 findings</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>2 findings</i>
<i>Caregiver</i>	<i>1 findings</i>

# Systemic Issues- 57% Decrease in Placement Exceptions

Figure 1: Number of Placement Exceptions, 2015-2024



# Where did Placement Exceptions Occur?

<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Hotel	1,988	165
Night to Night Foster Care	790	246
DCYF Leased Facility	1,792	2,212
	<b>4,570</b>	<b>2,623</b>



# Placement Exceptions

- ▶ For 63% (136) of children experiencing a placement exception, DCYF identifies a suitable placement within 1-5 days.
- ▶ However, 16% (34) children spent 20 or more nights in placement exceptions. These children are generally older, 10- 17 years of age, and have complex needs.
  - ▶ These 34 children account for over 70% of all placement exceptions.

# Placement Exceptions

## Recommendations:

- ▶ Expand Emerging Adulthood Housing Program
- ▶ Expand Licensed Receiving Care Resources
- ▶ Prioritize Regions 4 and 6.

# Juvenile Rehabilitation Oversight

This past year, OFCO received several complaints regarding safety and welfare of youth in JR facilities.

- ▶ Overcrowding
- ▶ Unsanitary living conditions
- ▶ Physical Safety
- ▶ Substance Abuse
- ▶ Lack of programs

# Juvenile Rehabilitation

OFCO's statutory authority over JR is unclear.

Who investigates complaints about JR?

- ▶ DCYF Licensing Division investigates allegations of child abuse or neglect of incarcerated youth but JR facilities are not licensed.
- ▶ JR internal review procedures include:
  - ▶ Informal resolution between youth and JR staff
  - ▶ Written complaint process and JR facility response
  - ▶ Critical Incident Review Team- Reviews use of force and other critical incidents.

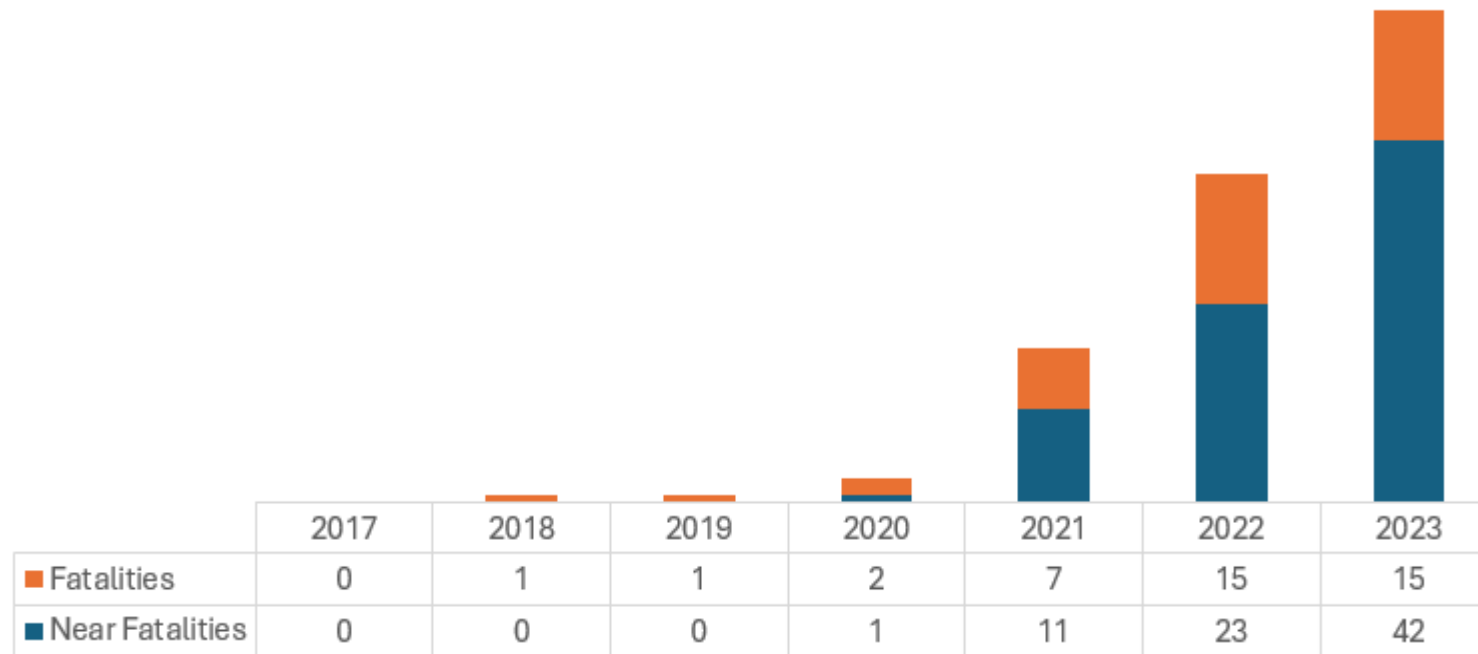
# Juvenile Rehabilitation Oversight

## Recommendations:

- ▶ Establish a Formal Hearing Process and a Uniform Grievance procedure within JR
- ▶ Modify RCW 43.06A clarifying OFCO's duties and responsibilities regarding youth and young adults in JR facilities.

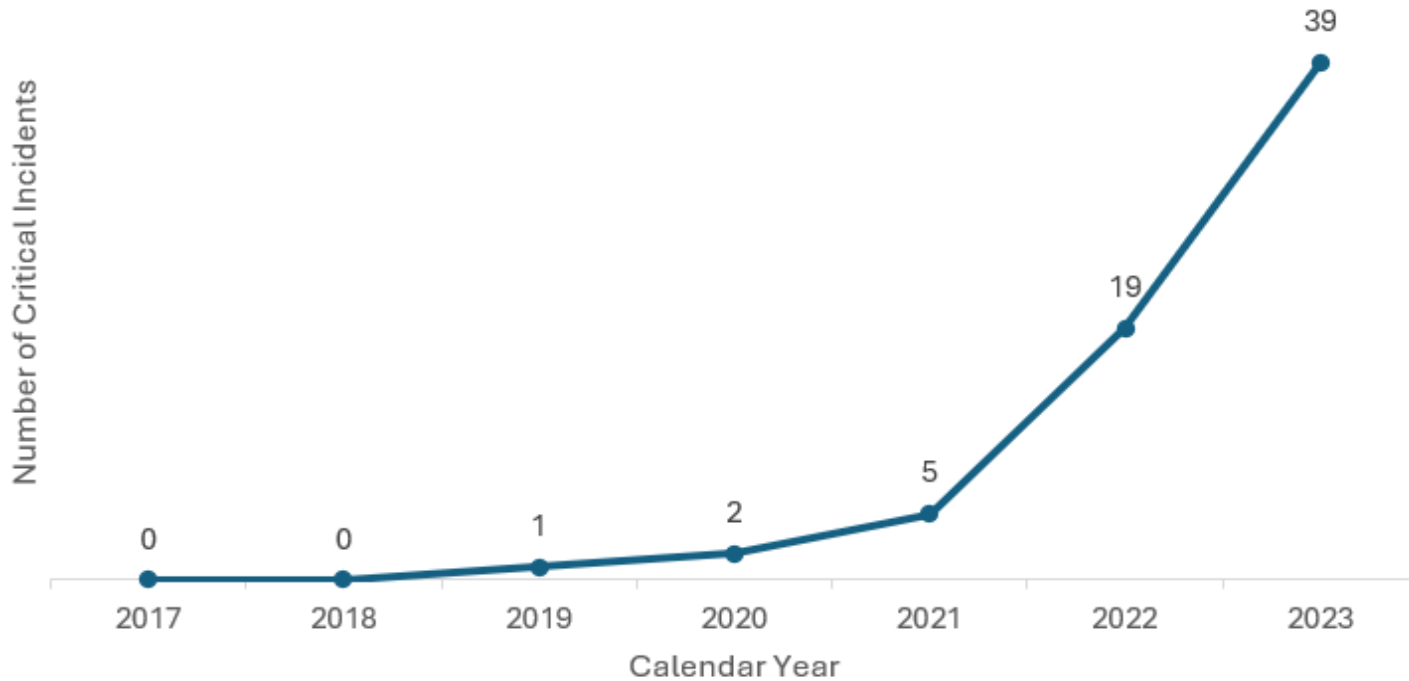
# Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities

Figure 16: Critical Incidents Involving Fentanyl All Children and Youth, 2017-2023



# Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities

Figure 17: Critical Incidents Involving Accidental Ingestion of Fentanyl by Children Ages 0-11, 2017-2023



# Questions and Answers



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