



Office of the Children's Ombudsman

Eric Reynolds, Director

Virginia Commission on Youth
August 18, 2026



Mission Statement (Va. Code 2.2-439)

The OCO was created:

- as a means of effecting changes in policy, procedure, and legislation;
- educating the public;
- investigating and reviewing actions of the Department, local departments, child-placing agencies, or child-caring institutions;
- and monitoring and ensuring compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies

pertaining to **child protective services** and the placement, supervision, and treatment of, and improvement of delivery of care to, children in **foster care** and **adoptive** homes.



Powers (§ 2.2-442)

The Children's Ombudsman has the authority to do all of the following with regard to children for whom a report of abuse or neglect was made, children receiving child-protective or foster care services, in foster care, or placed for adoption in an agency placement adoption:

1. Pursue all necessary action, including legal action, to protect the rights and welfare of such children.
2. Pursue legislative advocacy in the best interest of such children.
3. Review policies and procedures relating to any child-serving agency's involvement with such children and make recommendations for improvement.
4. Initiate investigations of the administrative acts of VDSS, LDSS, LCPA, or children's residential facilities on receipt of complaint or own initiative.



INVESTIGATE

- Whether administrative acts of VDSS, LDSS, LCPAs, children's residential facilities:
 - Were contrary to law, rule, or policy;
 - Imposed without an adequate statement of reason; or
 - Based on irrelevant, immaterial, or erroneous grounds
- Administrative Act "includes an action, omission, decision, recommendation, practice, or other procedure of the Department, a local department, or a child-placing agency with respect to a particular child related to adoption, foster care, or protective services."
- Child Fatalities due to abuse (prior or current involvement with CPS or foster care)





Complaint Processing

Intake

- Receipt of complaint (email, online form, phone)
- Complaints not involving CPS or Foster Care cases are referred to appropriate authorities, agencies, etc.
- CPS and Foster Care complaints advance to Preliminary Assessment stage

Preliminary Assessment

- Review complaint allegations and relevant case records
- Complainants with unsubstantiated allegations will receive information as to why the agency took the actions complained about
- Complaints with substantiated allegations or OCO-identified issues get assigned to an Investigations Analyst
 - May be resolved informally
 - May be advanced to a formal investigation



Investigation

Initiated when:

- Agency actions have affected or are affecting child safety and well-being
- Agency actions may have a detrimental impact on the case outcome
- Systemic practice issues are identified within an agency
- Systemic practice issues statewide

Investigative Tasks:

- Interviews with agency staff, collaterals
- Document review
- Law & policy research
- Collaboration with VDSS and Regional Offices
- Written Report of Findings and Recommendations



Authorities & Resources

Federal Laws & Regulations

- CAPTA
- Title IV-B Prevention
- Title IV-E Foster Care

State Laws

- Va. Code Title 16.1 (JDR Courts)
- Va. Code Title 63.2 (DSS)

State Regulations

- 22VAC40-705 (CPS)
- 22VAC40-201 (Permanency & Foster Care)

State DSS Policy Guidance

- VDSS Child and Family Services Manual



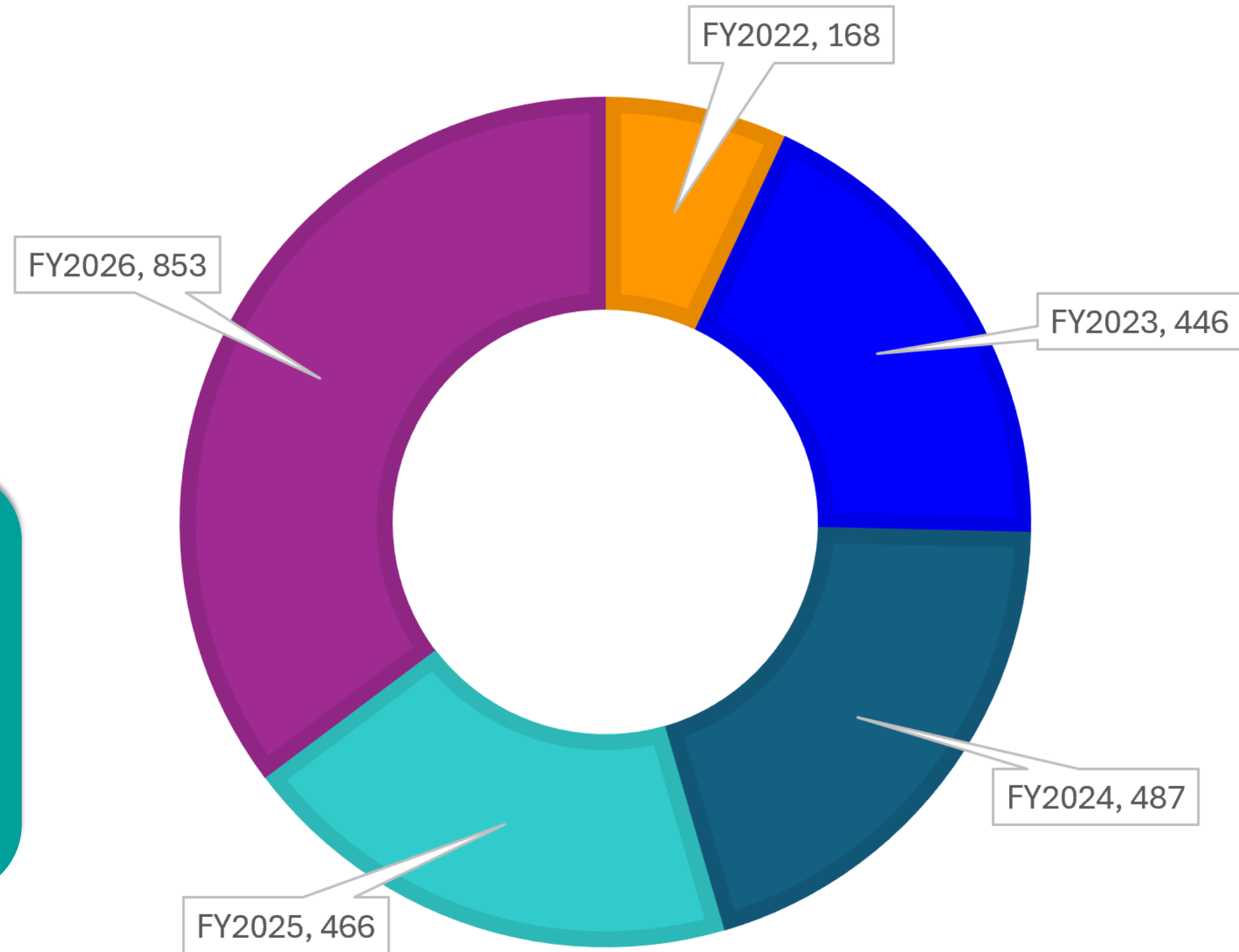
Fiscal Year 2026

853 Complaints Received

106 of 120 LDSS

21 Investigations

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY FISCAL YEAR



83% increase in
complaints
received from
FY 2025 to FY 2026

Complaint Source

Parents: 496

Relatives: 101

Foster parents: 42

Mandated reporters: 30

Children: 17

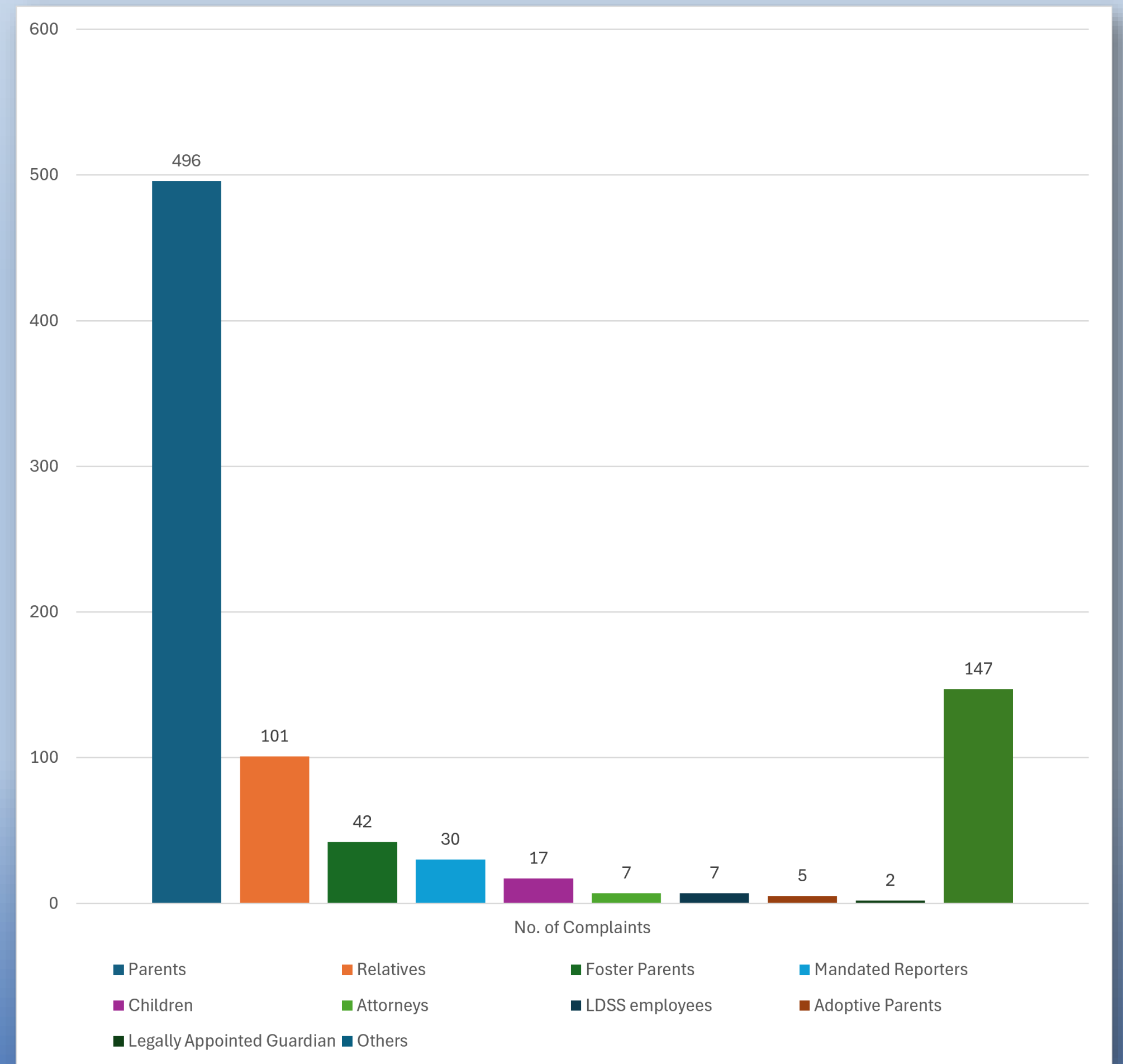
Attorneys: 7

LDSS employees: 7

Adoptive Parent: 5

Legally Appointed Guardian: 2

Others*: 147



*This includes anonymous complaints, and complaints from people who do not meet the statutory definition of a "complainant."

Office of the Children's Ombudsman

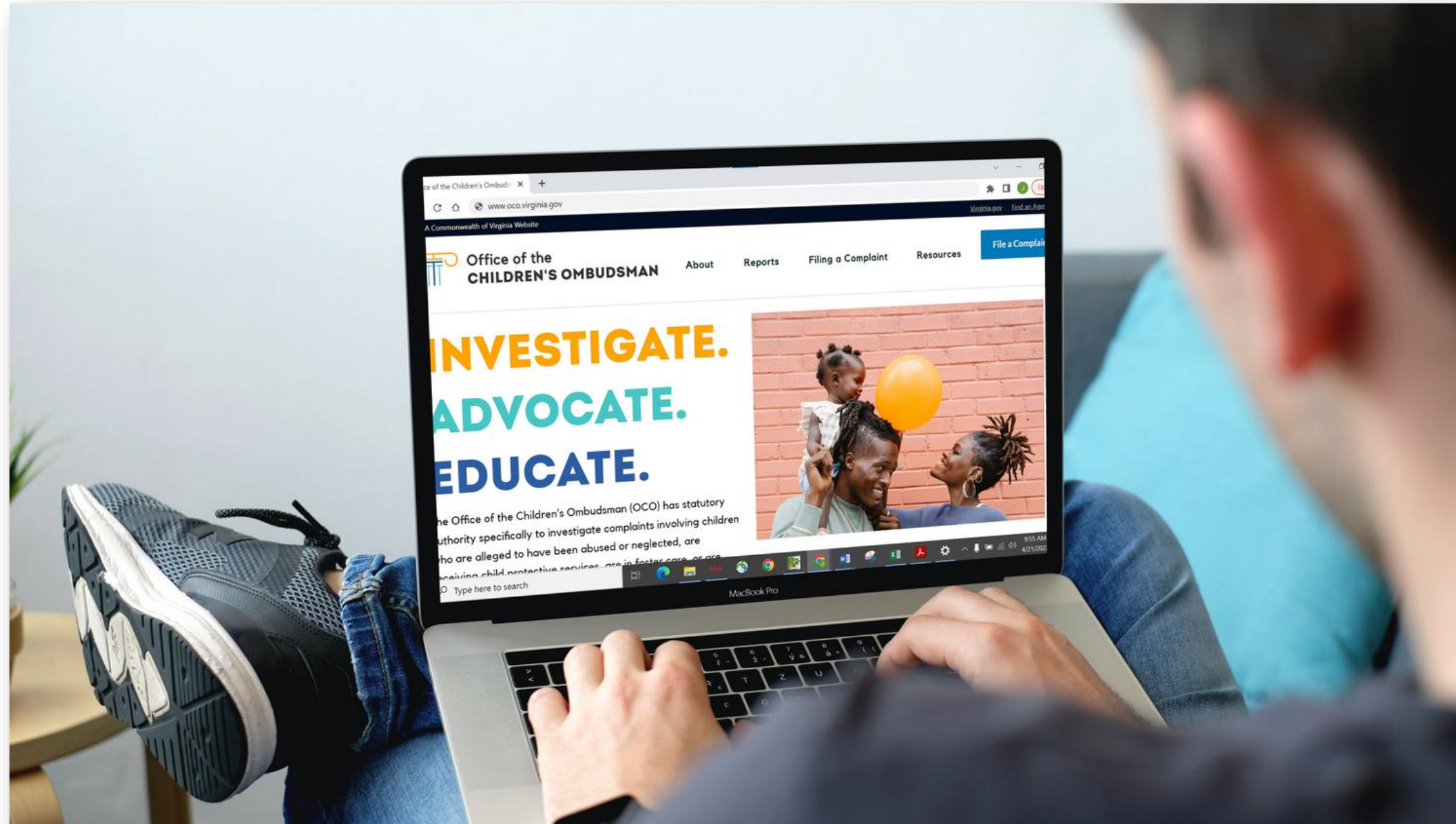


To file a complaint:

- complaints@oco.virginia.gov
- (804) 225-4801
- www.oco.virginia.gov/complaints



OFFICE of the CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN



www.oco.virginia.gov