



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Commission on Youth

Model Ombudsman Programs for Committed Juveniles

Matthew Nwaneri, Policy Analyst

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Impacts of Independent Correctional Ombudsman Programs

- **De-escalates conflict** and prevents unrest stemming from frustration.^[1]
- **Identifies system-wide issues** through established patterns in complaints.^[2]
- **Decreases workload** of correctional staff through outsourcing departmental complaint processes.^[3]

[1] Behan & Kirkham, 2016; [2] Hill, 2002; [3] Banwell-Moore & Tomczak, 2022

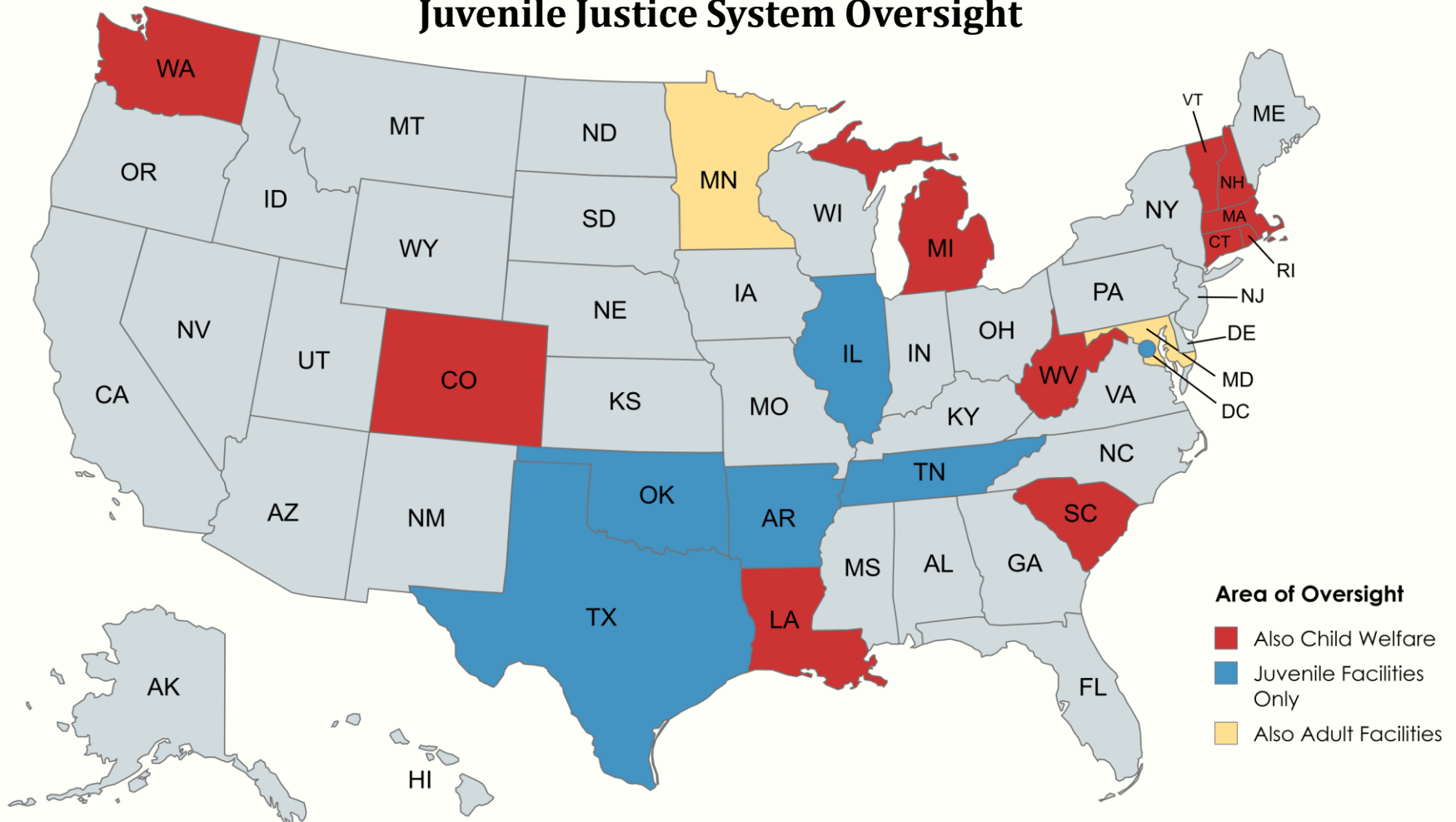


Ombudsman Offices with Juvenile Justice Oversight

- Eighteen states and the District of Columbia have an independent ombudsman office responsible for juvenile justice oversight.
 - Eleven of these offices are also responsible for child welfare system oversight .
 - Three states have previously expanded their children's ombudsman office to include juvenile justice.



Independent Ombudsman Offices with Juvenile Justice System Oversight





States that Recently Expanded the Powers & Duties of the Child Welfare System Ombudsman

2023

The West Virginia State Legislature expanded the scope of the Foster Care Ombudsman to include youth in juvenile justice facilities. ([*House Bill 3061*](#))

2024

The Michigan State Legislature added oversight of juvenile justice residential facilities to the powers and duties of the Office of Child Advocate. ([*Senate Bill 432*](#))

2025

The Washington State Legislature expanded the mandate of the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds to include juvenile rehabilitative facilities. ([*Senate Bill 5032*](#))



Important Considerations for Expansion

- Developing procedures for complaint intake
- Organizational restructuring
- Ensuring timely access to data
- Outreach to juvenile justice system stakeholders
- Building capacity for system-level reviews



Developing Procedures for Complaint Intake

- Ombudsman programs for juvenile justice may either:
 - operate an independent and parallel complaint system to the juvenile justice department
 - serve as the de facto external appeal for complaints to the juvenile justice department

Case Study: West Virginia Foster Care Ombudsman

Youth in custody can circumvent the departmental process to file complaints directly with the Ombudsman.

Case Study: Texas Office of the Independent Ombudsman

Youth in custody must complete the internal facility grievance process before filing a complaint with the Ombudsman.



Accessing Juvenile Justice System Data

- Ombudsman programs for juvenile justice may either:
 - develop data-sharing agreements with juvenile justice system stakeholders for streamlined requests
 - integrate data systems to have internal and secure access to juvenile justice system databases

Case Study: West Virginia Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO)

The FCO uses a templated form to submit data access requests that are quickly processed by the juvenile justice department.

Case Study: New Hampshire Office of the Child Advocate (OCA)

The OCA has direct access into internal databases for the juvenile justice system.



Organizational Restructuring

- Expanding ombudsman programs often add a juvenile justice division within the ombudsman office and staff that primarily handle juvenile justice system complaints.

Case Study: Washington Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO)

Following expansion of its powers and duties to include the juvenile justice system, the OFCO created a new division within the office to cover complaints from juvenile justice facilities. Two new staff members were hired for specialized juvenile justice roles.



Strengthening Communication with Juvenile Justice Stakeholders

- Expanding ombudsman programs should build relationships with juvenile justice system stakeholders and establish key points of contact within the department.

Case Study: Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate (OCA)

The OCA includes juvenile justice system stakeholders on the office's advisory council, which meets annually to discuss the findings from reports. A subcommittee within the council specifically focuses on juvenile justice.



Building Capacity for System-Level Reviews

- Expanding ombudsman programs tasked with system-level reviews will need to collect data on and remain informed on external factors impacting justice-involved youth. This could involve data integration and establishing an advisory board.

Case Study: Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate

In 2018, the Massachusetts legislature established the Juvenile Justice Policy and Advisory Board, which is chaired and staffed by the OCA. The Board collects cross-departmental data and analyzes intersections between juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health.



Questions/Comments?

Matthew Nwaneri, *Policy Analyst*
mnwaneri@vcoy.virginia.gov