



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-3873
PHONE: (213) 974-8301 FAX: (213) 626-5427

ARLENE BARRERA
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

OSCAR VALDEZ
CHIEF DEPUTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

ASSISTANT AUDITOR-CONTROLLERS:

PETER HUGHES
KAREN LOQUET
CONNIE YEE

October 5, 2020

TO: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn

FROM: Arlene Barrera 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPs SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2020**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Auditor-Controller's Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs¹ (Ombudsperson) Program activities for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2020.

Summary of Activities

The Ombudsperson conducted self-initiated **outreach visits to 86 youth** ranging in age from 13 to 19 years old. We visited 82 youth in-person and 4 via telephonic visits (televisits). Eighty-five (85) youth were from STRTPs, and one was from a group home (GH). In total, this comprised outreach to 41 STRTP and Group Home (GH) sites/homes operated by 18 contracted and non-contracted agencies, including:

- **37 sites/homes** operated by 16 STRTPs
- **4 sites/homes** operated by 2 GHs

¹ Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs. The Ombudsperson Program was formerly known as the Children's Group Home Ombudsman; the program name change is explained in the Background section on page 2.

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BE COUNTED ✓

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- We visited/televisited **11** of the 16 STRTP agencies in coordination with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman.
- Also, we conducted televisits with 7 STRTP agency administrators, representing 22 sites/homes.

The Ombudsperson received **107 requests for assistance** (requests) via the youth helpline (calls and e-mails), and during in-person outreach visits. No requests were received during televisits in this reporting period. Requests included general public inquiries on a variety of topics. Inquiries not within the subject matter jurisdiction or expertise of the Ombudsperson function were referred to an appropriate agency for response. We also received requests from foster youth outside the County, which we referred to other jurisdictions. We followed up on each youth request by telephone, including those originating outside the County, to ensure youth were connected with the appropriate entity to address their questions/concerns, and that they received the assistance they needed.

Background

In October 1998, the Board of Supervisors established the Office of the Children's Group Home Ombudsman at the recommendation of the Civil Grand Jury and Commission for Children and Families, to provide advocacy and a confidential, independent, and informal process to help youth under Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) oversight resolve issues while in GH placement. To ensure independence from DCFS as the placing agency the Ombudsperson, since its inception, resides in the Department of Auditor-Controller.

In January 2017, the State of California (State) implemented the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) to make changes to the State's child welfare system. Under CCR, GHs have been transitioning to STRTPs to meet higher standards of care in a short period of time. Accordingly, the County has worked with its contracted GHs to transition to STRTPs, with one remaining as a GH until December 31, 2020.

To align the Ombudsman with the STRTP model, in June 2020 the GH Ombudsman Program was renamed to the Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs to clearly identify the setting where target youth reside, as well as to incorporate gender neutrality. This name change does not impact the underlying program mission or function. All hard-copy informational material has been updated accordingly. The updated Ombudsperson webpage will roll out in the next reporting period.

Outreach Activities

A primary Ombudsperson responsibility is to meet with DCFS children in STRTPs/GHs, talk to them about their personal rights, and provide them the opportunity to share concerns or unmet needs. Visits are normally scheduled but may be unannounced. We prioritize and schedule visits based on concerns reported by youth through the helpline, and/or concerns raised by the Special Audit Committee, Commission for Children and Families, or other County child welfare partners. Our aim is to visit every agency once every six to nine months. We provide DCFS youth and staff with information about the Ombudsperson function. When youth voice a concern, we work with the appropriate individuals (e.g., agency staff, DCFS Children's Social Workers [CSW]) who may assist in developing solutions.

The Ombudsperson provides every County-contracted STRTP/GH agency with posters, and we ensure the posters are properly displayed in the homes when we conduct our visits. The posters include the Ombudsperson's toll-free helpline number and e-mail address.

We also visit DCFS youth placed in non-County contracted GHs. DCFS provides the Ombudsperson with the names of youth placed in these homes and they are also visited every six to nine months. DCFS relies on these GHs for hard-to-place youth who have special needs (e.g., a disability) or when other placement options have been exhausted. These GHs are approved as service providers by the Regional Centers, which are community-based, non-profit agencies that contract with the California Department of Developmental Services to provide or coordinate services and support for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The Safer at Home Orders issued by health authorities had a significant impact on the Ombudsperson's ability to visit and directly interact with youth. Prior to March 13, 2020, all outreach visits were in-person. However, to ensure youth continued to have access to the Ombudsperson and the benefit of our advocacy and assistance during the Safer at Home Order, we began conducting televisits with seven STRTP agency administrators to learn how they were shifting their programs and working with the youth in this unprecedented time. Areas of discussion included: COVID-19 safety measures, distance learning, enrichment activities, family connections, medical/therapy appointments, CSW/Probation Officer visits, and access to technology (e.g. cell phones, Internet, computers/laptops).

Televisits were also conducted with four youth from two of the agencies, and televisits are planned with youth from the other agencies in the next reporting period. Video televisits were explored but the portability of the phone provided more privacy and flexibility for the youth. In addition, when youth called the helpline to express a concern

and were willing to continue to engage in conversation, we conducted impromptu televisits and asked questions relating to the topic areas above.

Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson receives requests through a helpline, via e-mail, during in-person site visits, and televisits. Upon receiving a request, the Ombudsperson interviews the requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action.

The Ombudsperson categorizes requests based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller. The Ombudsperson's goal is to be accessible and to assist all callers and youth during outreach visits, and accordingly, presumes all requests to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

During the Safer at Home Order, the Ombudsperson extended the helpline hours to include weekends and longer hours, 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily. Due to the uncertainty of these unprecedented times, the Ombudsperson wanted to provide more accessibility to youth as some of their resources may not be available. Operating seven days a week aligned with the accessibility offered by the Office of the California Foster Care Ombudsperson (CFCO).

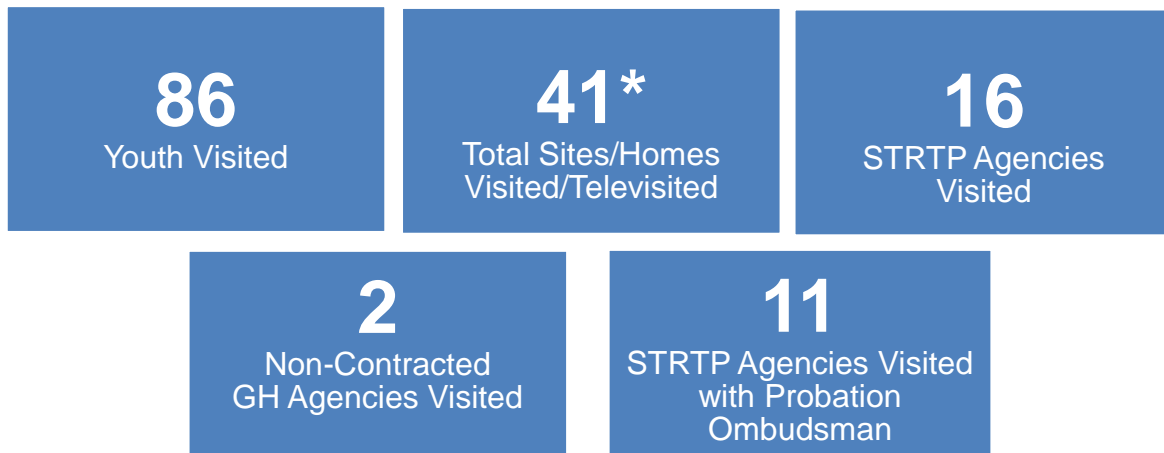
Resolution of Requests

To properly address and resolve requests within the purview of the Ombudsperson, we communicate with and make referrals to DCFS, including but not limited to, CSWs, Supervising CSWs (SCSW), Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD), Contracts Administration Division (CAD), Youth Development Services, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, we collaborate with Probation's Ombudsman and Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance (PPQA) Unit to resolve issues. Lastly, we contact non-County entities such as STRTP/GH staff and management, Community Care Licensing, the CFCO, and if needed, other counties, to ensure youth's concerns are addressed. Most importantly, we follow up with the youth once we have discussed their request with the appropriate parties. Time frames for follow-up varies as the requests may be part of a greater, more complex issue that is not within the Ombudsperson's purview.

Detailed Activities

Outreach

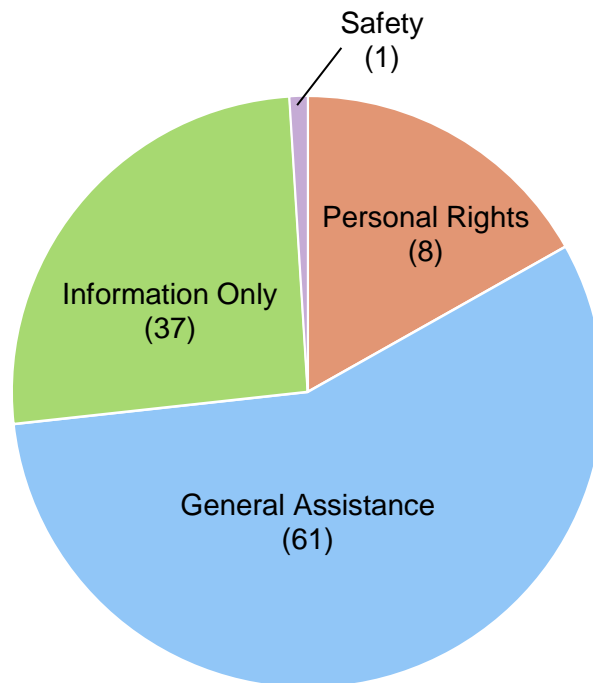
The following is a summary of outreach visits, both in-person and televisits, for this reporting period (detailed in Attachment I). It should be noted that the number of youths visited decreased by more than half from last reporting period due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a significant impact on our ability to conduct visits while appropriate communication methods were being worked out. In addition, we were cognizant of the STRTPs need for time to adjust and adapt to keeping the youth safe while following guidelines and protocols from the State and the County.



*Includes all physical sites/homes visited, announced and unannounced, even if youth were non-verbal or not available to meet, and televisits.

Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson received a total of **107 requests for assistance**, consisting of 89 calls, 5 direct requests during outreach visits, and 13 e-mails.



The following provides a summary of Requests for Assistance (detailed in Attachments II and III).

Safety

During this reporting period, we received one (approximately 1%) request that involved personal safety concerns.

- The first weekend in April, during our extended operating hours, we received a call from a youth who felt scared and unsafe because another youth in the STRTP was exposed to COVID-19. On that Saturday morning, the Ombudsperson was able to speak and consult with the CFCO, DCFS' CAD and OHCMD, and Probation's PPQA Director. Through on-going guidance and communication, the STRTP was already implementing measures to keep the youth safe. They hired a private nurse to monitor the exposed youth, transformed the staff office that included a restroom into a bedroom for the youth to quarantine, and provided personal protective equipment to all the residents and staff. The Ombudsperson followed up with the youth caller over

the next few days. Even though she still felt nervous, she stated the agency was doing everything necessary to keep everyone safe.

Personal Rights

There were 8 (7%) requests relating to Personal Rights which included: Health/Medical, Dental Care, Dietary Needs, and Allowance. For example:

- During the Safer at Home Order, a pregnant youth called saying staff would not take her to her ultrasound appointment. She also said she was waiting for her COVID-19 test results due to a recent exposure. The Ombudsperson followed up with the Program Director who stated that the doctor's office would not see her until her results came back negative. The Ombudsperson requested the Program Director directly reach out to the youth to help her better understand the situation and recommended requesting a televisit in the interim. The Ombudsperson followed up with the youth to ensure she understood the precautions and restrictions. She said she spoke with the Program Director and understood, but still did not want to wait the few days for her test results to come back before seeing a doctor. The agency took her to the emergency room as an alternative but was turned away because it was not an emergency. Fortunately, the youth's test results came back negative the next day and her appointment was rescheduled. During this time, the Ombudsperson ensured that youth who called understood the Safer at Home Order, and what precautions agencies were required to take for their health and safety due to the pandemic, even if they disagreed.

General Assistance

There were 61 (57%) requests for General Assistance which included: Issues with Policies/Rules, Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, Personal Care/Belongings, CSW Contact, Condition of Residence and Amenities, Placement Change Status, and Independent Living Transition. For example:

- During the Safer at Home Order, a pregnant youth called to report she was having issues with a staff member, and that being confined to the home due to the pandemic made her anxiety worse. She had already tried to resolve this issue through the agency's grievance process but was unsuccessful, so she called the Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson had multiple teleconferences with the Program Director, the youth's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), DCFS Expectant and Parenting Youth (EPY) Conference Facilitator, SCSW, the youth's Probation Officer, and the Probation Ombudsman. The agency was also conducting an internal review of the youth's concern. While the Agency determined the issue was ultimately a personality conflict and did not involve misconduct or fault by the involved staff, in consultation with the Ombudsperson, the youth's CASA and EPY Conference Facilitator, the

Program Director agreed it was best to move the staff out of the youth's pod until after she gave birth to alleviate any undue stress. Within a week, the youth had her baby and was placed with a foster family directly from the hospital.

Information Only

There were 37 (35%) requests involving individuals seeking information (26 requests pertaining to the Ombudsperson and 11 requests that were non-Ombudsperson related). In such cases, we documented the requests, provided an answer, or directed the requester to an appropriate party to address their inquiry.

Index of Attachments

- Attachment I:** Agencies Visited for Outreach
Attachment II: Requests for Assistance Received by Type
Attachment III: Requests for Assistance Received by Agency

Acknowledgment

We thank management and staff from the various STRTP and GH facilities we visited in-person and via televisits, the Probation Ombudsman, DCFS, and other Child Welfare partners for their cooperation and assistance in helping us address the needs of youth served by the Ombudsperson.

If you have any questions or need additional information please call me, or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Ombudsperson, at (213) 253-0117 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

AB:OV:PH:RGC:AMS:MD

Attachments

c: Fesia Davenport, Acting Chief Executive Officer
Bobby D. Cagle, Director, DCFS
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Ray Leyva, Interim Chief, Probation
Special Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Contract Administration Division, DCFS
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Probation Ombudsman
Countywide Communications

LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS
AGENCIES VISITED FOR OUTREACH
January 1 through June 30, 2020

| IN-PERSON Visits by Supervisorial District | | NC | JO | Sites Visited | |
|--|----------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1st District | | | | 8 | |
| Heritage | | | | •Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina | |
| Inclusion Specialized Programs | X | | | •Walnut | |
| Maryvale | | X | | •Rosemead | |
| San Gabriel Childen's Center | | X | | •Azusa (2) | |
| West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center | | X | | •Pomona | |
| 2nd District | | | | 4 | |
| Wayfinder Family Services | X ¹ | X | | •Los Angeles (4) | |
| 4th District | | | | 3 | |
| Heritage | | | | •Whittier | |
| Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc. | | | | •San Pedro •Torrance | |
| 5th District | | | | 12 | |
| Bourne, Inc. | | X | | •Altadena | |
| Fleming & Barnes dba Dimondale Adolescent Center | | X | | •Lancaster (4) | |
| Girls Republic | | X | | •Monrovia | |
| Haynes Family of Programs | | X | | •La Verne | |
| Heritage | | | | •La Verne | |
| Hillsides Home for Children | | | | •Pasadena | |
| McKinley Children's Center | | X | | •San Dimas | |
| Victor Treatment Centers | | | | •Pasadena •South Pasadena | |
| Out of County | | Location | NC | JO | 5 |
| Mary's Path | | Orange | | | •Santa Ana (2) |
| Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc. | | Orange | | | •Placentia (2) |
| West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center | | San Bernardino | | | •Chino |
| Subtotal | | | | 32 | |
| TELEVISITS by Supervisorial District | | JO | | Site Locations | |
| 1st District | | | | 5 | |
| Garces Residential Care | | | | •Claremont | |
| Heritage | | | | •Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina | |
| Maryvale | | X | | •Rosemead | |
| 2nd District | | | | 3 | |
| Fleming & Barnes Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care | | X | | •Carson •Gardena •Hawthorne | |
| 4th District | | | | 2 | |
| Heritage | | | | •Whittier | |
| Fleming & Barnes Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care | | X | | •Long Beach | |
| 5th District | | | | 12 | |
| Fleming & Barnes Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care | | X | | •Lancaster (4) | |
| Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services | | X | | •Altadena | |
| Heritage | | | | •La Verne | |
| Hillsides Home for Children | | | | •Pasadena | |
| Victor Treatment Centers | | | | •Pasadena (4) •South Pasadena | |
| Subtotal | | | | 22 | |
| TOTAL | | | | 54² | |

¹ Three (3) of the four (4) sites are non-County contracted Regional Center providers.

² Total sites/homes visited: 41 + 13 sites/homes duplicated through televisits = 54.

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY TYPE**

January 1 through June 30, 2020

| | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Safety | 1 |
| Personal Safety | 1 |
| 2. Personal Rights | 8 |
| Health/Medical, Dental Care | 4 |
| Dietary Needs | 3 |
| Allowance | 1 |
| 3. General Assistance | 61 |
| Issues with Policies/Rules | 19 |
| Residential Conflict(s) with Staff | 15 |
| Personal Care/Belongings | 9 |
| Children's Social Worker Contact | 5 |
| Condition of Residence and Amenities | 5 |
| Residential Conflict(s) with Peers | 5 |
| Independent Living Transition | 2 |
| Placement Change Status | 1 |
| 4. Total - All Types | 70 |
| 5. Information Only | 37 |
| Ombudsperson Related | 26 |
| Non-Ombudsperson Related | 11 |
| 6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson | 107 |

**Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.*

LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY AGENCY

January 1 through June 30, 2020

| Agency Name | Supervisory District(s) / Out of County | Total Number of Beds | Number of Sites | Number of Requests | Types of Requests* |
|--|---|---|-----------------|--------------------|--|
| Bourne, Inc. | 5th | 24 | 4 | 8 ¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules (3) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (3) •Personal Care/Belongings •Personal Safety |
| Crittenton Services for Children and Families | Orange County | 48 | 1 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health/Medical, Dental Care |
| Deliann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home | 2nd | 20 | 3 | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Care/Belongings (2) |
| Dream Home Care, Inc. | 2nd, 4th | 18 | 3 | 11 ² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules (4) •Dietary Needs (3) •Residential Conflict with Peers (2) •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Personal Care/Belongings |
| Five Acres | 5th | 76 | 2 | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Placement Change Status •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff |
| Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care | 2nd, 4th, 5th | 48 | 8 | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Issues with Policies/Rules •Independent Living Transition •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff |
| Fred Jefferson Memorial Home for Boys | 2nd | 12 | 2 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules |
| Haynes Family of Programs | 5th | 36 | 1 | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules (2) •Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff |
| Heritage | 1st, 4th, 5th | 30 | 5 | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2) |
| Mary's Path | Orange County | 18 | 2 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health/Medical, Dental Care |
| Maryvale | 1st | 42 | 1 | 10 ³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules (3) •Condition of Residence and Amenities (2) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (3) •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Personal Care/Belongings |
| Penny Lane Centers | 3rd, 5th | 48 | 8 | 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Children's Social Worker Contact (4) •Issues with Policies/Rules (2) |
| Project Six dba The Help Group | 3rd | 17 | 1 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers |
| Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc. | 4th, Orange County | 24 | 4 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Care/Belongings |
| St. Anne's Maternity Home | 1st | 32 (plus 18 beds for children under age 3) | 1 | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Care/Belongings (2) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2) |

| Agency Name | Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County | Total Number of Beds | Number of Sites | Number of Requests | Types of Requests* |
|--|---|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| Victor Treatment Centers | 5th | 33 | 5 | 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2) •Independent Living Transition •Issues with Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers |
| Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services | 2nd | 48 | 2 | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Children's Social Worker Contact •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Issues with Policies/Rules |
| West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center | San Bernardino County | 12 | 2 | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Condition of Residence and Amenities |
| Wayfinder Family Services | 2nd | 28 | 1 | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Allowance •Issues with Policies/Rules |
| Total | | | | 70 | ⁴ |

*Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.

¹ Five (5) requests were from one (1) youth

² Nine (9) requests were from two (2) youth

³ Five (5) requests were from two (2) youth

⁴ Does not include 37 Information Only Requests