



Office of the  
**CORRECTIONS OMBUDS**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

FISCAL YEAR 2023

November 1, 2023

TO: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor of the State of Washington  
Members of the Washington State Legislature  
Stakeholders of the Office of the Corrections Ombuds  
Cheryl Strange, Secretary of the Department of Corrections

We are pleased to submit the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report of the Office of the Corrections Ombuds, which provides an account of the agency's activities from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023.

During this reporting period, the Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) opened **3,657** cases representing complaints from, or about, **1,779** incarcerated individuals. We resolved **3,854** complaints. The most frequently received complaints concerned **healthcare, disciplinary cases, and DOC staff conduct.**

Bringing about positive change in Washington's corrections system is our collective responsibility. The OCO is committed to clearly and effectively communicating to the Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) problems that need to be fixed and asking for change and solutions. In return, we deliver objective, honest, transparent, and responsive communications and negotiations to positively impact the community we serve.

In May, I had the extreme honor to travel to Norway with correctional leaders from California, Oregon, and Washington, on a sponsored delegation of the University of California San Francisco's Amend project. Being able to see for myself the "Norway Model" and the positive ripple effects of using advanced decarcerating strategies and better systems of accountability, I brought home a deeper awareness of our responsibility to provide analysis of where Washington DOC is falling short of its goal to be a more humane corrections system. The OCO staff remains committed to supporting policy change aimed at achieving measurable improvements in public health and human rights in our state's corrections system.

It is an honor to serve as the Director of the OCO and work alongside courageous public employees who are bold and persistent problem solvers. We thank you for supporting the Office of the Corrections Ombuds and our work to increase positive outcomes for the community we serve. As always, we remain optimistic that this annual report and our work empowers and makes a difference.

Sincerely,



Caitlin T. Robertson, Ph.D.  
Director, Office of the Corrections Ombuds

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Core Duties	4
Budget and Expenditures	4
Top Ten Investigative Case Factors	5
Top Ten DOC Institutions of Incident Complaints	6
Washington Public Records Act	6
OCO Action	7
Assistance Provided – Case Investigations	7
Individual Concerns	7
Systemic Concerns	10
Confidential Hotline	11
Facility Visits	11
Publications	12
Monthly Outcome Reports: A Self-Advocacy Tool	12
Unresolved OCO Recommendations	14
Ongoing Concerns with the Residential Treatment Units	15
Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Work	17
Stakeholder Input	18
Looking to the Future	19
OCO’s Vision	20
OCO’s Mission	20
OCO’s Values	20
OCO Strategic Priorities for 2023-2026	20
Public Communications & Education	20
Comprehensive Investigations	20
Capacity Building	20

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## Executive Summary

In Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023), the Office of the Corrections Ombuds **opened 3,657 cases** representing complaints from, or about, **1,779 incarcerated individuals**. The office **resolved 3,854 complaints** during this time period.<sup>1</sup> The Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) received over 5,000 calls, or an average of **456 calls for assistance each month** through our hotline. The OCO is a small office, currently consisting of **13 dedicated public employees**.

Complaints related to **health care (medical, mental health, and dental) were the most frequently received type of concern** in FY 2023.

**Disciplinary cases and DOC staff conduct were the second and third most common types of complaint** received in FY 2023.

The OCO successfully **negotiated hundreds of positive outcomes** (provided assistance) during FY 2023, ranging from individual concerns to systems changes. During this same time period, the OCO released **12** monthly outcome reports, provided comments on **14** proposed DOC Policy updates, and published **5** public reports.

The OCO doubled the number of public meetings to **8** by holding a quarterly meeting inside of a prison facility and a secondary meeting in the community to allow external stakeholders to participate.

The OCO values continuous improvement and the trust of the people incarcerated in the Washington Department of Corrections facilities and all our stakeholders. Please reach out if we can be of assistance.

To submit an online complaint, click [HERE](#) or go to: <https://oco.wa.gov/submit-complaint>

To subscribe to our OCO notification listserv and news bulletins click [HERE](#) or go to: [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAGOV/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=WAGOV\\_158](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAGOV/subscriber/new?topic_id=WAGOV_158)

### Questions and/or comments about this report can be sent to:

Office of the Corrections Ombuds  
P.O. BOX 40009  
Olympia, Washington 98505  
[OCOCorrespondence@gov.wa.gov](mailto:OCOCorrespondence@gov.wa.gov)

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<sup>1</sup> Closed case figures include cases that were closed as duplicates as well as those reopened for quality assurance purposes and closed at the conclusion of that review.

## Core Duties

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds is an independent and impartial public office within the Governor's Office. The Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) serves the state of Washington by helping to resolve issues involving people incarcerated in the Department of Corrections facilities. Through our casework and published reports, we work to promote a positive change in corrections.

The following duties and responsibilities of the Ombuds are set forth in state law<sup>2</sup>:

- Maintain a statewide toll-free confidential hotline.
- Provide information and technical assistance to incarcerated individuals and stakeholders.
- Receive, investigate, and resolve complaints.
- Monitor and provide system oversight related to the health, safety, welfare, and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.
- Monitor and provide legislative and policy developments affecting correctional facilities.
- Submit an annual report by November 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.
- Submit an annual report to the legislature on the status of the implementation of unexpected fatality review recommendations.

## Budget and Expenditures

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds Fiscal Year 2023 budget and expenditures:

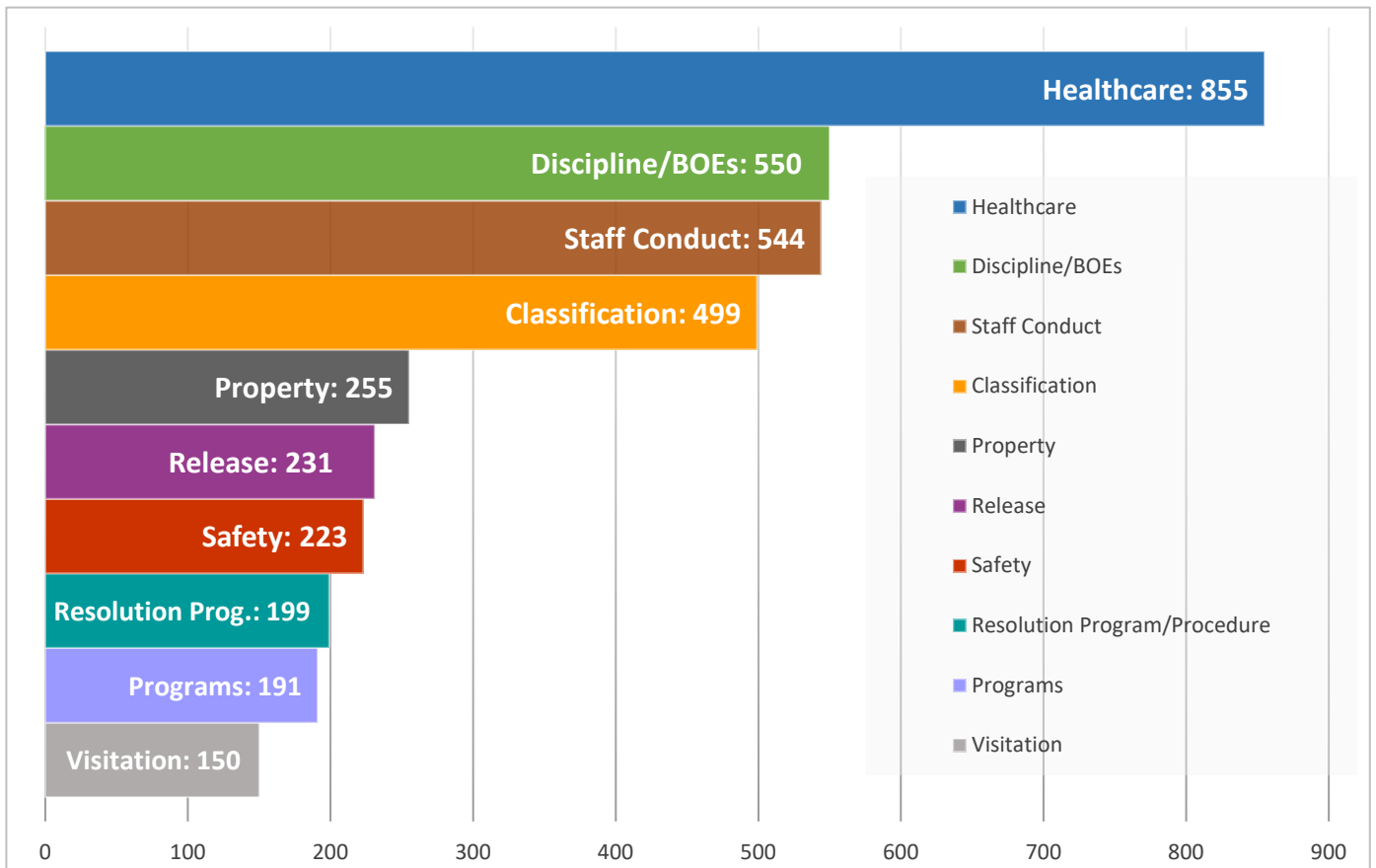
Category	Allotment	Expenditure
<b>ESSB 5119: Individuals in Custody - FY23</b>	<b>118,000</b>	72,338
<b>001-General Fund: Salaries and Expenses - FY23</b>	<b>1,437,390</b>	
A/ Employee Salaries and Wages		835,956
B/ Employee Benefits		330,216
C/ Professional Service Contracts		23,185
E/ Goods and Services		249,621
G/ Travel		24,521
J/ Capital Outlays		53
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,555,390</b>	<b>\$1,535,890</b>

<sup>2</sup>RCW 43.06C and RCW 72.09.770

## Top Ten Investigative Case Factors

The top ten most frequently reported topics of investigative cases in FY 2023 were:

1. Healthcare
2. Discipline/Behavior Observation Entries
3. Supervision/Staff Conduct
4. Classification
5. Property
6. Release
7. Safety
8. Resolution Program/Procedure
9. Programs
10. Visitation

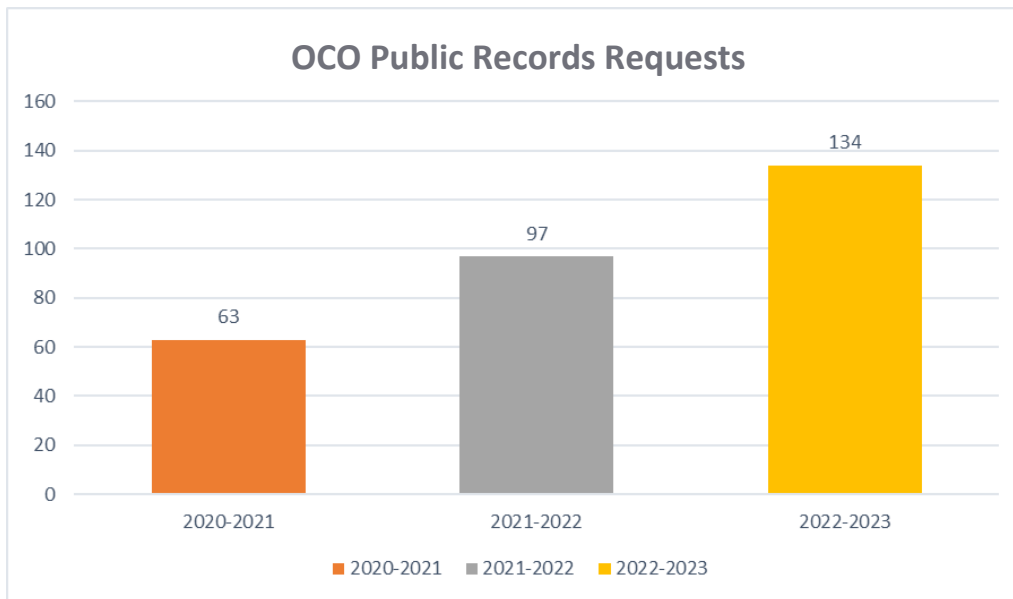


## Top Ten DOC Institutions of Incident Complaints

The OCO received the most complaints from the following ten DOC Institutions in FY 2023:

DOC Institution of Incident	Cases Opened	Cases Closed <sup>3</sup>
Monroe Correctional Complex	661	634
Washington State Penitentiary	579	620
Stafford Creek Corrections Center	544	594
Airway Heights Corrections Center	496	556
Washington Corrections Center	392	384
Coyote Ridge Corrections Center	367	403
Washington Corrections Center for Women	231	243
Clallam Bay Corrections Center	106	111
Cedar Creek Corrections Center	59	64
Larch Corrections Center	36	41

## Washington Public Records Act



Since its inception, the number and complexity of public disclosure requests received by the OCO has grown tremendously; in fact, between 2020-2023 we have witnessed an **increase of 100+%**. In response to this surge, during FY2023 the OCO expanded our public records team and dedicated

<sup>3</sup> The closed case figures in this table include: 1) cases opened in the prior fiscal year; 2) cases that were closed as duplicates; and 3) cases that were reopened for review and then closed again.

resources to strengthening our internal processes related to records production and records management.

Additionally, in FY2023 we invested in a robust records request management system to ensure that we could continue to properly track and provide timely services to requestors. As of February 2023, requestors now have access to the OCO’s public records portal 24 hours a day and can communicate with the OCO public records team using their GovQA account.

The OCO continues to work to inform the public of the agency’s confidentiality rules and obligations, codified in [RCW 43.06C.040](#) and [43.06C.060](#), as well as [Chapters 138-10](#) and [138-12](#) WAC.

## OCO Action

### Assistance Provided – Case Investigations

The following are examples of investigative cases in which the OCO staff provided assistance or information to incarcerated individuals in prisons throughout the state of Washington.

#### Individual Concerns

##### Access to Health Care

- Patient reported pain and delayed access care; patient was later diagnosed with cancer.
- The OCO alerted facility and headquarters health services leadership; provided updates and self-advocacy information to patient; monitored and confirmed cancer testing, treatment, and follow-ups; and requested an appointment with a re-entry nurse to discuss access planning upon release.

##### Termination from CI Job

- Incarcerated individual reported termination from Correctional Industries (CI) employment for not having or pursuing a GED. However, GED classes for people requiring English as a Second Language (ESL) were not offered at AHCC at the time.
- The OCO identified AHCC lacked a facilitator for GED classes for ESL learners, communicated the concern to facility staff, CI staff and education staff, and recommended that the individual be allowed to work in CI without pursuing their GED until a facilitator is hired. DOC agreed to reinstate the individual’s CI employment.

##### Safety Concerns

- External person reported to the OCO that their loved one had concerns for his safety if his scheduled transfer was to take place.
- The OCO identified the individual was currently housed in a safe harbor facility, communicated the concern to DOC classification at headquarters, and asked for a full review of safety concerns and for the transfer to be halted pending the review.

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The DOC agreed to cancel the transfer and allow the individual to stay at the safe harbor facility.

#### **Improper Behavior Observation Entry**

- An incarcerated individual reported receiving a negative Behavior Observation Entry (BOE) for asking for the OCO phone number.
- The OCO reviewed the negative BOE and verified the concern, communicated the concern to the Associate Superintendent, and recommended the negative BOE be removed immediately. DOC agreed and removed the BOE.

#### **Mailroom Delay**

- An incarcerated individual reported that letters sent to him in a language other than English sat in the mailroom for several months awaiting translation for review by mailroom staff despite DOC policy stating mail requiring translation will be issued to the individual within five business days.
- The OCO spoke to DOC leadership and requested the issue be addressed to ensure the individual received the mail as soon as possible. DOC agreed to issue the individual their mail and re-train the mailroom staff of the proper protocol for handling mail in another language.

#### **Loss of Dental Partial**

- An incarcerated individual reported their dental partial (denture) was not returned to them after placement in segregation. The individual reported staff packed his items and did not include the denture partial.
- OCO staff made immediate outreach to the facility to intervene prior to the partial being lost or thrown out. DOC was able to provide the partial denture directly to the individual.

#### **Access to Gender-Affirming Care**

- A transgender patient reported requesting access to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) at multiple facilities for several years but not receiving it.
- The OCO alerted facility and headquarters health services staff and found the Care Review Committee (CRC) denial did not specify which criteria the patient did not initially meet or what actions were needed to meet the criteria. The patient was then assessed and approved for and began HRT treatment.

#### **Failure to Update Custody Facility Plan Impacting Release Date**

- An incarcerated individual reported DOC had not updated their Custody Facility Plan (CFP) for more than two years, preventing him from having a good conduct time (GCT) restoration plan finalized.

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- The OCO substantiated that his CFP had not been updated for more than two years and requested DOC finalize the plan. DOC agreed to update the plan. The OCO confirmed DOC restored the individual’s GCT and nearly three years were taken off the individual’s release date.

### **Inaccessible Housing**

- An incarcerated individual reported they were moved to a cell that was not compatible with their mobility needs.
- The OCO verified the move and requested DOC move them to a more appropriate cell. DOC agreed to immediately move the person and documented the person’s ongoing accessibility needs in the individual’s central file to prevent this from reoccurring in the future.

### **Lack of Mental Health Assessment**

- An external person reported their loved one had developmental and mental health concerns that DOC had not reviewed and were worried for their loved one’s safety.
- The OCO contacted mental health and requested a mental health assessment and a housing review. DOC agreed to the assessment, assigned a mental health provider, and moved the individual to a different housing unit.



Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants.

- Justice Louise Brandeis (1914)

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## **Systemic Concerns**

**Mail:** The OCO convened a Mail Workgroup inviting internal and external stakeholders, including DOC staff responsible for the oversight of the mail program, to negotiate updates to the mail policies and practices. As a result of the Workgroup, over 20 negotiated outcomes were established including DOC agreement to review security standards for outgoing and incoming mail, revision to policies and practices, the removal of mail in a foreign language as a rejection reason for digital messages, creation of a DOC workgroup to review the definition of sexually explicit materials as well as provide updates to policy.

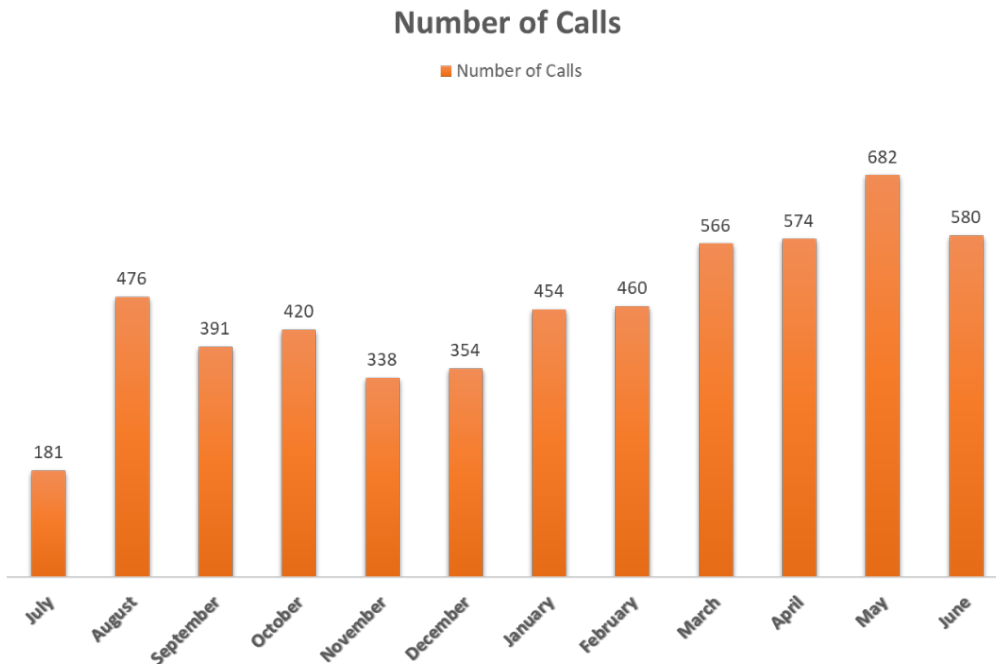
**COVID-19 Deaths:** The OCO reviewed the COVID-19 related deaths of 20 people under DOC care and made several recommendations to DOC including the continued utilization of a patient-centered care model that focuses on whole-person care, quarterly connections with local community hospitals by DOC medical providers, the establishment of an end-of-life decision support system, the development of hospice and palliative care models, and removal of barriers to alternative housing placements. DOC agreed with the report in substance and intent.

**Unfair Disciplinary Actions:** The OCO received multiple concerns from incarcerated individuals at Stafford Creek alleging unfair treatment and retaliation in the veteran's pod which indicated the nine out of twelve Black men in the veteran's pod received infractions. The OCO communicated directly with facility leadership about the matter which resulted in DOC opening an audit of the veteran's pod infractions. Ultimately, the facility dismissed 56 infractions that impacted 13 individuals as a result of substantiating the infraction concerns.

**Withheld Payments for DNR Fire Crew:** The OCO received several complaints about withheld gratuity payments being terminated from the Department of Natural Resources Fire Crew. The OCO investigated this concern and identified inconsistencies in withheld payments and requested DOC amend the interagency agreement language to support paying workers for completed hours worked. While not funded to incur these costs, the Airway Heights Superintendent agreed to pay five AHCC fire crew workers out of the facility's budget and the DOC leadership agreed to pay three Larch Corrections workers out of the department's budget. DOC and DNR then worked to finalize a new interagency agreement to ensure gratuities are not withheld again.

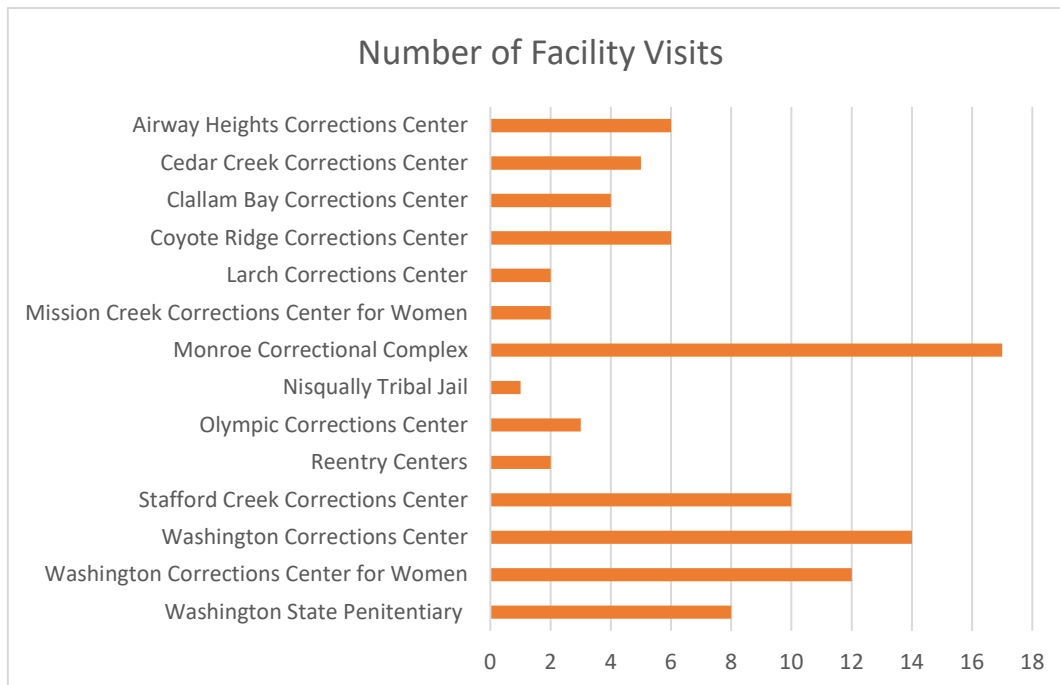
### Confidential Hotline

In Fiscal Year 2023, the OCO answered **5,476** total hotline calls with an average of **456** calls per month.



### Facility Visits

In Fiscal Year 2023, the OCO staff completed **93 facility visits**. This means that on average, OCO conducted in-person visits to incarcerated people and facility staff nearly twice per week.



## Publications

The OCO continues to improve our investigation process with the goal of increasing positive outcomes for the incarcerated people we serve. During the fiscal year 2023 reporting period, the OCO issued the following publications<sup>4</sup>:

- Person-Centered Prevention and Management of Infectious Diseases Recommendations
- Two Special Reports:
  - 56 Dismissed Infractions Impacting 13 People - Stafford Creek Corrections Center
  - Earned Gratuity (Wages) Withheld After Termination - DNR/DOC Fire Crew
- Two Negotiated Outcome Reports:
  - Retaliation
  - Mail
- 12 Monthly Outcome Reports
- Policy Comments for revisions to the following policies:
  - DOC Policy 380.540 Vehicle Use in Partial Confinement
  - DOC Policy 420.310 Searches of Incarcerated Individuals
  - DOC Policy 440.000 Personal Property in Prisons
  - DOC Policy 440.020 Transport of Property
  - DOC Policy 450.100 Mail for Individuals in Prison
  - DOC Policy 460.000 Disciplinary Process for Prisons
  - DOC Policy 490.700 Transgender, Intersex, and/or Non-Binary Housing and Supervision
  - DOC Policy 500.000 Education and Vocational Programs in Prisons
  - DOC Policy 540.105 Recreation Programs in Prison
  - DOC Policy 590.100 Extending Family Visiting
  - DOC Policy 600.000 Health Services Management
  - DOC Policy 610.650 Outpatient Services
  - DOC Policy 620.020 Patient-Paid Healthcare
  - DOC Policy 700.000 Work Programs in Prisons

### Monthly Outcome Reports: A Self-Advocacy Tool

The OCO investigates complaints regarding any actions or inactions of the DOC that adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of incarcerated individuals. RCW 43.06C.040. RCW 43.06C.040(2)(k) directs the ombuds to render a public decision on the merits of each complaint at the conclusion of an investigation. All cases opened by the OCO are considered investigations for the purposes of the statute. As of March 15, 2022, the OCO opens a case for every complaint received by this office. We publish Monthly Outcomes Reports<sup>5</sup> every month with all public decisions of the cases closed in that month. Additionally, we worked with the DOC to make sure that all our reports are

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<sup>4</sup> All publications are available at the OCO website [HERE](#) and at: <https://oco.wa.gov/reports-publications>

<sup>5</sup> All Monthly Outcomes Reports (MORs) are available on the OCO website [HERE](#) and at: <https://oco.wa.gov/reports-publications/reports/monthly-outcome-reports>

immediately available on the Securus tablets in the FYI application, and in all DOC-operated law libraries.

Based on feedback we received from incarcerated individuals, we updated our case closure reasons to better show data that reflects the outcomes reached and to provide greater transparency into the work of the office. The updated case closure reasons are as follows:

<b>Case Closure Reason</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Unexpected Fatality Review	The incarcerated person died unexpectedly, and the death was reviewed by the unexpected fatality review team, as required by RCW 72.09.770.
Assistance Provided	The OCO achieved full or partial resolution of the person’s complaint.
Information Provided	The OCO provided self-advocacy information.
DOC Resolved	DOC staff resolved the concern prior to OCO action.
Insufficient Evidence to Substantiate	Insufficient evidence existed to substantiate the concern.
No Violation of Policy	The OCO determined that DOC policy was not violated.
Substantiated	The OCO verified the concern but was unable to achieve a resolution to the concern.
Administrative Remedies Not Pursued	The incarcerated person did not yet pursue internal resolution per RCW 43.06C.040(2)(b).
Declined	The OCO declined to investigate the complaint per WAC 138-10-040(3).
Lacked Jurisdiction	The complaint did not meet OCO’s jurisdictional requirements (typically when complaint is not about an incarcerated person or not about a DOC action).
Person Declined OCO Involvement	The person did not want the OCO to pursue the concern or the OCO received no response to requests for more information.
Person Left DOC Custody	The incarcerated person left DOC custody prior to OCO action.

## Unresolved OCO Recommendations

The following are key recommendations made by the OCO that remain outstanding as of October 2023:

OCO Recommendations to the DOC	Issued	Status
DOC should ensure that an individual's <b>mental health status is considered throughout the disciplinary process.</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Unresolved</b>
DOC should <b>reduce the frequency of placement and length of stay in any segregated housing</b> for individuals with serious mental health conditions.	<b>2021</b>	<b>Unresolved</b>
DOC should explore best practices for <b>successfully housing and treating individuals with behavioral challenges.</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Unresolved</b>
DOC should <b>equip DOC correctional officers and other staff with knowledge and skills</b> needed to support individuals with mental health conditions.	<b>2021</b>	<b>Unresolved</b>
DOC staff should <b>train all custody staff on using de-escalation tactics</b> instead of force.	<b>2021 &amp; 2023</b>	<b>Unresolved &amp; Re-issued</b>
DOC should <b>develop a comprehensive RTU [Residential Treatment Unit] policy</b> that addresses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) objective criteria for admission;</li> <li>b) modified disciplinary system;</li> <li>c) modified classification system;</li> <li>d) pathway out of RTU, including objective criteria for discharge;</li> <li>e) mandatory specialized mental health training for RTU custody staff;</li> <li>f) programming availability in RTU (to include programming support).</li> </ul>	<b>2021 &amp; 2023</b>	<b>Unresolved &amp; Re-issued</b>
DOC should <b>develop a comprehensive IBMP [Individual Behavior Management Plan] policy</b> which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) objective criteria for who should or must have an IBMP;</li> <li>b) guidelines for incentives that may be used;</li> <li>c) guidelines for safety responses that may be used, including whether/when use of restraints may be part of an IBMP;</li> <li>d) mandatory training for all mental health providers that addresses how to write an IBMP;</li> <li>e) mandatory training for any DOC custody staff who routinely work with individuals who have IBMPs; and</li> <li>f) routine audits of IBMPs by qualified headquarters staff.</li> </ul>	<b>2021 &amp; 2023</b>	<b>Unresolved &amp; Re-issued</b>

<p>DOC should <b>improve suicide prevention practices</b>. The OCO is aware that the DOC received one assessment (2015) and one reassessment (2023) from Lindsay Hayes, a nationally recognized expert in the field of suicide prevention within jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities.</p> <p>The DOC should <b>publicly share its corrective action plan for each category of Mr. Hayes’ recommendations</b>.</p>	<p><b>2023</b></p>	<p><b>Unresolved</b></p>
<p>DOC should <b>rename the Special Offender Unit (SOU)</b>. The OCO encourages the DOC to remove the terminology “Special Offender Unit” and rename the unit to better align with its role as a mental health residential treatment unit.</p>	<p><b>2023</b></p>	<p><b>Unresolved</b></p>

**Ongoing Concerns with the Residential Treatment Units**

On March 13, 2023, the OCO received information, including the photographs below, from an anonymous complainant regarding the physical conditions of cells and allegations of mistreatment of two patients housed in the Residential Treatment Unit (RTU) at Monroe Correctional Complex, referred to as the “Special Offender Unit” (SOU). The photos depicted hazardous living conditions in two different cells and suggested a failure of custody, healthcare, and physical plant coordination and leadership. After reviewing the information, the OCO initiated an investigation into the conditions of confinement and medical treatment of two patients in the Residential Treatment Unit at Monroe.



An SOU cell at MCC

On March 14, 2023, the OCO made an unannounced visit to MCC-SOU to ascertain the current conditions of these cells and speak with the two patients. While touring the living units, the OCO observed multiple unoccupied RTU cells in various stages of repair. The OCO discussed concerns with facility staff, who provided information about the steps taken to protect against a similar situation occurring again.

On March 15, 2023, the OCO urged the DOC to investigate the system failures that had allowed conditions in these RTU cells to deteriorate so significantly. The DOC agreed to initiate an internal



systemic review. On June 6, 2023, the OCO received a copy of the Secretary Special Inquiry Review of the MCC-SOU.

On June 20, 2023, the OCO communicated recommendations to the DOC related to strengthening and enriching mental health care access and services throughout the DOC’s Residential Treatment Units. Some of these recommendations had been originally issued by the OCO in 2021 but remained



unresolved (see table above) and were therefore re-issued.

On June 30, 2023, the DOC posted on its website a news spotlight including a “before” photo of a cell in MCC-SOU and an “after” photo of a different MCC-SOU cell. The news spotlight, “Humanity in Corrections – Treating Complex Mental Health Disorders in Prisons”<sup>6</sup>, included a link to a portion of a Secretary Special Inquiry Review which stated that the Secretary had launched the review to determine what improvements could be made to support individuals in the SOU.

While work continues to improve the RTUs statewide, many of the OCO’s recommendations remain unresolved. We are publishing these recommendations and related photos here in our annual report to ensure that Washington state policymakers are aware of this history and these incidents.

Simultaneous to this investigation and review, there was an alarming increase in deaths by suicide in the Department of Corrections’ Residential Treatment Units. Deaths by suicide occurred:

- February 20, 2023, in the Close Observation Area located in the MCC-SOU<sup>7</sup>
- May 17, 2023, in the RTU at the Monroe Correctional Complex<sup>8</sup>
- June 11, 2023, in the RTU at the Washington State Penitentiary<sup>9</sup>
- June 12, 2023, in the RTU at the Washington State Penitentiary<sup>10</sup> and
- June 16, 2023, in the RTU at the Washington State Penitentiary<sup>11</sup>.

All five suicides were independently investigated by the Department through its Critical Incident Review (CIR) process, and the deaths underwent an unexpected fatality review (UFR) by representatives of the Department of Health, the Health Care Authority, the Office of the Corrections Ombuds, and the Department of Corrections.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/2023/spotlight/treating-mental-health-disorders.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [UFR-23-004](#)

<sup>8</sup> [UFR-23-005](#)

<sup>9</sup> [UFR-23-007](#)

<sup>10</sup> [UFR-23-008](#)

<sup>11</sup> [UFR-23-009](#)

OCO staff continue to diligently monitor conditions in the Residential Treatment Units statewide. We will continue to examine the root causes that contributed to these inhumane living conditions with the objective that no one incarcerated by the Washington DOC will ever live in similarly deplorable conditions again.

An SOU cell at MCC



### Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Work

The OCO is committed to creating a culture that centers equity and belonging to sustain workplace diversity and we are collaborating to manifest a pro-equity anti-racism ecosystem in a multicultural Washington state where everyone flourishes and achieves their full potential now and for future generations. The OCO's PEAR team was established in 2022 as directed in [Executive Order 22-04](#) and under the direction of the [Office of Equity](#). During Fiscal Year 2023, the OCO PEAR team undertook several projects to ensure that our small state agency works in a way that reduces disparities and improves equitable and just outcomes for everyone in Washington.

FY 2023 OCO PEAR work included:

- Identifying, developing, and launching a **demographic data reconciliation project** to ensure that OCO data properly reflects the data provided by incarcerated individuals to the Department of Corrections.
- Arranging showings of *Race: The Power of an Illusion* followed by thoughtful small group discussions about the content and connections to OCO work and office.
- Improving stakeholder engagement by holding quarterly meetings inside prison facilities in addition to quarterly hybrid meetings for non-incarcerated stakeholders. This change allowed for and resulted in **increased feedback from incarcerated people** on OCO work.
- Engaging in ongoing **trauma responsive care training** with the Center for Trauma-Responsive Practice Change. These trainings are provided to all staff and specialized coaching is provided to the supervisory team. The aim of the work is to enhance trauma-responsive practices used by staff and leadership of the OCO in order to empower disenfranchised persons and address issues of systemic oppression.

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- Establishing a contract and implementing a process for having written OCO communications **translated into languages spoken by OCO customers** in an effort to reduce barriers to accessing OCO services for people whose primary language is a language other than English.

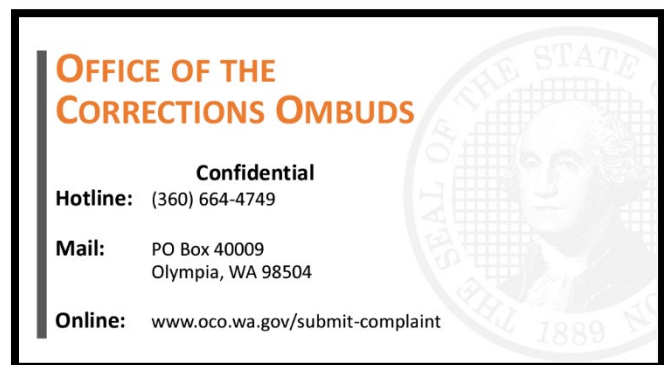
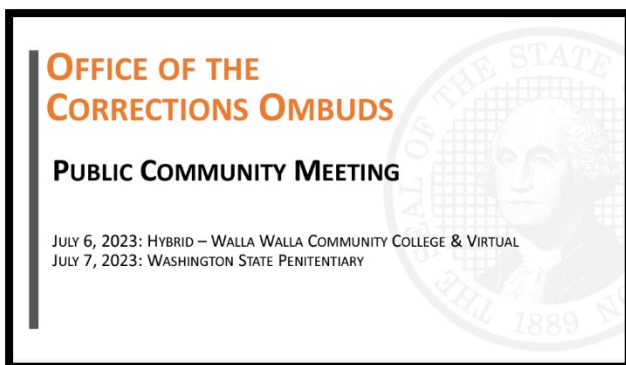
Additionally, throughout Fiscal Year 2023, the OCO Director was an active member of the DOC’s PEAR subgroup focusing on examining the DOC’s disciplinary and sanctioning processes. In Fiscal Year 2024, the DOC Secretary created a PEAR Advisory Board and invited the OCO Director to serve on the Advisory Board. The Board is scheduled to meet twice annually and tasked with: (1) monitoring the progress that DOC teams are making on their PEAR service line investments; (2) providing feedback and helping prioritize future service line investments; and (3) reviewing proposed updates to the DOC’s PEAR Strategic Plan.

### Stakeholder Input

Historically, the OCO held public meetings in person and outside of prisons and transitioned to virtual meetings during the pandemic. The OCO public quarterly meetings for FY 2023 were all held inside a Washington DOC facility. We were excited about making this change to allow us to bring our public meetings directly to the stakeholders living inside WA DOC facilities. We are proud to include the voices of incarcerated people on our public platform. In addition to the public meetings inside of the prisons, we also held a secondary public meeting in a hybrid format that allowed stakeholders in the community to attend in person or virtually.

#### The 2023 Calendar Year OCO Quarterly Public Meeting Schedule

- January 6, 2023: Washington Corrections Center, Shelton
- January 26, 2023: Helen Sommers Building, Olympia
- April 26, 2023: Monroe Correctional Complex, Monroe
- April 28, 2023: Helen Sommers Building, Olympia
- July 6, 2023: Walla Walla Community College, Walla Walla
- July 7, 2023: Washington State Penitentiary, Walla Walla
- October 6, 2023: Clallam Bay Corrections Center, Clallam Bay
- November 1, 2023: Helen Sommers Building, Olympia



In keeping with our PEAR principles, not only were OCO staff inside prisons presenting our quarterly data directly to the community we serve, we also worked with the DOC to guarantee that our

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presentation materials were uploaded to all Securus Tablets and available to review in all DOC Law Libraries. All presentation materials are available on our public website [here](#).

As part of the office’s 2023 strategic planning, we surveyed our community partners, including members of the Statewide Family Council as well as incarcerated individuals, asking for feedback on the work and function of the OCO. The responses were informative and played a significant role in the shaping of our new three-year strategic plan. A sample of this feedback is below:

**The OCO's vision is a more humane Washington corrections system. To reach our vision, what should we work on first? Ranked Order, with 1 being the most important.**

Responses from Incarcerated Individuals	Responses from Community Partners
1. DOC staff conduct	1. Healthcare access & quality
2. Healthcare access & quality	2. Individual investigations/negotiated outcomes
3. Individual investigations/negotiated outcomes	3. Solitary confinement
4. DOC policy recommendations	4. DOC staff conduct
5. DOC resolutions program	5. DOC policy recommendations
6. Classification	6. Classification
7. Legislative work (examples: Correctional Industries, building improvements)	7. Access to programming/education
8. Solitary confinement	8. DOC resolutions program
9. Access to programming/education	9. Legislative work (examples: Correctional Industries, building improvements)
10.Other	10.Other

### Looking to the Future

Throughout the summer and early fall of 2023 the OCO staff worked with our colleagues at [Results Washington](#) to develop a comprehensive three-year strategic plan. Our first task was to establish our vision, mission, and values. After a robust and collaborative process, led by our facilitators, we are pleased to share our new vision, mission, five core values, and strategic priorities.

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## **OCO's Vision**

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds envisions a more humane and transparent Washington corrections system.

## **OCO's Mission**

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds is on a mission to provide opportunities for people impacted by incarceration to raise issues and resolve conflicts. We work to reduce harm in the Washington corrections system by negotiating outcomes, recommending positive change, and reporting individual and systemic concerns.

## **OCO's Values**

**Integrity:** We believe in honesty, transparency, and authenticity.

**Respect:** We are a compassionate, kind, and consistent organization. We value our collective humanity and dignity.

**Collaboration:** We work together to deliver objective communications and negotiations to positively impact the community we serve.

**Equity:** We recognize the importance of diversity and lived experience. We aim to provide equitable services to all people impacted by incarceration.

**Courage:** We are bold and persistent problem solvers. We work to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of incarcerated individuals. We remain optimistic that our work empowers and makes a difference.

## **OCO Strategic Priorities for 2023-2026**

For the next three years, we are prioritizing work that will achieve the following three key outcomes:

**Public Communications & Education:** Improve outreach, education, and access.

**Comprehensive Investigations:** Deliver individual resolutions and publish systemic recommendations that achieve positive and persistent change.

**Capacity Building:** Strengthen internal systems and processes to ensure continuity of quality services.

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