

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5032

As of January 20, 2025

Title: An act relating to expanding the duties of the office of the family and children's ombuds to include juvenile rehabilitation facilities operated by the department of children, youth, and families.

Brief Description: Expanding the duties of the office of the family and children's ombuds to include juvenile rehabilitation facilities operated by the department of children, youth, and families.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Trudeau and Wellman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/20/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the statutory authority of the Office of the Children and Family's Ombuds (OFCO) to include youth and individuals in the state's care or custody, including at juvenile rehabilitation facilities.
- Directs the Department of Children, Youth and Families to provide OFCO physical access to state institutions, including juvenile rehabilitation facilities, serving children, youth, and families as well as granting OFCO unrestricted online access to the juvenile rehabilitation case management system.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds. Established in 1996, the Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) is an independent

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and impartial office that helps citizens navigate Washington state agencies serving children, youth and families. OFCO also investigates complaints about a Washington state agency's actions or conduct that involve:

- any child at risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm;
- a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services; and
- the safety or welfare of children in state care.

When a complaint issue is substantiated, OFCO intervenes to correct a violation of law or policy, or to prevent harm to a child or family. OFCO also identifies system-wide issues, and recommends appropriate changes to improve outcomes for children and strengthen families.

OFCO issues an annual report to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Oversight Board and to the Governor analyzing the work of the office, including recommendations. In its most recent report, OFCO made two recommendations regarding Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR): (1) provide sufficient funding for DCYF to establish a formal hearing process and a uniform grievance process for youth and young adults in JR facilities; and (2) modify state laws clarifying OFCO's duties and responsibilities in JR facilities.

Department of Children, Youth and Families. The Legislature created DCYF in 2017. DCYF assumed the services of the Department of Early Learning, the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, the Office of Juvenile Justice, and the Children's Administration within the Department of Social and Health Services.

Juvenile Rehabilitation Institutions. The JR division of DCYF operates two secure residential facilities for juveniles who are convicted of crimes and sentenced to more than 30 days of confinement. The Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie serves younger males as well as female juveniles. The Green Hill School in Chehalis serves older male juveniles.

JR also operates community residential facilities, which allow youth to begin transitioning back to the community. These facilities provide treatment, education, and vocational services. To be eligible for community facility placement, a youth must be placed on minimum security status. Minimum security status is based on risk and behavior assessments, and requires the individual served 10 percent of the individual's aggregate minimum disposition or 30 days, whichever is greater, and all placement assessment requirements have been met.

There are eight community facilities across the state:

- Canyon View—Wenatchee;
- Oakridge—Lakewood;
- Parke Creek—Ellensburg;
- Ridgeview—Yakima;
- Sunrise—Ephrata;

- Touchstone—Olympia;
- Twin Rivers—Richland; and
- Woodinville—Kirkland.

Summary of Bill: It is clarified that OFCO's purpose is to promote public awareness and understanding of youth, in addition to family and children services, provided by DCYF. The statutory authority of OFCO is expanded to include youth and individuals in the state's care or custody, including at JR facilities.

Child, youth, or individual includes any person in the state's care, in state-licensed facilities or residences, or JR facilities who is receiving services from DCYF.

DCYF is to permit OFCO physical access to state institutions, including juvenile rehabilitation facilities, serving children, youth and families as well as grant OFCO unrestricted online access to the JR case management system.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.