

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN**



***ANNUAL REPORT of  
REGIONAL and AREA OFFICE INQUIRIES  
Calendar Year 2017***

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### Introduction

The Office of the Ombudsman addresses inquiries and complaints related to Department of Children and Families (DCF/Department) services in order to resolve the identified issues and to help ensure that the rights of individuals involved with the Department are upheld and maintained.

The Office of the Ombudsman (Office) is housed within the Office of the Commissioner for the Department of Children and Families and serves many functions. The staff directly handle inquiries made to the DCF Commissioner from clients, youth, providers and concerned citizens as well as from the Governor's Office, federal, and state legislators, local officials, the Office of the Child Advocate and many other entities.

The Director of the Office also handles grievances filed by youth at Connecticut Juvenile Training School.

Last, the Director of the Office conducts Special Qualitative Reviews on cases regarding a child fatality, near fatality or other significant events that occur regarding a child/family currently working with the Department or whom had recent involvement.

### Processes

The Ombudsman staff utilize an objective, impartial, and collaborative process to facilitate fair and appropriate outcomes to concerns that are reported, and attempts to facilitate resolutions as amicably as possible.

As required, the Office, in collaboration with Regional, Facility and Central Office staff, consults and problem-solves case-related and systemic issues in order to assist and support DCF staff at all levels, and across each Division.

### What We Believe

*Mission* - The mission of the Office of the Ombudsman is to assist in supporting the safety and well-being of Connecticut's children, to improve effectiveness, quality, efficiency and responsiveness of DCF and connected services and supports, and to promote public confidence in the child welfare system.

*Vision* - Our vision is a collaborative and transparent system whereby individuals can freely express themselves about the Department's work, resulting in improvements from a case, systems, policy, and/or statutory perspective.

*Values* - We engage in the values of compassion, understanding and a commitment to each individual with whom we communicate, as we believe they deserve to be heard and feel respected throughout their involvement with the Department.

### How We Conduct Our Work

- *Respond* promptly to inquiries
- *Engage* the caller
- *Actively listen* to the concerns expressed
- *Assess* concerns

- *Answer* questions
- *Provide* information about departmental policy and procedures
- *Search* for a resolution of disputes
- *Promote* the client's voice
- *Mediate* and act as a liaison between all involved parties
- *Arrange* case conferences when necessary
- *Collaborate* with community providers
- *Educate* the community
- *Resolve* the presenting problem

*Where Information is Located about the Office of the Ombudsman*

Information pertaining to the role the Ombudsman plays within the Department and how to contact the Office can be found in multiple areas on the DCF website, and in written documents provided to all families as follows:

- 1) In the *Parent's Rights to Know Brochure*, information pertaining to the Office of the Ombudsman and the role the Office plays within the Department is documented including DCF phone numbers. This brochure is provided to all families upon initial visit by Department staff. That brochure can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Multicultural-Affairs/Parents-Right-to-Know>
- 2) On the DCF website under "Most Popular Links" the "About DCF" heading can be located. When clicked, the DCF Ombudsman's Office (Complaints Department) is listed with our phone numbers. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/dcf>
- 3) On the DCF website under "Most Popular Links" the "Contact Us" heading can be located. When clicked, the DCF Ombudsman's Office (Complaints Department) is listed with our phone numbers. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/dcf>
- 4) On the DCF website under "Most Popular Links" the "Ombudsman's Office (General Complaints and Inquiries)" appears and when clicked, takes you to the Ombudsman's brochure and our Annual Reports. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>
- 5) On the DCF website under "Most Popular Links" the "What Every Parent Should Know" appears and when clicked, takes you to the Ombudsman's brochure and our Annual Reports. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>
- 6) On the DCF website under the headings "For Families and "For Providers" sections can be located. When clicked, the *Parents Rights to Know Brochure* is located which includes information about the Office of the Ombudsman. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>
- 7) By simply typing in "Complaints" on the DCF website's search engine, the link takes you to the Ombudsman's brochure. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Search-Results?SearchKeyword=complaints>

- 8) All of our Annual Reports can be accessed via the *DCF Data Connect* link found on our website under the heading “About DCF”. The Ombudsman’s reports are found under the *Alphabetical Listing* of reports link within that greater site. That link can be accessed here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Data-Connect/Home>

Further, DCF’s Regional Offices and Facilities actively discuss with their clients/residents the role of the Office of the Ombudsman within the Agency as a resource if there are disagreements or disputes that cannot be resolved.

The Ombudsman’s role has also been noted in media stories throughout the year with respect to specific cases served by the Department.

The Director of the Office stays in regular communication with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to discuss case specific concerns, as well as Agency policy and practice. The OCA also copies the Director on all inquiries made to the DCF Regional Offices and Facilities. Families and professionals, when thought to be the best course of action, are also actively and directly referred to the Office of the Ombudsman by the OCA. Likewise, the Director of the Office of the Ombudsman refers families to the Office of the Child Advocate when appropriate.

Data

During Calendar Year (CY) 2017, the Department served 36,540 families, which includes 6,538 children who spent any amount of time in placement during that time period. Of the families served, 11,200 were new to the system. The Office received 1,271 inquiries, which is 87 inquiries less than the number received during CY 2016. This decrease can be attributed to the Ombudsman’s staff working to clarify the difference between when a caller is actually requesting assistance with a problem, which should be documented as an inquiry, versus asking for a phone number or other general piece of information pertaining to the Department.

Over 77% of the inquiries received in CY 2017 represented unique families as compared to 75% in CY 2016. Data analysis reveals that 167 families were responsible for 438 or 34% of the CY 2017 inquiries.

It should be noted that the Department received an inquiry from only approximately .03% of the families who came to our attention.

The breakdown of the main reasons for the inquiries is as follows:

Reason for Call	Inquiries - 2017	Inquiries - 2016	Inquiries - 2015	Inquiries - 2014	Inquiries – 2013
Case Management	295	257	442	500	425
Investigation Concern	135	205	132	135	50
Abuse/Neglect	129	127	78	17	21
Placement	105	69	89	86	44
Visitations	59	62	50	42	31
Informational/General	58	167	23	12	70
Legal Questions/Issues	55	31	30	40	57
Request for DCF Services	50	21	24	28	7

Case Practice	35	43	95	46	63
Licensing Issue	34	78	14	13	4
Worker Complaint	32	64	88	63	77
Payment	29	36	29	25	19
Reunification	29	15	6	12	8
Problems Obtaining Resources	28	15	15	15	10
Request for Documentation	25	25	17	13	42
Administrative Hearing	24	13	21	10	11
Careline Concern	13	12	13	5	15
Voluntary Services	12	3	0	0	0
Adoption	10	18	15	12	11
Foster Care	10	11	17	17	28
Custody	10	11	8	14	11

The top five reasons for calls to the Office of the Ombudsman and the nature of the inquiries will be explained in further detail in the paragraphs below:

Case Management

A total of 295 inquiries were received pertaining to Case Management which is a 15% increase from CY 2016 to CY 2017. This category includes a diverse array of topics expressed by those who inquire such as why cases remain open, service provision, questions pertaining to court proceedings and the intensity of the Department’s actions with a family.

During the year, some clients expressed frustration believing their case should be closed as they have fully complied with the required services. This overall risks in these cases is then assessed along with whether or not the client actually made progress with their identified plan of service provision leading to a confidence level the family was no longer in need of child protective services.

Families often call the Office of the Ombudsman closely before or after a Court hearing. They seek guidance from the staff to fully understand the proceedings, seek clarity on confusing language they heard, advice on how to plan for their children and timeframes for reunification. Furthermore, families discuss the nature of their relationships with court appointed attorneys.

Clients also express a belief that a delay exists with staff connecting them to required services or that they are on a waiting list for a particular program. When this occurs, the case cannot be closed necessitating continued involvement with the Department. Clients also believe these delays result in a longer period of time before reunification exists.

The area of substance use screening and evaluation is a topic frequently encountered in this category of inquiries. Individuals were noted to agree to accept a referral for a screen yet did not understand a one-time negative test result would not automatically result in case closure or return of their children.

### Investigation Concerns

The number of inquiries for Investigation Concerns dropped from 205 in CY 2016 to 135 in CY 2017.

The most common inquiry in this category was families seeking to clarify the exact nature of the Department's involvement. They often wanted a step by step plan for what to expect from the Department as they believed the Agency was placing difficult demands on them.

Fathers remained well-versed in policy and procedures when questioning certain aspects of the investigation. Depending on the approach they take with staff, their actions can be interpreted as a means to intimidate Agency personnel versus seeking to clarify a means to resolution.

The non-custodial parent frequently expresses their thoughts that we are not acting in proactive enough fashion to protect their children.

Mothers who contact the Office tend to question why the fathers of their children need to be notified of the allegations even if he does not play an active role in his children's lives. They also want an answer about the length of time the Agency will be involved. At times, they express concerns the investigation will be used against them in custody hearings.

A high number of kin contact the Office of the Ombudsman as they have first-hand knowledge of family issues which prove to be important information for the Department to understand. Confidentiality must be adhered to, yet, Department staff can talk to kin to receive information from them even in the absence of a release of information.

The issue of how an investigation can be used in Family Court is also a topic of questioning.

### Abuse/Neglect

The number of inquiries in the Abuse and Neglect category remained steady from CY2016 to CY2017. These were calls and emails made to the Ombudsman's Office by individuals who believed they had a set of facts or circumstances which constituted child maltreatment. Often, these calls were lengthy in nature as it took a while for the Ombudsman's staff to gain enough information to fully understand the context of the caller's concerns.

Media attention about the Department and the expansion of the mandated reporter laws are believed to both have influenced the volume of inquiries in this category. A number of communications result in the Ombudsman's staff connecting the individuals directly to the DCF Child Abuse and Neglect Careline.

Non-custodial parents and kin make the majority of inquiries in this category as they are seeking assistance on how to intervene in a particular situation. They are often told of information from other sources which they do not understand or which has them believing the Department should intervene quickly as a child is not safe.

All information received on an open case is forwarded to the Social Worker, Social Work Supervisor and Program Manager assigned to the family regardless of whether a belief that child maltreatment has occurred.

### Placement

The category of Placement pertains to individuals either expressing a concern about the current placement of a child or offering to be a placement resource for a specific child. The number of inquiries in this category increased from 69 in CY 2016 to 105 in CY 2017.

Kin and fictive kin expressing an interest in providing care overwhelmingly contact the Office of the Ombudsman. Often, multiple family members call within a short period of time after a child has been removed to determine what they can do to either facilitate the child living with them or support the child in their current placement.

An interesting dynamic seen is when kin disagree with the Department's decision to place a child with a particular kin family member as they believe they are the better option for the child. Kin also express a conflict with the chosen caregiver and may indicate they have information on that person's overall ability to be licensed or their suitability.

Parents also express their desires to have their children placed with particular kin.

Furthermore, parents have been experienced to inquire about the conditions of their child during visits, lack of relationship with the temporary caregiver or that the placement is too far away from them making consistent visitation difficult.

### Visitation Issues

The inquiries for Visitation also remained consistent from 62 in CY 2016 to 59 in CY 2017. In this category, the inquiry was focused solely on a specific concern regarding visitation and not a combination of concerns with the way their case is being handled.

Parents provided emotional statements after a visit was cancelled by the Department and no re-scheduled time has been offered. They wish to have a greater frequency of visits or a longer length of time with their children.

Staffing and resources were seen to have a negative effect on visitation between children and their families. Agency resources such as Case Aides to drive children to and from visits are not in abundance and Courts were seen to order a higher frequency of visits, especially with young children, which depleted Agency resources.

Some offices experienced shortages in contracted providers who could facilitate visitation including picking up children who were placed a long distance from each other.

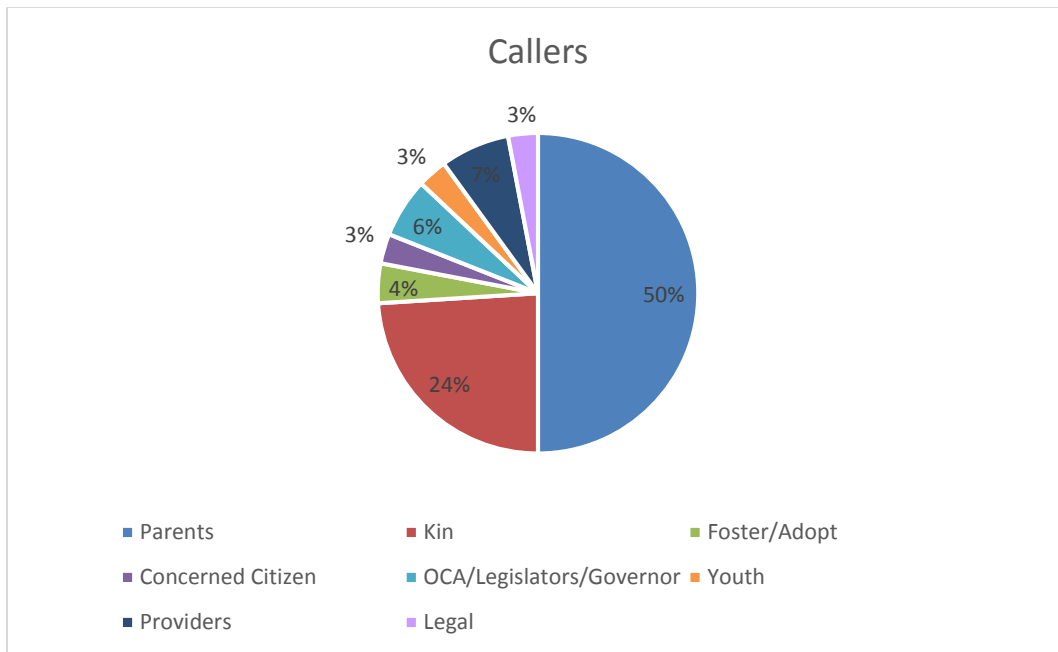
Kin actively express their desires to visit children in care. These demands were balanced against the Agency's mandate to first and foremost ensure parents and siblings have consistent visitation, and if Agency resources permit, extend visitation to other family and kin may occur.

Visitation was negatively impacted if a child was placed with a particular kinship family and they did not have a positive relationship with other kin members. In this situation, the Department was looked upon to facilitate visitation, not due to safety issues, but as a result of intra-familial conflict.



### The Callers

A breakdown of the categories of individuals who contact the Office of the Ombudsman are as follows:

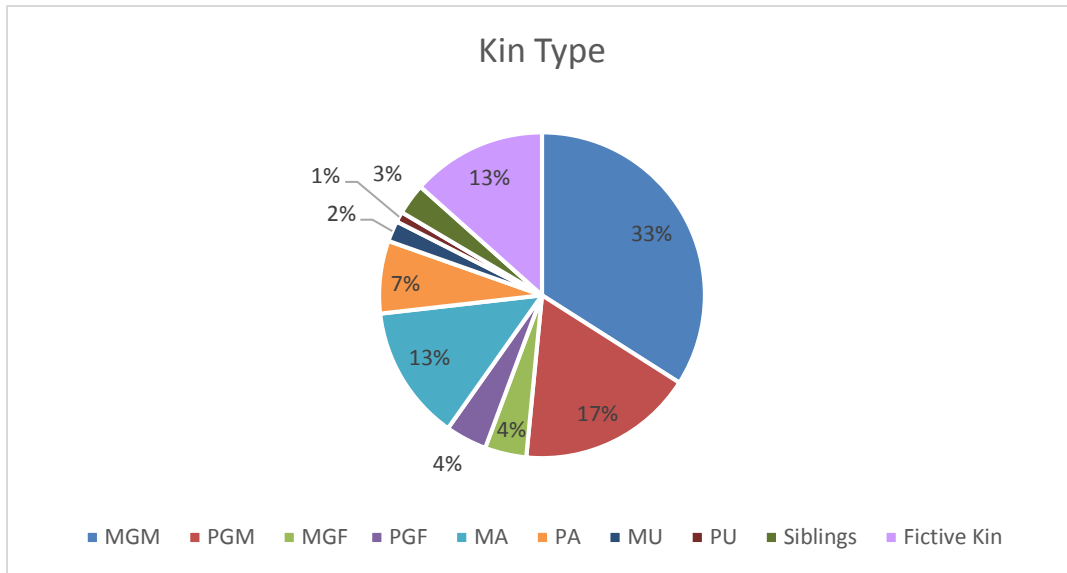


Parents account for 621 or 50% of the total inquiries. When this data pertaining to individuals identified as “Parents” is further analyzed, it shows Mothers represent 439 (71%) of the inquiries and Fathers represent 182 (29%) of the inquiries. Inquiries from Fathers are down 3% from CY 2016.

As the chart indicates, kin account for 24% of the total inquiries made to the Office of the Ombudsman, which is 2% lower than in CY 2016. The concerns expressed by kin overlap many areas of the Agency and are across multiple categories. Kin were often well informed about Department policies and practices and articulate particular scenarios of concern. While kin tended, as might be expected, to express more emotion when presenting their concerns, they were usually steadfast in representing their views.

During CY 2017, the Department again saw a number of individuals making inquiries to multiple entities at the same time, such as the Commissioner’s Office, Office of the Ombudsman, Governor’s Office and Legislators. These inquiries required coordination to ensure all parties had the same information and that there was clear communication regarding who was the point of contact to respond.

The following chart illustrates the categories of kin who contacted the Office of the Ombudsman:



Looking further into the data, Maternal relatives account for 55% of the kinship inquiries, which is consistent with CY 2016 figures. An increase was seen in inquiries from fictive kin, moving from 3% of the inquiries in CY 2016 to now 12% in CY 2017. Paternal relatives now account for 31% of the inquiries, which is up from 29% in CY 2016. Siblings made 2% of the inquiries which is consistent with CY 2016 figures. Further assessment is required to determine this disparity between the inquiries received by each type of kin.

#### Comparing Calendar Year 2016 and Calendar Year 2017 Data

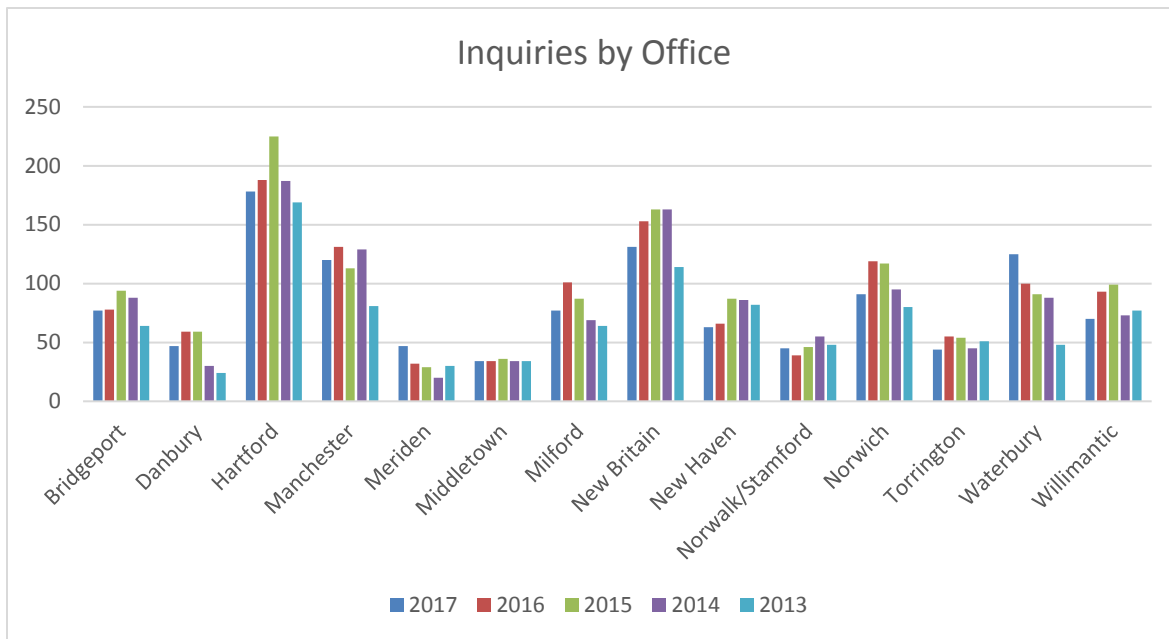
The following chart presents the inquiries, per Regional Office, for CYs 2016 and 2017. Also noted are the number of unique family inquiries versus the total number of inquiries received for CY 2017. It is important to keep in mind that some families may contact the Ombudsman's Office multiple times, concerning a variety of topics. Statewide, 984 or 77% of inquiries received pertain to a unique family.

Furthermore, the chart allows comparisons to be made per Office when taking into account inquiries as compared to total cases and youth in placement served in CY 2017.

Discussions will occur on a Statewide, Regional and Office specific level about the trends seen in inquiries compared to the data across all inquiry categories. From that, additional interventions may occur which impact engagement with families, the case planning process and other topics as a result of what was gained from this analysis.

The breakdown of inquiries per Regional Office for the calendar year 2017 as compared to calendar year 2016 is as follows:

Regional Office	Total Inquiries 2016	Total Inquiries 2017	Unique Family Inquiries 2017	Percentage of Unique Families Inquiries	Total Unique DCF Cases 2017	Percentage of Unique Inquiries in Relation to Total Unique Cases	Total DCF Youth in Placement S2017
Hartford	188	178	140	79%	4317	.032	835
New Britain	153	131	93	71%	3746	.024	662
Waterbury	100	125	84	67%	3243	.025	897
Manchester	131	120	99	83%	3487	.028	552
Norwich	119	91	69	76%	3201	.021	703
Bridgeport	78	77	64	83%	3294	.019	477
Milford	101	77	60	78%	3078	.019	482
Willimantic	93	70	51	73%	2005	.025	510
New Haven	66	63	55	87%	2720	.020	521
Danbury	59	47	35	74%	1565	.022	325
Meriden	32	47	30	64%	1378	.021	256
Norwalk	39	45	33	73%	2390	.013	272
Torrington	55	44	28	64%	1259	.022	239
Middletown	34	40	34	85%	1303	.026	215



Each Regional Office has a liaison to the Office of the Ombudsman who coordinates responses upon receipt of the initial inquiry. On an annual basis, the Regional Offices are provided the exact inquiries pertaining to each office complete with the write-ups of the Ombudsman’s interventions. This supports the Region’s access to catchment level information and data that can aid them with assessing specific areas of practice and interest.

Context of the Inquiries

Major themes as found on a statewide level are highlighted below. It is important to ensure the context of the work occurring in the Department is understood when reviewing these points. The outcomes of the Department’s work are all impacted by factors such as the complexity of a child or family’s needs, including the impacts of intergenerational trauma; internal and external budgetary and staffing pressures; higher DCF caseloads, increased demands on staff at all levels, media coverage, time and increased efforts to better ensure family (including fatherhood) engagement; and the impacts of environmental and societal factors such as the opioid crisis.

Further, an inquiry to the Office of the Ombudsman should not automatically be viewed as negative. Often, contact is initiated after staff have had difficult conversations with their clients about the nature of maltreatment a child has suffered, clarifying the next steps in case planning and permanency related actions which need to occur. Some clients simply seek an individual outside of the Regional Office to confirm the information they were told.

The Department is also scrutinized in a variety of ways, both publicly and privately by multiple entities. As stated previously, callers were found to be knowledgeable and well-versed about DCF policies and procedures; often reciting facts about major cases, budgets and programmatic changes that were currently highlighted in the media.

Major Themes:

- 1) *Investigations of Families* - The nature of some of the investigation related inquiries is as follows:
  - Parents state they are not aware a report they made to the Careline was non-accepted until they re-contacted the Careline themselves to clarify the status.
  - Parents remain eager to have their investigation closed and will contact the Agency after the 45<sup>th</sup> day to inquire about why it remains open.
  - Kin contact the Department to offer information on why they believe a child is being abused or neglected and/or why they believe the Department has erred in its decision making
  - Families who have read their records wish to provide a written statement to be included in their file to clarify information or dispute what they believe is inaccurate information.
  - Victims of intimate partner violence inquire as to why their case will remain open if they have removed the perpetrator from their house and believe they have responded to all of the Department's requests.
  - Women frequently express concerns Department staff are being influenced by the batterer who exhibits a coercive pattern of control.
  - The non-offending or non-custodial parent, who does not live in the home, does not believe they are advised of the allegations pertaining to their children in a timely manner.
  
- 2) *Kinship Care and Kinship Caregivers* – Kin have presented the following issues with respect to their capacity as either current caregivers, a person who wishes to be a support for children, or someone who has knowledge of a particular child's situation:
  - Kin wish to be a resource for a child, to assist with transportation or visit children in care regardless of whether they are chosen to be the primary caregiver.
  - Families want to know specific information about the nature of the Department's involvement yet have difficulty understanding the constraints of confidentiality.
  - Inconsistency is seen where at times placement with kin does not occur until after a substantiation is overturned or criminal history is fully assessed, while in other scenarios, a child in a similar situation is allowed to be placed into a kinship home with past CPS and Criminal history and then a waiver is pursued.
  - When conflicts exist between family members, multiple calls may be made to the Ombudsman's Office in an attempt to provide negative information about the current caregivers of a child in order to influence placement disruption.
  - Clarification is necessary to determine under what circumstances kinship providers can supervise visits.
  - Kin express dissatisfaction regarding not being informed about the full range of services or supports available to them while caring for a child under a Safety Plan; Family Arrangement; pursuing guardianship through Probate Court; the process to obtain a straight Transfer of Guardianship for a child through the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters; or agreeing to become fully licensed as a kinship placement, which may lead to either a Subsidized Guardianship or Adoption.

3) *Children in Placement* – The concerns about placement of children encompass many categories of inquiries and are provided to the Ombudsman’s staff predominately by Mothers. Some are below:

- Clients struggle with understanding the difference between being “complaint” with services versus fully making “progress” which may lead towards successful reunification.
- Delays in services being implemented, due to programs being full, the Social Worker not being able to locate the correct services for a family or the referral not being made in a timely manner are points of frustration for callers.
- At times, clients express the Specific Steps they are expected to accomplish to satisfy court requirements leaves them feeling overwhelmed.
- A frequent complaint of parents is that they are not receiving timely calls back from their Court appointed Attorneys and do not feel they have a strong relationship with them leading to lack of progress being made in court.
- Parents express disappointment when a visit with their child(ren) has been cancelled and makeup visits have not been rescheduled in a timely fashion.
- Kin often contact the Department with intentions of visiting a child in care yet given the caseload demands of the staff and time constraints, accommodating all kin who wish to visit a child is not always possible.

4) *Fatherhood Engagement* – Issues pertaining to the engagement of Fathers are expressed across multiple categories of inquiries. Inquiries from Fathers decreased 3% from CY2016 yet inquiries from Paternal relatives increased 2% during the same period.

- Discussions with Fathers tend to take a longer period of time in order to clarify for them the systems available for a child to be protected and to fully understand the concerns related to their child.
- Fathers often perceive they are offered inconsistent services from the Department as compared to Mothers.
- Some Fathers are under the impression a delay exists in protecting their children if they have been interviewed towards the end of an investigation and were not afforded the opportunity to intervene sooner.
- Fathers report inconsistent notification when the Department has made the decision to close the Mother’s case and not being afforded the opportunity to provide input into this process or decision.

5) *Foster Care and Adoptive Families* – A number of concerns have been expressed by foster and adoptive families and are included in many categories of inquiries. A benefit of the Department’s system is that these individuals have a FASU Social Worker, Social Work Supervisor and Program Manager, and a CAFAP liaison who can be of assistance to them. Additional supports are also available if they are a Therapeutic Foster Family:

- The length of time for licensure is a point of frustration for families.
- Case records do not reflect consistent communication between CPS and FASU staff when a placement is disrupting which would allow a provision of support services to be implemented in a more timely fashion leading to the possibility of the placement being preserved.

- Foster parents report not fully being informed of the child's past history including behavioral health needs prior to accepting them for placement.
- Foster and adoptive families express not being notified of all pertinent meetings, appointments or court hearings in a timely fashion for the youth in their care.
- Adoptive parents licensed for "legal risk" placements have difficulty fully realizing the legal status of the child and why reunification efforts must remain until further orders of the court.
- Some adoptive parents report frustration at the length of time it takes Court processes to establish permanency and a misunderstanding about the extent reasonable efforts must be provided to parents.

6) *Youth Who Contact the Office of the Ombudsman* – A total of 33 youth contacted the Office of the Ombudsman for the CY 2016.

- Multiple youth outreached to the Commissioner's Office with the intention of speaking directly to the Commissioner to express their views.
- Social media has improved the level of communication between youth and Department staff.
- Youth inquire as to their eligibility for financial support if an adoptive or transfer of guardianship placement disrupts and they have located an alternative caregiver.
- Youth request to access the Re-Entry process often in a time of crisis.

### *Inquiry Dynamics*

There are particular calls that present complex challenges to both engage the caller and resolve their presenting issue. Some are as follows:

- 1) Clients who are under the influence, may have unmet mental health needs or demonstrate cognitive challenges present barriers to resolving their expressed issues.
- 2) Youth may contact the Ombudsman's Office initially by e-mail or social media to provide information they are being harmed. It becomes difficult to identify the youth and their family, leading to the Department or Law Enforcement to respond, until they are engaged and willing to disclose full details of the maltreatment and their address.
- 3) Parents, who were involved with DCF as a child, present as guarded with Department staff and can be highly emotional when discussing their concerns.
- 4) Non-custodial parents are seen to contact multiple staff in order to express concerns and give the impression they are attempting to influence the direction of the case.
- 5) Grandparents articulate pain and sorrow when discussing the circumstances of their adult child's substance abuse, exposure to violence or maltreatment at the hands of a partner. They are genuinely concerned about their grandchildren and may have difficulty understanding DCF procedures.
- 6) Men demonstrating extreme patterns of coercive control experience delays in having their issues with the Department resolved quickly or to their satisfaction.
- 7) Custody issues, without allegations of child maltreatment, are not the responsibility of the Department which is confusing for callers.

### Engagement with Youth and Families

The Department will continue to empower families and youth to openly express their views about the relationship that exists between them and their workers, and their interactions with rest of the agency. Congruent with the Office of the Ombudsman's mission and vision for its work, this dialogue leads towards successful outcomes.

Over the course of the year, many factors such as race, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, generational issues and socioeconomic status all impacted DCF's work with families and youth. At times, families requested a Social Worker of a particular race or ethnicity while expressing their uncomfortable feelings towards working with currently assigned staff. Female victims of trauma sometimes expressed that working with a male staff member could be difficult given their prior abusive treatment by a former partner. Parents articulated thoughts that given their current socioeconomic status, judgements were made against them by DCF personnel whom they believed came from a background of advantage.

Throughout the year, information was provided to the Office of the Ombudsman regarding actions, inactions or statements made by Department personnel that negatively impacted engagement with youth and families. Families and youth indicated that positive engagement with them might be enhanced by the following:

- If a Social Worker is going to be late to an appointment or if a visit needs to be cancelled, clients would like to be contacted as soon as possible so they can make alternative arrangements and to know when the visit can be rescheduled.
- The Parent's Rights to Know brochure assists families in understand their rights and callers indicate they are thankful when the document is both provided to them and explained.
- Staff should be mindful that families access social media to obtain personal information about them. The worker-client relationship will be negatively affected if the client finds negative or demeaning comments made about families or the Agency as posted by the Agency staff member.
- Callers express they do not want to work with staff who may have personal, non-case related information about them. This may include clients and staff previously attending school together, having a mutual friend or attending the same function in the community.
- Clear discussions should occur regarding confidentiality as families express concern regarding where and to whom their case related information is sent.
- Clients express appreciation for those staff who repeat the Department's message to them while using patience and understanding.
- Understanding the Agency's chain of command is helpful to families so they are aware whom they can speak with if they have continued questions about Departmental involvement.



Messaging of Key Department Practices

The following quotes are examples of the types of issues frequently shared by callers to the Office of the Ombudsman. While it is difficult to truly contextualize some of these remarks, it would appear helpful for the Department to be aware of some of the sentiments that callers are suggesting staff are imparting.

<i>"It was non-accepted"</i>	<i>"We don't have residentials for that type of kid"</i>	<i>"We no longer pay for those things"</i>
<i>"It was my supervisor's decision..."</i>	<i>"Typical custody case"</i>	<i>"I don't have a release to talk to you"</i>
<i>"Call the Careline"</i>	<i>"The visit is cancelled "</i>	<i>"Unsubstantiations don't matter"</i>
<i>"It is only a FAR"</i>	<i>"The case will be closed "</i>	<i>"That is a Family Court issue"</i>

Best Practices Associated with Inquiries

A number of best practices occurring in the Regional Offices has been identified associated to an Office of the Ombudsman inquiry. These aid with achieving positive resolution of inquiries and can support improvements in the associated areas. Those activities include, but are not limited to the following:

- 1) An inquiry to the Ombudsman's Office should be viewed as a sentinel event in the life of a case and included in the overall assessment of safety and risk.
- 2) The caller feels validated in their concerns when a Social Work Supervisor or Program Manager contacts them upon receipt of an inquiry.
- 3) When multiple individuals have inquired about a case, a team meeting assists to both clarify information and coordinate supports for a family.
- 4) When the Ombudsman's Office is contacted in advance of a likely call/inquiry, it leads to a more timely complaint resolution.
- 5) Documenting a managerial note in LINK upon review and response to an Ombudsman's inquiry demonstrates the inquiry was addressed with staff.

Inquiries received from the Office of the Child Advocate and Legislators require further assessment.

Office of the Child Advocate Inquiries

The Director of the Office of the Ombudsman is copied on all inquiries received by the Regional Offices from the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). In general, the Office of the Ombudsman works to ensure that a quick and thorough response to the OCA occurs. Further, the Office seeks to support a collaborative relationship, including convening conference calls or face to face meetings between the

OCA and the Regional Offices to better resolve these often most complicated manners. In assessing inquiries coming from the Child Advocate’s Office the following was observed and noted:

- Very few inquiries made to the OCA overlap with the same family who has previously contacted the Office of the Ombudsman.
- The OCA has the authority to maintain the confidentiality of the caller. At times, those who make inquiries may be concerned about retaliation if they express their concerns to the Department and subsequently choose to contact the OCA.
- Community professionals appear to contact the OCA, while family members tend to contact the Department.
- The Information received by the OCA, at times, is different or more than what the Department may have at the time.
- OCA inquiries tend to focus on youth with complex, multi-systems involvement, or young children viewed as vulnerable who are in high risk situations.

Legislative Inquiries

A total of 59 legislative inquiries were made during CY 2017. A brief summary of the actual cases is as follows:

Regional Office	Presenting Issue
Region 1 - Norwalk	Paternal grandparents contacted their Rabbi who inquired with a legislator about the placement of their grandson who is not residing in a family practicing the same religious beliefs consistent with the birth family. The child is placed into a pre-adoptive home and the family recognizes the need to be open to this child’s ethnic, cultural and religious background.
Region 1 - Norwalk	A concerned citizen contacted his legislator inquiring about the death of a child in foster care claiming the mother of the child is not being informed of the investigation status. It was explained that due to confidentiality, no information could be disclosed directly to this person without a release of information. It was later learned this individual was not acting in the family’s best interests. In addition, the Department, Police and Medical Examiner have not fully completed their work to determine the manner and cause of death regarding this child.
Region 1 - Bridgeport	A legislator contacted the Department after receiving information that a child was removed from a pre-adoptive home under questionable circumstances. Upon review of the case, an adolescent was residing with a single parent who wished to adopt him. A number of concerns were expressed about the stability of that placement as the pre-adoptive parent had an adolescent in her home, who was previously adopted, and now is exhibiting significantly challenging behaviors requiring a provision of intensive services. It was not determined to be in the foster child’s best interests to remain in that home as his needs were not fully being addressed given those of the other child.
Region 2 - Milford	The maternal grandmother on an open case placed numerous calls to her legislator concerned about the safety of her grandson and the stability of her young daughter who was the child’s mother. This was a case of severe domestic violence and the concerns were valid. As a result, the family was being monitored by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. Eventually, the family made the decision to all reside again together in the same home which alleviated many of the concerns including the visibility of the baby.

Region 2 - Milford	On at least three occasions, an adoptive parent outreached to their legislator with the belief they did not have the proper services to provide a safe home for their child. This child frequently demonstrated aggressive outbursts requiring Police intervention, EMPS and short term hospitalizations. The issue with the family was a combination of the youth's behaviors and the parent's lack of fully cooperating with the community programs working with her both in her home and in the community. The youth was eventually placed into a therapeutic group home.
Region 2 - Milford	The paternal grandmother of a young child outreached to her representative in Congress to express concerns about the manner in which the Department is handling her son's case. The grandmother, her son and his young daughter all reside in the same home with the grandmother taking the majority of the caregiver responsibilities. The child was viewed as safe, all of her needs were met and she was visible. The grandmother eventually understood why the child was not removed given that she was in actuality, the primary caregiver.
Region 2 - Milford	A parent of a child in care asked her legislator to intervene to facilitate reunification. The removal was necessary as the parent has significant cognitive challenges, the housing conditions were deplorable and unfit for a child and the mother remained in a relationship with an abusive boyfriend. Safety factors remained present in the home which prevented the child from returning.
Region 2 - Milford	On three occasions during the year, a legislator inquired about a family who is engaged in a contentious custody and visitation case in the Family Court. The maternal grandmother in the family is the most outspoken about what she believes is wrong with the system and how her grandchild is suffering while living with his father. Extensive communication occurred with the family. Eventually, the mother of the child had her substantiations overturned and some of her criminal charges were dropped. The Department was not asked to provide any information to the Family Court where the majority of the concerns of this case originate.
Region 2 - Milford	A father on an open case is a neighbor of a legislator and asked him to look into the manner his children were spoken to by the Investigator. Also, to clarify why the Department substantiated neglect against him. It was learned that the Investigator used a direct and firm approach when interviewing and interacting with the children who exhibited some degree of difficult and unfocused behaviors. They reacted negatively to the manner of intervention. As result, the father no longer allowed staff in the home and community providers forwarded the Department updates on the children's well-being. The substantiation was overturned during the Administrative Hearings process and the case was closed.
Region 2 - Milford	The Department, along with the Department of Developmental Services, received an inquiry from a legislator about a 15 year old boy with complex behavioral health needs and asked which Agency was more suited to work with his family. The family was able to access ABA services through their insurance company and agreed to work with DDS who was more suited given the child's long-term and complex needs.
Region 2 – New Haven	A legislator forwarded the concerns of a maternal grandmother who believed the Department was overlooking the risk factors the father of the children presented yet acted overly harsh on the mother who demonstrated similar behaviors as the father. This grandmother eventually received guardianship of one grandchild and established consistent visitation with the other child which appeared to alleviate her concerns about that child's safety while residing with the father.
Region 2 – New Haven	The legal guardian of a child sent a list of problems she experienced to her representative in Congress. She was not happy with the manner our facility treated her child or the family, that her child's Diabetes was not properly monitored and she did not believe the facility was culturally

	competent to treat her hair. This guardian made a number of calls to different Agency personnel and multiple staff responded to the issues brought forward. The concerns did require some degree of discussion with the staff who treated her child although overall, the care was consistent with Agency standards.
Region 2 – New Haven	Paternal grandparents attended an event in their community and provided their legislator concerns about three children for whom they were previously licensed. The status of case is that the children were reunified and the parents did not wish for the grandparents to actively visit them. While unfortunate, this decision is up to the parents and the grandparents were referred to the Family Court with the hope they could obtain a court order permitting them to visit.
Region 2 – New Haven	A local legislator contacted the Department on behalf of a maternal grandmother who wished to be licensed for her two grandchildren. Unfortunately, licensure could not proceed both due to the grandmother's history and because her own children at one point were placed into state custody. Furthermore, the grandchildren in question were actually removed from the grandmother's home as her daughters resided with her and unsafe conditions existed for the young children which she failed to recognize or address while they were living in her home.
Region 3 - Middletown	The father on an open case asked his legislator to clarify with the Department the timeframe for the current safety plan in place. The case was opened as the mother overdosed on pills and the father agreed not to allow any unsupervised contact with the child. He was receiving support from his mother who was part of the plan. The investigation was still underway at the time the inquiry was received and the planning was viewed as appropriate to keep this child safe.
Region 3 - Norwich	A maternal grandmother requested assistance from her legislator as she believed her grandchildren were being neglected. It was determined that this grandmother did make a report to the Careline and the Department investigated the matter but did not have reason to substantiate the allegations. Due to confidentiality, the Department cannot advise this person of the outcome of our actions which appears to be her biggest concern. She was advised her grandchildren were safe and if support is needed in the future, she would be contacted.
Region 3 - Norwich	A local legislator contacted the Department as her constituent believes her rights are being terminated because she has a marijuana card. Furthermore, she does not want her child residing with her sister as her sister was once her caregiver and physically abused her while they were living together. This case is well known to the Ombudsman's Office as multiple inquiries have been received. The Department is proceeding with a Termination of Parental Rights trial as the mother has failed to rehabilitate for a prolonged period of time. Her child was viewed as safe and stable where he is currently residing and this will be his permanent placement.
Region 3 – Norwich	The mother in a very involved Juvenile Court case outreached to her legislator claiming that her children are being harmed in the foster home. It was determined that one child had what appeared to be a burn, and upon examination, it was found to be eczema. The same child had a cut on his ear consistent with being pushed by a sibling during normal childhood play. This case has received a lot of attention in the Office of the Ombudsman.
Region 3 – Norwich	A client with a past history of substantiations contacted their legislator to determine how she could be removed from the Central Registry. That process was explained as well as the best way to frame the positive changes this individual has made in her life when submitting information to the Department for reconsideration.

Region 3 - Norwich	A legislator contacted the Department after receiving a complaint from a mother who believed she was ready for reunification but continues to be victimized by the Department's unreasonable demands. Upon review of the situation, the mother remains quite antagonistic towards the Department, the reunification program does not believe she is ready to assume full time care for her children and she recently violated a Protective Order.
Region 3 – Norwich	The Governor's Office was contacted by a father of a 15 year old who also contacted his legislator with the belief his daughter was kidnapped by her birth mother from school. The Connecticut State Police, Rhode Island State Police and Rhode Island Department of Children and Families became involved. It was learned the child left her father's house due to deplorable conditions and wished to reside with her mother. The child was determined to be safe. The Department did investigate the conditions reported by the child.
Region 3 – Norwich	The father on an ongoing services case asked his legislator to intervene as the Department wanted to conduct a home visit on a religious holiday he celebrated. The issue was quickly resolved as he informed the Department of his wishes to reschedule the visit which was agreed upon by all parties.
Region 3 - Willimantic	A legislator contacted the Department regarding a case where two children were removed from a foster home. The placement of the boys was necessary as the caregivers displayed consistently unacceptable behaviors towards Department personnel and at one point, denied the staff access to the children. The situation became very complex with the Office of the Child Advocate and Superior Court for Juvenile Matters becoming involved after an emergency motion was filed.
Region 3 - Willimantic	The maternal grandmother of two young children asked her legislator to intervene in a family court matter. This grandmother had temporary guardianship of the children via Probate Court and then the children's mother filed to have the children returned to her. The court granted the order and now the grandmother is concerned about the children's welfare and being able to visit them on a consistent basis. The Department is assessing the mother's home and has not determined the children are abused or neglected. The visitation issue will be addressed via the court.
Region 3 - Willimantic	A legislator inquired about how the Department can arrange visitation between a maternal grandmother and her grandchildren who are placed into DCF custody. The plan for the children is termination of parental rights and they are going to be adopted by the paternal grandmother. Conflicts exist between the maternal and paternal sides of the family. The Department did arrange some visits between the maternal grandmother and the children but then strongly encouraged her to work out her differences with the paternal grandmother so moving forward, visits can be arranged between themselves and not the Department.
Region 3 - Willimantic	The friend of a client contacted their legislator as they believed the Department unjustly removed a baby from the hospital without giving the parents a chance at parenting or proper supports to assist them. Placement was viewed as necessary as the family in question had a prior Termination of Parental Rights ruling made against their first child, they presented with untreated mental health issues at the hospital after this child was born as well as domestic violence issues and could not develop an appropriate safety plan during the Considered Removal Meeting.
Region 3 - Willimantic	A pre-adoptive family asked their legislator for assistance with services to address the specialized needs of the child they wished to adopt. This is a kinship family who appears to be very committed to this little boy who has experienced multiple hospitalizations and is in need of a neuropsychological examination. Delays did exist in the implementation of services which the Region addressed. The family eventually adopted the child.

Region 3- Willimantic	The Lieutenant Governor's Office was contacted by a constituent who was waiting to be approved as a relative caregiver via the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children procedures. The client was concerned about perceived delays in the process. Upon review of the matter, the Department was facilitating information being sent to the State of Florida who ultimately had the responsibility to confirm placement plans for the children and send them to Connecticut.
Region 4 - Manchester	The lieutenant Governor's office was provided a packet of information by a maternal grandmother who believed her granddaughter was physically abused by the mother's boyfriend. The case was actually closed by the Department at the time of the inquiry. The information provided was assessed and no further action was deemed necessary as the child was safe and the boyfriend had no further access to her.
Region 4 - Manchester	A paternal grandfather questioned his legislator about the delays in licensure preventing him from caring for his grandson. The child is actually in the custody of the State of Massachusetts and that state has yet to request Connecticut, via the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children agreement, to conduct a study on this individual regarding his suitability to be placed. Eventually the request was made and he was licensed.
Region 4 - Manchester	Paternal grandparents of two boys in care contacted members of the Children's Committee as they wanted their grandsons placed with them. Placement of the children was necessary as their son sexually assaulted his step-daughter, was arrested and incarcerated, and the mother of the three children, two of which are his, did not appropriately protect them or ensure they received proper supportive services. The grandparents were not viewed as an appropriate placement as they did not believe the allegations against their son, only wanted one grandson, eventually they agreed to take the second grandson but would not agree to facilitate placement of their step-granddaughter who was the child sexually abused. This would have resulted in the children being separated. The grandparents were not supportive of the Department's planning, hired an attorney and gained Intervenor status in court. The Department did not want to separate the three children and they remained in a kinship placement who wished to adopt them. The case will be heavily litigated in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters.
Region 4 - Manchester	A paternal grandmother contacted her legislator to intervene after the Department made the decision not to pursue her has a placement for her grandson. The grandmother's history is complicated and her own children were placed with relatives with one coming into state custody years ago. The grandmother was also not viewed as fully forthcoming with all information asked of her pertaining to her current living situation. She was assessed not to be appropriate for licensure at the present time.
Region 4 - Manchester	A legal guardian questioned their legislator as to why they are not receiving a subsidy for the children they are providing care. The family actually pursued a Transfer of Guardianship via the Probate Court and therefore, they are not eligible for a subsidy from our Department but they are eligible to receive a stipend from the Department of Social Services.
Region 4 - Manchester	The father on an open case questioned why he was not being reunified with his son who was never harmed by him or his wife. In this matter, his wife seriously abused her son which required that child, and this young child who was viewed as similarly situated, to be placed. His wife is not cooperating with the Department and until personnel have assessed the home as safe for both children, neither child can be reunified as the couple remains living together.
Region 4 - Manchester	A mother asked her legislator for assistance in facilitating reunification with her baby. This mother lost her first child to the Department, this child was considered a High Risk Newborn and she was not

	cooperating with identified services. She has court ordered Specific Steps and is represented by an Attorney. If the mother makes considerable gains towards rehabilitation, reunification may occur.
Region 4 - Manchester	The mother on a closed case contacted her legislator as she continued to believe the Department made the wrong decision by not substantiating sexual abuse against her ex-husband. Connecticut and New York child protective services as well as the police investigated the multiple allegations this young child made and neither state substantiated nor pursued an arrest. The child is in therapy and if additional disclosures are made, a new investigation can be commenced.
Region 4 - Hartford	Multiple legislators including members of the Children's Committee and a Congressman inquired about voluntary services for a specialized needs 15 year old girl. Her mother made numerous contacts in the community as she did not feel she had the correct supports to provide care for her daughter upon discharge from the hospital. Multiple providers were involved and the case was eventually closed as the youth was receiving in-home services paid for by insurance and the Department of Developmental Services was also going to work with the family.
Region 4 - Hartford	A mother who was the victim of domestic violence outreached to her legislator as the Department filed Neglect Petitions on the family. A total of three reports have been received documenting the coercive pattern of control present in the home and the family was not cooperative with Agency services. Eventually, the family did agree to home visits and other interventions which allowed the petitions to be withdrawn and the case to be closed after the children were viewed as safe.
Region 4 - Hartford	The previous foster parents of an adolescent, who has her own baby, contacted the Governor's Office concerned that the Department is not properly planning for this youth. The youth has not cooperated with the Department's efforts to provide her a placement, was smoking marijuana and subsequently lost custody of her daughter. If a placement is needed, the Department may pursue this family again.
Region 5 – Danbury	Two legislators inquired about the care of a young child as her case was brought to their attention by a great paternal aunt who resides out of state. This family has been the subject of multiple inquires to the Office of the Ombudsman and much discord is present between the different sides of the family. Concerns are present and the Department is monitoring the family closely. Neglect petitions are pending in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters.
Region 5 - Danbury	A father contacted his legislator alleging that his children were removed due to his mental health and because he uses medical marijuana. The case was reviewed and it was noted that this man suffers from significant unmet mental health issues resulting in the need for hospitalization, and was driving a car with his children in it while under the influence. Although he may have a prescription for marijuana, his use negatively impacted his parenting ability. The children were placed with their mother.
Region 5 – Torrington	A legislator contacted the Department after having a conversation with a foster parent in his community. This foster parent is a kinship provider and had a sibling group of three boys of which one was removed. He has had ongoing disagreements with the social workers and another child was removed and he is now asking for the third child to be placed elsewhere. It appears his expectations of the Department are not reasonable yet, the Department could communicate more clearly with him about the overall planning.
Region 5 – Torrington	A family contacted their legislator, the Governor's Office and Lieutenant Governor's Office pertaining to literally all aspects of their case. This family had made a significant number of inquiries to the Commissioner's Office and the Office of the Ombudsman. Their child has been removed and she had

	done reasonably well in care but did run away on a few occasions. The parents are represented by counsel and their issues are best addressed in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. It is not expected that their inquiries will stop.
Region 5 – Waterbury	The foster parents of an adolescent requested a meeting with Department staff and their legislator. It is clear that some aspects of the case could have been handled differently by the assigned social worker especially around notifying the foster parents of her plans to visit the child and drive him to appointments. However, the expectations of the foster parents regarding payments, supports and the overall management of the case are not overall reasonable.
Region 5 - Waterbury	The mother of two young children in care asked for assistance from her legislator as she had a negative experience with Department staff surrounding when discussing her victimization by one of the children’s fathers. The actions of the supervisor were not appropriate, the case was transferred to another supervisor and a meeting was held to address the situation.
Region 5 – Waterbury	A father on a case contacted the Governor’s office as he believed the Department was overzealous in our actions to investigate domestic violence and that we provided false information to the Criminal Court resulting in a Protective Order being re-instated against him. The allegations in the case are very serious and the father was reported to have extremely controlling and abusive behaviors towards his wife. The Department’s actions and the information provided during testimony were found to be appropriate.
Region 5 – Waterbury	The legal guardian of a young child contacted her legislator as she is court ordered to have the child partake in visits with his grandparents. The child is scared, does not want to attend and the activities in the grandparent’s home are questionable. At the time of inquiry, the Department’s case was actually closed. The guardian was encouraged to contact the Careline if she believed abuse or neglect was present during the visits and to have the child’s therapist provide a document to the court regarding recommendations for continued visits. Ultimately, the Family Court will make the decision regarding visitation.
Region 5 - Waterbury	A legislator contacted the Department to more fully understand the procedures for an investigation. She was contacted by a maternal grandmother who expressed concerns regarding how her daughter was being treated when allegations were made pertaining to her grandson. The referral was viewed as appropriate as were the actions of the Department. The child is suffering from many psychiatric diagnoses and does not have the proper array of supports.
Region 6 – Meriden	The paternal aunt of a child in placement contacted her legislator on a numerous occasions. She was not of the belief the Department was doing everything we could to find her nephew when he runs away, will not go to school or is involved in delinquency behaviors. This youth is very difficult and a large meeting was held with the aunt and service providers, including his Probation Officer, to determine the best course of action.
Region 6 - Meriden	Two legislators contacted the Department after they were called by a mother on an open Department case. Her 16 year old child went to live with his maternal grandmother and is refusing to return to his mother’s house. She believes the maternal grandmother is neglecting him and subsequently, made a new report. Upon investigation, the child appeared to be fine, expressed he did not want to return to his mother’s house and the family is going to have to work out the custody arrangements via the Family Court.
Region 6 – New Britain	A mother outreached to her legislator seeking clarity on what to do in order for reunification to occur with her two children. The children are currently placed, via Probate Court, with their maternal



	grandmother. The family has significant conflicts which impact visitation for the children, allowing the mother to go to their doctor visits and other aspects of communication. The Probate Court asked the Department for an updated assessment on the children's best interest. The decision was made to recommend the mother and maternal grandmother engage in counseling to address their differences which would lead to a longer term plan being established for the children.
Region 6 – New Britain	The parents of a child removed contacted their legislator and multiple other parties to facilitate reunification. This is a high profile case in which the Commissioner intervened. The family has an extensive history with the Department, lost a previous child and this child was literally not seen for years by outside people while the family resided in a hotel. The case is being highly litigated in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters.
Region 6 – New Britain	A father who was previously involved with the Department spoke to the Lieutenant Governor about his experiences. He was upset that his children were placed in Christian households yet they are Jewish. This family was active with the Department almost 10 years prior and the children refused to reside with their father. They found kinship homes to reside in, did excellent and both wound up going to college and living successful lives. It does not appear they were prevented from practicing their religious beliefs.
Region 6 – New Britain	The maternal grandmother of a child in care, and her advocate, contacted their legislator about the Department's actions which they deemed unreasonable. This is a case that has been contested in court for years and the young child is going to be reunified with her father. All parties in the matter are represented by counsel and the matter is well known to the Office of the Ombudsman staff.
Region 6 – New Britain	A maternal grandmother asked her legislator to intervene with her daughter who is denying her visitation with her grandchildren. This is a matter for the Family Court as the Department does not have any involvement with the family.
Hotline	A school social worker contacted her legislator as she disputed the statements attributed to her in the Careline report she made. A Careline manager allowed her to listen to her exact phone call and the statements documented were proven to be accurate.
Central Office	A legislator contacted the Department after a maternal grandmother, who resides in the home with her daughter and granddaughter, did not understand the parameters of our investigation activities. The child was showing sexual knowledge beyond her chronological age and allegations of sexual abuse were present. Neglect petitions were filed as the mother was not complaint with service providers, would not allow the Department to speak to the child's school and refused access to her child.
Central Office	The mother of a child with specialized needs inquired with her legislator about available services. A list of providers was given which included 211, EMPS, the Infoline and Careline to access Voluntary Services.
Central Office	A legislator contacted the Department as his constituent was interested in providing transportation services to children in foster care. The individual was connected to staff in Fiscal and Contracts Management.

Informational Calls

For CY 2017 the Office received 585 informational calls. The breakdown of the main reasons for the informational calls is as follows:

Reason for Call	Number of Calls
Inquiry – DCF Policy/Procedures	101
Request for Phone Number	88
Referred to DCF Hotline	71
Inquiry – Legal/Custody Issues	56
Inquiry – Substantiation/Appeal/Central Registry	44
Non-Specific or Other	40
Closed Record Request	40
Referred to Another DCF Division	31
Referred to Another State Agency	29
Inquiry – Foster Care/Adoption	27
Inquiry – Medical/Mental Health Services	15
Inquiry – Subsidy/ICPC/TOG	14
Inquiry – Housing/Financial Assistance	10
Out of State	9
Inquiry – Education Matters	5
Request for DCF Case Services	5

It should be noted that the above inquiries were made on families with no current or past involvement with the Department. As a part of its function, the Office of the Ombudsman also handles questions and inquiries from the general public.

Statewide Systems Themes and Points of Intervention

As a result of the almost 2,000 total inquiries received for CY 2017, a number of cross-systems themes and points of intervention have been identified. They are as follows:

System	Presenting Problems
<i>Housing Assistance</i>	The Department is increasingly being contacted by individuals who are seeking immediate housing as they are legally homeless, are without a source of income; and the shelter system is overloaded with no beds available. These requests also include a desire for the Department to provide a down payment for housing.

<i>Affordable Legal Representation</i>	Families, not involved with the Department, inquire about affordable legal assistance. The issues which they are seeking to resolve are: custody issues, kin desiring to compel the court to allow visitation, housing matters and divorces from abusive partners.
<i>Family Court</i>	Concerns with the family court remains an issue with multiple callers. This includes individuals not being allowed to communicate in any fashion with their children, delays in custody hearings, the non-compliant parent not being held accountable or perceived unfair treatment by court personnel.
<i>Children with Behavioral Health Needs</i>	Families seek quick access to services for their specialized needs child. They report delays in accessing community based programs or not having the knowledge of what their medical insurance will fund.

#### Lessons Learned

Throughout all of the inquiries received in the Office of the Ombudsman, some basic lessons can be learned from the voice of youth, clients, foster parents and others who express their views. They are as follows:

- Families are eager to have their calls returned even if the question at hand has not been fully resolved by the Department.
- Staff can speak to kin or concerned citizens to receive information at any time regardless of whether a release of information has been received.
- Families would benefit from understanding the chain of command in a Regional Office which may result in quicker problem resolution.
- Youth in care would benefit from being empowered to develop a closer relationship with their court appointed Attorneys when barriers exist in their case planning.
- Kinship placements are complex and require a higher level of effort to coordinate casework activities including but not limited to: court processes, birth parent demands, visitations, service provision and ongoing answering of questions.
- Foster parents live daily with the children in their homes and often have a unique perspective on the care that child requires and their views on the maltreatment they suffered.
- When conflicts exist amongst kinship members, ongoing visitation of the child, when placed with one side of the family, can be difficult to negotiate amongst kinship members.