



SFY 2022 Annual Report

Oklahoma Foster Parent Voices & Foster Youth Matters



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



OKLAHOMA
Human Services
Office of Client Advocacy

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History of the Programs

In 2014, the Oklahoma legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1793, which created the Foster Parent Grievance Program. It required the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) and the Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) Office of Client Advocacy (OCA) to work in partnership to create a grievance system for foster parents.

SB 1793 called on the agencies to identify systemic issues in the child welfare system (CWS) and prepare an annual report to the legislature (10A OS §1-9-112). Since the program's inception, the foster parent grievance program has received nearly 1,700 complaints. Foster parents can file

complaints at <https://okfosterparentvoices.org> or (405) 606-4900.

Inspired by the success of the Foster Parent Grievance Program, the legislature passed House Bill (HB) 2552, which called for the creation of a grievance program that monitors the rights of foster children being served by the CWS (10A OS §1-9-112). Since the program's inception, it has received nearly 1,400 complaints, and foster children can file complaints at the website <https://okfosteryouthmatters.org> or by calling a youth advocate at (405) 982-3842.

State Fiscal Year (SFY 2022)

At the end of SFY 2022, the Foster Parent Grievance Program received 173 complaints, and 136 were identified as grievances (a 10% decrease from the prior fiscal year). The foster children grievance program received 400 complaints, and 319 were identified as grievances (a 10% decrease from the prior fiscal year). A total of six complaints received by the Foster Parent Grievance Program

were suitable for investigations of allegations of retaliation.

The complaints filed during SFY 2022 with the Foster Parent Grievance Program concerned OKDHS employees. Complaints received by the foster youth grievance program were mainly concerned with the actions of the facility staff.

What is a Complaint or Grievance?

If a violation of policy or procedure is believed to have occurred, a complaint can be filed by calling it in or submitting it on the website. Once the complaint is received, a review is conducted by the OCA and OJSO to determine if the alleged action or inaction violates the Oklahoma Bill of

Rights for Foster Parents and/or Foster Children. If a violation has occurred, it is deemed a grievance and will be handled per the grievance process. If a complaint is not considered a grievance, the complainant will be directed to the appropriate entity for further assistance.

The Grievance Process

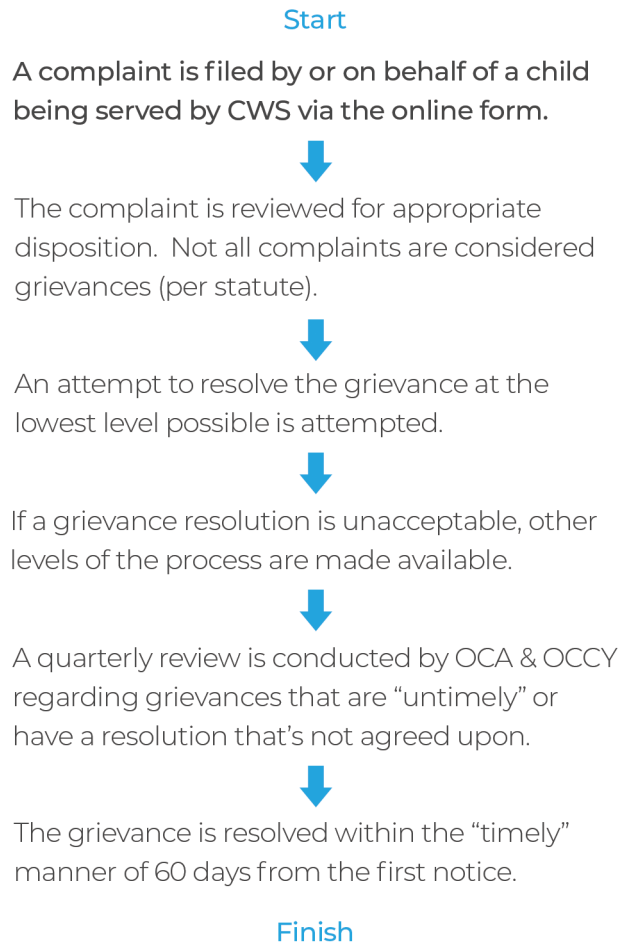
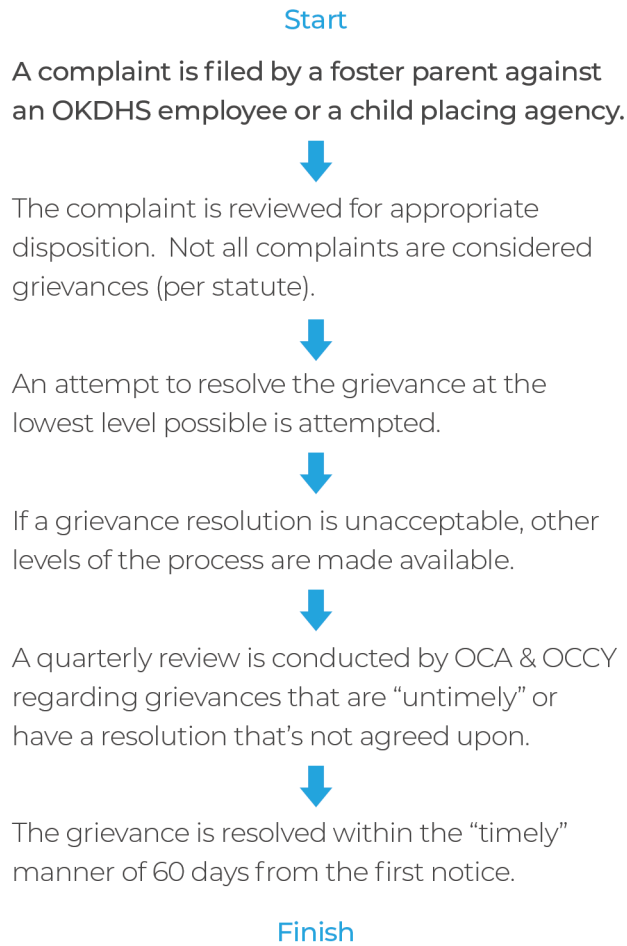
If a foster parent wishes to file a complaint against an OKDHS worker or an employee of a child-placing agency, they begin the process by completing the online form at <https://okfosterparentvoices.org>. Similarly, a complaint can be filed by (or on behalf of) a child being served by CWS by completing the online form at <https://okfosteryouthmatters.org>. Children placed in facilities file complaints via paper form,

which is placed in a lock box. It is later retrieved by the Local Grievance Coordinator (LGC.) Each complaint retrieved by the LGC is then entered into the Foster Youth Matters website. This occurs after the LGC initially attempts to resolve the grievance informally.

When a complaint is received by OCA (whether it is processed by the FCO or the Grievance

The Grievance Process

okfosterparentvoices.org okfosteryouthmatters.org



Program Supervisor), the first task is determining the appropriate disposition.

When a complaint involves issues that are a grievance that have not been resolved informally, the FCO or Grievance Unit Program Supervisor collaborates with CWS to resolve grievances at the lowest possible level. This allows access to impartial arbitration by management within the central office (10A O.S. §1-9-120). If the person who filed the grievance does not consider a proposed resolution acceptable, multiple review levels are available to them. A grievance is not considered resolved until the resolution is accepted or until all levels of the grievance process have been exhausted. A grievance is considered resolved as

“timely,” when it is resolved within 60 days of the date a complaint was received. (10A O.S. §1-9-120).

When a grievance is filed by (or on behalf of) a child in a facility, the LGC initially attempts to resolve the grievance informally. When that is successful, the grievance is then forwarded to OCA, who follows up to confirm that the grievance is resolved and closed. When it is impossible to resolve the grievance informally, it is processed by OCA in the same manner as non-facility grievances. Most complaints submitted through the Foster Youth Matters website originate from children placed in facilities and are informally resolved before the complaints are entered into the system.

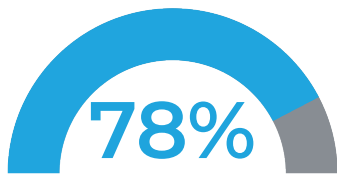
The Retaliation Investigation Process

A foster parent or a child in foster care is protected from retaliation by OKDHS or child-placing agency employees (10A O.S. §1-9-120) when they have filed a grievance, provided information to a state official or OKDHS employee, or otherwise participated in an investigation against OKDHS. The OCA Investigation Unit is responsible for investigating claims that OKDHS or a child-placing agency has retaliated, harassed, or discriminated against a foster parent or retaliated or discriminated against a child in care. If the allegations of retaliation are substantiated against a child welfare worker, OCA informs CWS leadership and the foster parent or child who made the complaint. Similar to grievances, investigations must be completed within 60 days of filing to be considered timely.

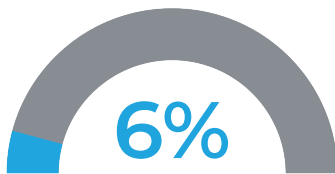
From July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, foster parents filed 173 complaints. Of those complaints, 136 (or 78%) were processed as grievances, and eight (or 5%) were sent for investigation. This is a modest decrease from FY 2021 but in line with FY 2019 and FY 2020. A complaint must be related to an action or inaction of OKDHS or personnel from a child-placing agency to be considered a grievance. Instances can include applying a policy to foster care services or violating the foster parent bill of rights. To be deemed a grievance, a complaint cannot deal with an issue excluded from the FCO's purview by law or policy.

When a foster parent complaint is not a grievance, the FCO determines where it should be referred. Of the non-grievable complaints received, eleven (or 6% of the total received) were referred to the OKDHS Director's Helpline, and eight (or 5% of the total received) were referred to a legal or administrative process. Seven complaints (4% of the total) were referred to the Youth Grievance Program. Finally, two complaints were duplicates, and one was spam.

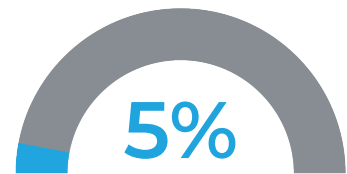
Foster Parent Complaint Dispositions • SFY 2022 Statewide Totals



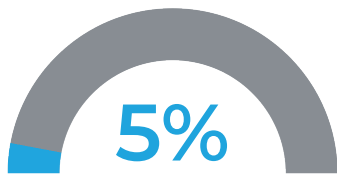
Grievance (136)



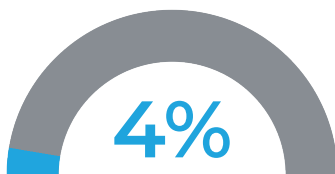
Director's Helpline (11)



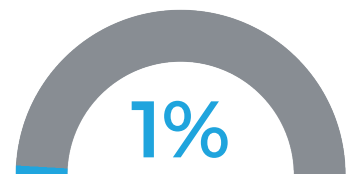
Investigation (8)



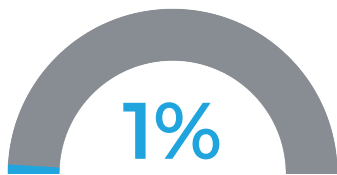
Refer to Legal or Administrative Process (8)



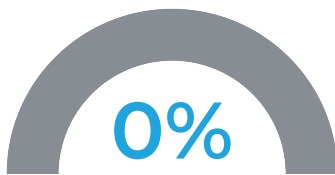
Refer to Youth Grievance Program (7)



Duplicate (2)



Spam (1)



Other (1)

Raw numbers are shown in parentheses

OCA Statewide Youth Grievances by Month and Disposition Jul. 2021 - Jun. 2022

1st Quarter

Complaint Focus	July 2021		August 2021		September 2021	
	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	8	23	13	21	10	24
Not Grieveable in Youth Grievance Program	8	1	6	1	0	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	1	1	0	0	1
Referred to Other DHS Division	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to Outside Entity (Tribe)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	16	25	20	0	10	25
Grand Total	41		42		35	

2nd Quarter

Complaint Focus	October 2021		November 2021		December 2021	
	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	9	25	6	21	3	14
Not Grieveable in Youth Grievance Program	8	00	2	0	3	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	00	0	0	0	0
Referred to Other DHS Division	0	00	1	0	3	0
Referred to Outside Entity (Tribe)	0	00	0	0	1	0
Total	17	25	9	21	10	14
Grand Total	42		30		24	

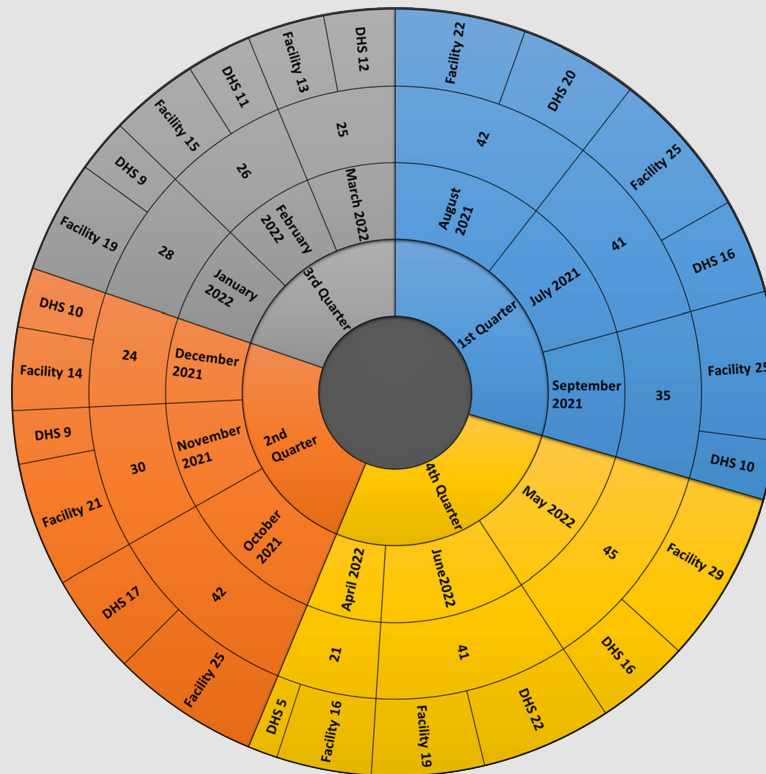
3rd Quarter

Complaint Focus	January 2022		February 2022		March 2022	
	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	3	14	7	10	10	8
Not Grieveable in Youth Grievance Program	3	3	4	0	2	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	3	0	5	0	5
Referred to Other DHS Division	2	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to Outside Entity (Tribe)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	9	19	11	15	12	13
Grand Total	28		26		25	

4th Quarter

Complaint Focus	April 2022		May 2022		June 2022	
	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	4	15	14	29	13	15
Not Grieveable in Youth Grievance Program	0	0	1	0	2	2
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	0	0	0	0	2
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	1	0	6	0
Referred to Outside Entity (Tribe)	0	1	0	0	1	0
Total	5	16	16	29	22	19
Grand Total	21		45		41	

OCA Youth Grievance Program SFY 2022 (June 2021-June 2022)



N = 400

From July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, the OCA Youth Grievance program received 400 complaints. These were filed by or on behalf of youth served by CWS. Of the 400 complaints filed, 243 were filed by youth placed in OKDHS-contracted facilities and related to facility issues. The remaining 157 complaints were related to OKDHS issues.

OCA Statewide Youth Grievances 2021-2022 Totals

Grievance	319	Referred to Other DHS Division	14
Not Grieveable in Youth Grievance Program	46	Referred to Outside Entity (Tribe)	4
Referred to Abuse Hotline	17	Combined Total of Complaint Focus	81
Grand Total for 2021-2022	400		

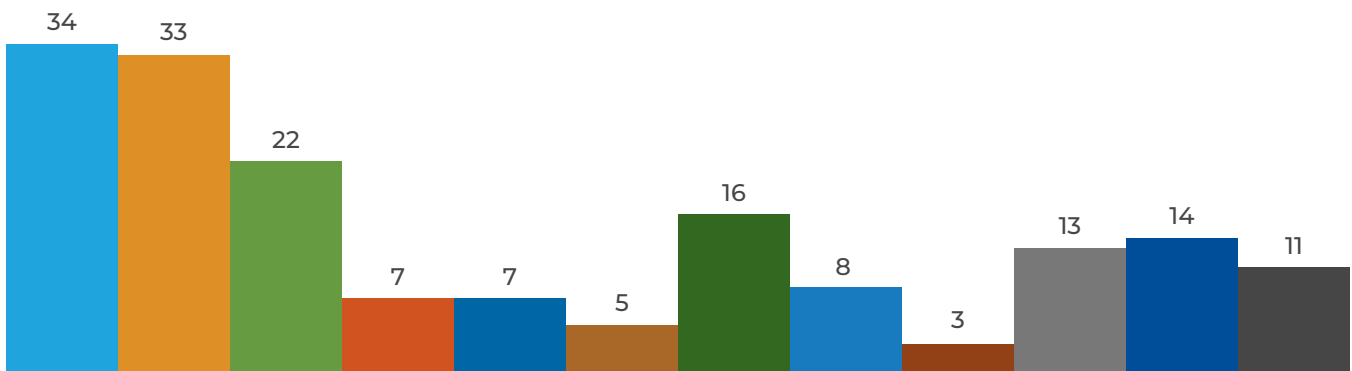
Of the complaints filed, 80% were processed as grievances. Of the 319 grievances handled by the Youth Grievance program, 100 dealt with OKDHS issues, and 219 were facility grievances. Of the complaints deemed non-grieveable, 44% were referred to the Statewide Abuse and Neglect Hotline or another OKDHS division for assistance. The chart above breaks these numbers out to provide the yearly and monthly totals for each category.



Nature of Complaints

When a complaint is entered into either the Foster Parent Voices website or the Foster Youth Matters website, the complainant is instructed to choose the nature of their complaint from a menu of options. The choices that are available on each website differ. Complaints of foster parents and children being served by CWS tend to focus on different issues.

Foster Parent Reports of Nature of the Complaint • Statewide Totals SFY 2022



- 34 - Action of an employee of DHS or child-placing agency
- 33 - Inaction of an employee of DHS or child-placing agency
- 22 - A decision made by an employee of DHS or child-placing agency
- 7 - Placement of child(ren)
- 7 - Removal of child(ren)
- 5 - Complaint regarding a policy or regulation
- 16 - Lack of communication
- 3 - Threats towards the foster parent
- 8 - Rude or unfair treatment
- 13 - Financial reimbursement for foster parent
- 14 - Violation of foster parent bill of rights
- 11 - Other

The nature of complaint categories most often cited in foster parent complaints for FY 2022 were “action of an employee of DHS or child-placing agency” (at 34 instances), “inaction of an employee of DHS or child-placing agency” (at 33 instances), “a decision made by an employee of DHS or child-placing agency” (at 22 instances).

The categories in the youth grievance program submissions were based on the foster youth bill of rights, with the language adjusted to account for a child’s development. The tables show the selections by raw numbers and by percentages. Of all the complaints filed with the program, most were concerned with issues related to youth and the facility staff at 41% (162 complaints) or other youth residing in the facility at 18% (71).

OCA Youth Grievance Statewide Complaints • SFY 2022

<p>1</p> <p>I need help, I don't know what happens next when I age out</p>	<p>1</p> <p>I'm not allowed to take part in my religion or made to go...</p>	<p>1</p> <p>I moved but I don't have my stuff</p>	<p>2</p> <p>I can't contact my court staff - My attorney, judge, CASA</p>
<p>2</p> <p>I am not placed with my brother(s) and/or sister(s)</p>	<p>2</p> <p>I am not being provided my essential documents (birth certificate, etc.)</p>	<p>3</p> <p>I don't know why I'm in custody or what happens next</p>	<p>5</p> <p>No one tells me when I have to move or why</p>
<p>5</p> <p>I need to see my doctor/dentist/therapist</p>	<p>5</p> <p>I don't get to visit my brother(s)/sister(s)</p>	<p>8</p> <p>I am not involved in case decisions that affect my family</p>	<p>9</p> <p>I'm not placed with family or a friend</p>
<p>11</p> <p>I don't get to visit friends/other family</p>	<p>11</p> <p>I don't feel safe</p>	<p>12</p> <p>My caseworker is not visiting me or calling me back</p>	<p>14</p> <p>I don't get to visit my parents</p>
<p>33</p> <p>Multiple</p>	<p>41</p> <p>Other</p>	<p>71</p> <p>I have problems with other kids where I live</p>	<p>162</p> <p>I have a problem with facility staff where I live</p>

OCA Youth Grievance Statewide Complaints by Percentage • SFY 2022

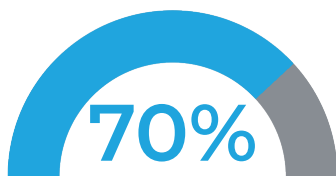
<p>0.3%</p> <p>My clothes don't fit me or I don't have clothes for the weather</p>	<p>0.3%</p> <p>I need help, I don't know what happens next when I age out</p>	<p>0.3%</p> <p>I'm not allowed to take part in my religion or made to go...</p>	<p>0.3%</p> <p>I moved but I don't have my stuff</p>
<p>1%</p> <p>I can't contact court staff, my attorney/ judge/CASA</p>	<p>1%</p> <p>I am not placed with my brother(s) and/or sister(s)</p>	<p>1%</p> <p>I am not being provided my essential documents (birth certificate, etc.)</p>	<p>1%</p> <p>I don't know why I'm in custody or what happens next</p>
<p>1%</p> <p>No one tells me when I have to move or why</p>	<p>1%</p> <p>I need to see my doctor/dentist/therapist</p>	<p>1%</p> <p>I don't get to visit my brother(s) / sister(s)</p>	<p>2%</p> <p>I am not involved in case decisions that affect my family</p>
<p>2%</p> <p>I'm not placed with family or a friend</p>	<p>3%</p> <p>I don't get to visit friend/other family</p>	<p>3%</p> <p>I don't feel safe</p>	<p>3%</p> <p>My caseworker is not visiting me or calling me back</p>
<p>4%</p> <p>I don't get to visit my parents</p>	<p>8%</p> <p>Multiple</p>	<p>10%</p> <p>Other</p>	<p>18%</p> <p>I have problems with other kids where I live</p>
<p>41%</p> <p>I have a problem with facility staff where I live</p>			

Number of Complaints Resolved

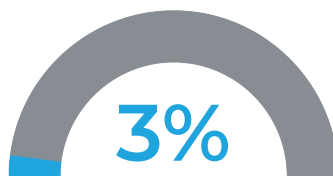
Complaint closure data is recorded when the file is closed, while complaint dispositions are recorded as the complaint is received. For this reason, it is not uncommon for the receipt of a complaint to be recorded in one fiscal year while its closure is recorded in a different fiscal year. This can lead to discrepancies between the number of complaints received and the number of complaints closed in a given year.

Regardless of their source, complaints can be closed in numerous ways, only some of which the grievance programs consider a resolution. A grievance can be closed for these reasons: it's either resolved, the complainant decided not to pursue it further, or the program reached its limit in helping the complainant.

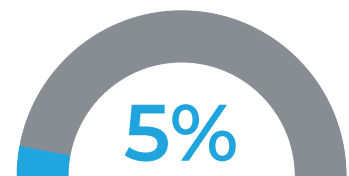
Closure Types • Statewide Totals SFY 2022



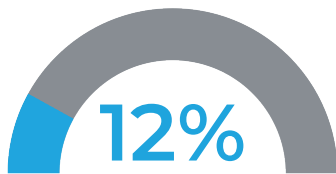
Resolved • Per Foster Parent (121)



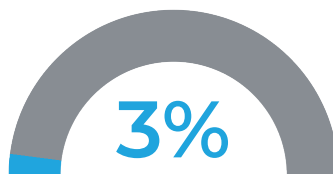
Resolved • Investigation Complete (6)



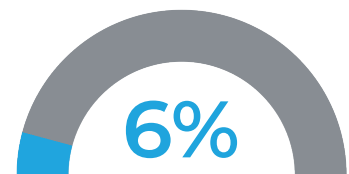
Resolved • Acceptance Deemed (8)



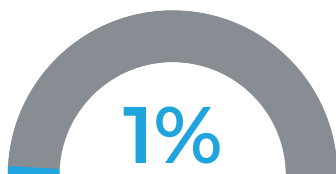
Closed • Refer Out (21)



Closed • Complaint Rendered Non-grievable (6)



Closed • Abandoned by Foster Parent (10)

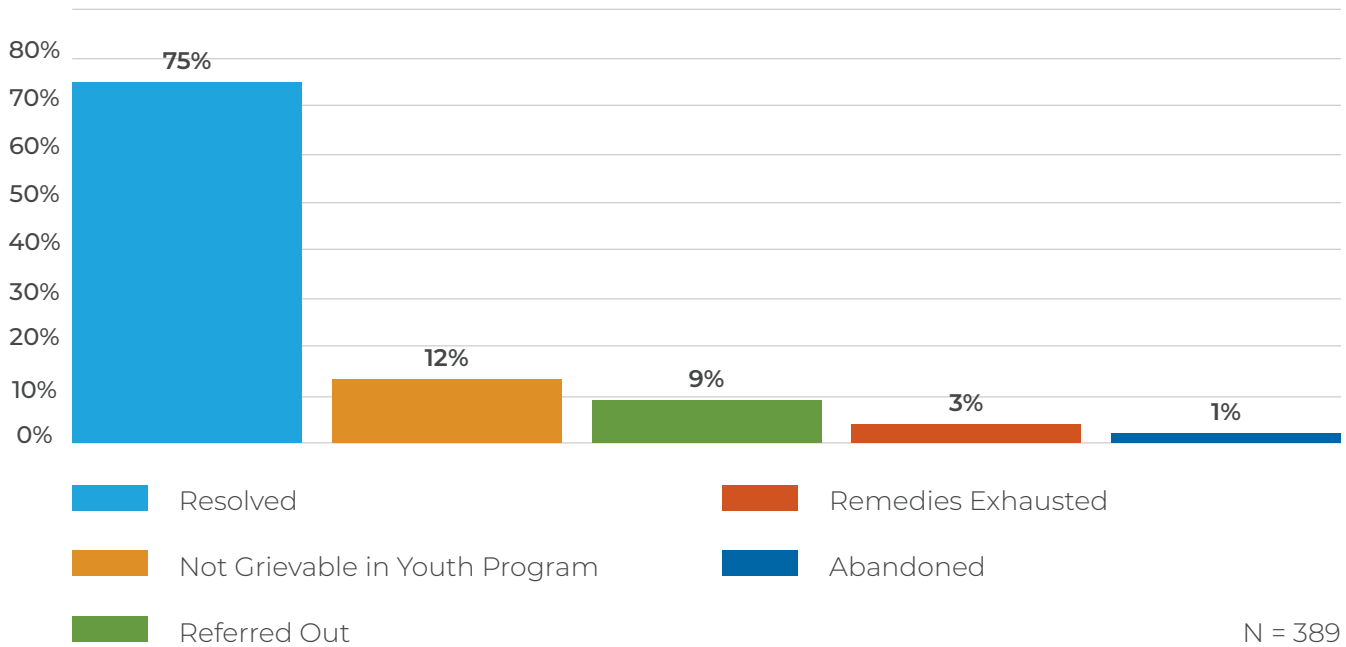


Closed • No Action Needed (2)

Raw numbers shown in parentheses

The FCO categorizes resolved complaints into three types: resolved by the foster parent, resolved with acceptance deemed, and resolved with investigation completed. In FY 2022, 78% of complaints were resolved (135 total). This is a 15% increase from FY 2021. A complaint can also close because no action was needed (typically because it was a duplicate of another grievance), because something happened to render the case non-grievable (like an intervening change in case circumstances), because it was referred out to another program, or because the foster parent abandoned it. The only significant change in this area was connected to the number of complaints closed due to having been abandoned by the foster parent. The number of complaints in this category decreased from 16 in FY 2021 to 10 in FY 2022.

OCA Youth Grievance Program • Closure Reasons SFY 2022



During FY 2022, the foster youth grievance program closed 389 grievances, with 75% resolved and 12% considered “not grievable.” The second category includes complaints by or on behalf of individuals not served by CWS and complaints rendered non-grievable by a change in case of circumstance, like filing a court order. Nine percent were referred out to other divisions of the agency or to other entities who had jurisdiction over the situation. In 3% of cases, the complaint was closed with remedies exhausted; this category includes complaints in which the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome, but the issue had been pursued as far as possible. A foster parent might be upset about trial reunification, or a step-parent could seek placement or visitation despite OKDHS determining that visitation is not in the child’s best interest due to legal or safety concerns.

Ongoing Community Outreach and System Improvement Efforts

The missions of the FCO and the youth grievance program are not limited solely to processing grievances. Both programs are responsible for identifying systemic issues in the child welfare system. Data collection and reporting achieve this goal. Both programs collect detailed data on the complaints filed through their portals. That data is then used to create reports, which have been provided quarterly or biannually to OCCY, the director of OKDHS, child welfare leadership, and the co-neutrals (when appropriate).

Both programs have educational components, which include providing training relevant to internal and external stakeholders. The youth grievance program offers training to facilities that contract with OKDHS detailing the roles of the facilities and the LGCs concerning grievances filed by (or on behalf of) children in care. The FCO has created training on the foster parent bill of rights, the court processes related to child welfare cases, and how foster parents can advocate for the children in their care without creating adversarial relationships. The FCO offers this training online and in person. Additionally, the FCO program offers online panel discussions on issues relevant to foster parents. Both of these efforts have been well received and are being developed further.

This report has been prepared and respectfully submitted in partnership with OKDHS and OCCY.





**OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND
YOUTH**

2915 N. Classen Boulevard, Suite 300
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106
(405) 606-4900

This publication is issued by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth as authorized by Annette Wisk Jacobi, Executive Director. Copies have not been printed, but are available through the agency's website at <http://www.oklahoma.gov/occy>.

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