

Office of the Children's Ombudsman



# 2025 OCO Annual Report

## Findings, Data, and Trends

CSA Conference  
October 2025





# Virginia's Office of the Children's Ombudsman

- Eric Reynolds, Director
- Jane Lissenden, Policy Analyst
- Denise Dickerson, Intake Analyst
- Destiny Allen, Investigations Analyst
- Frank Green, Investigations Analyst
- Jamie Anderson, Senior Investigations Analyst

# Mission Statement (Va. Code 2.2-439)

The OCO was created:

- as a means of effecting changes in policy, procedure, and legislation;
- educating the public;
- investigating and reviewing actions of the Department, local departments, child-placing agencies, or child-caring institutions;
- and monitoring and ensuring compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies

pertaining to **child protective services** and the placement, supervision, and treatment of, and improvement of delivery of care to, children in **foster care** and **adoptive** homes.



# Powers (§ 2.2-442)

The Children's Ombudsman has the authority to do all of the following with regard to children receiving child-protective services, in foster care, or placed for adoption:

1. Pursue all necessary action, including legal action, to protect the rights and welfare of such children.
2. Pursue legislative advocacy in the best interest of such children.
3. Review policies and procedures relating to any child-serving agency's involvement with such children and make recommendations for improvement.
4. Initiate investigations of the administrative acts of VDSS, LDSS, LCPA, or children's residential facilities on receipt of complaint or own initiative.





# INVESTIGATE

- Whether administrative acts of VDSS, LDSS, and LCPAs (and as of July 1, children's residential facilities):
  - Were contrary to law, rule, or policy;
  - Imposed without an adequate statement of reason; or
  - Based on irrelevant, immaterial, or erroneous grounds
- Administrative Act "includes an action, omission, decision, recommendation, practice, or other procedure of the Department, a local department, an adoption attorney, or a child-placing agency with respect to a particular child related to adoption, foster care, or protective services."
- Child Fatalities due to abuse (prior or current involvement with CPS or foster care)



# Data

**466** Complaints Received

**88 of 120** local departments of social services

**263** parents (**57%**)

**70** relatives (**15%**)

**25** foster parents (**5%**)

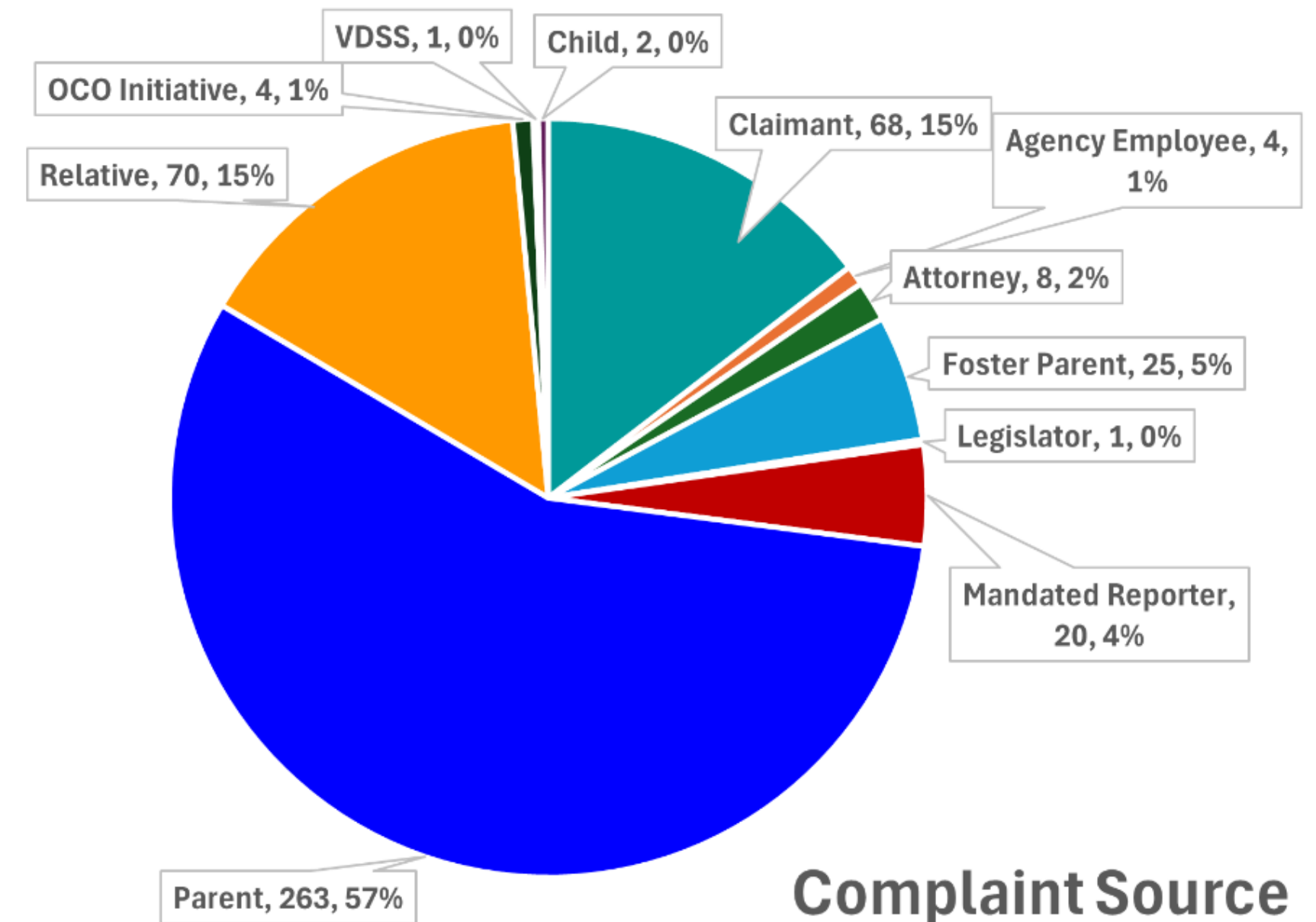
**20** mandated reporters (**4%**)

**8** attorneys(**2%**)

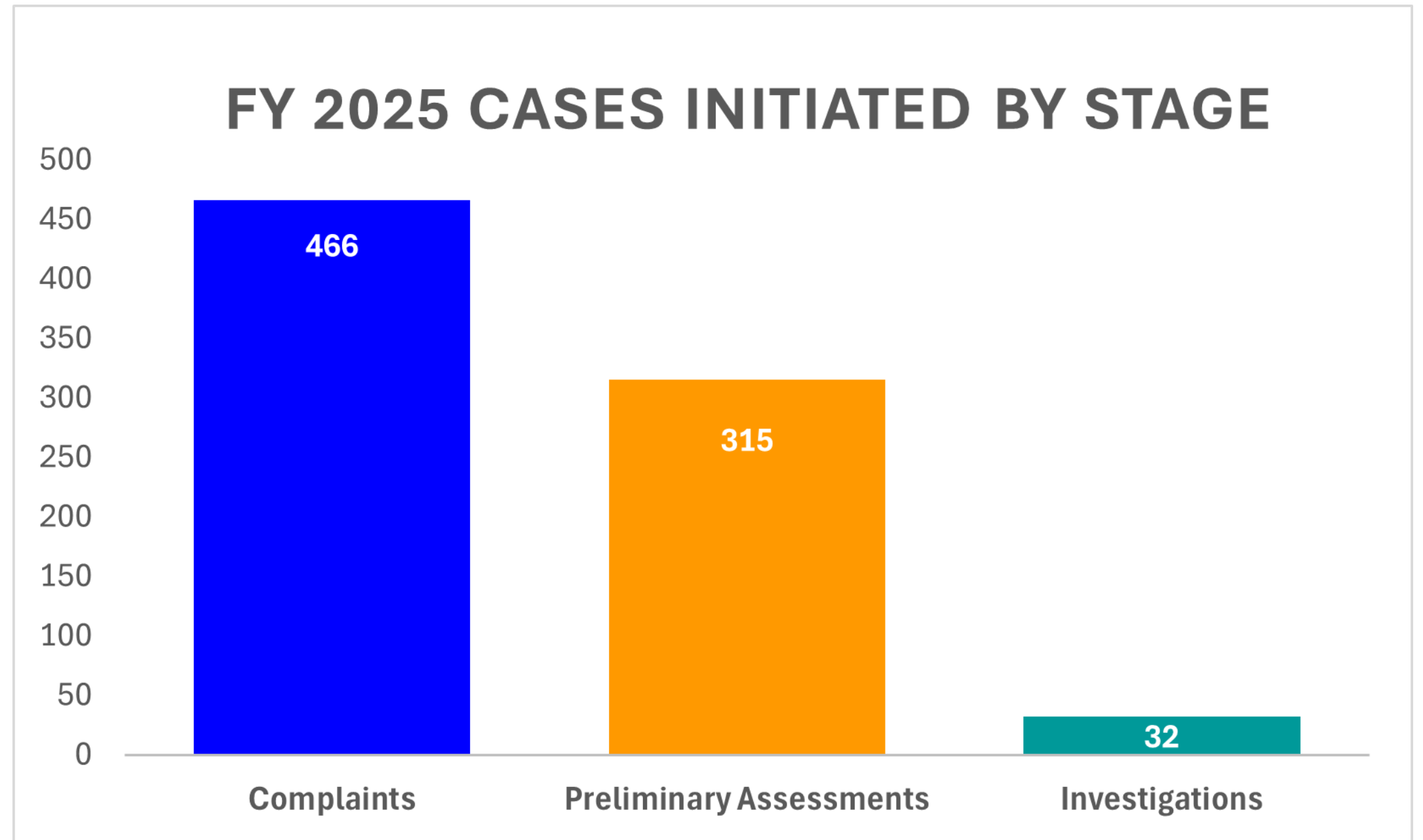
**4** LDSS employees (**1%**)

**2** children (**<1%**)

**75** others (**16%**)



**151** complaints screened out  
(**32%**)  
**315** preliminary assessments  
(**68%**)  
**32** investigations initiated  
(**7%**)



# Agencies Investigated

• Allegheny-Covington	Piedmont Region
• Carroll County	Western Region
• Chesterfield-Colonial Heights	Central Region
• Danville	Piedmont Region
• Franklin County	Piedmont Region
• Henry-Martinsville	Piedmont Region
• Nelson County	Piedmont Region
• Norfolk	Eastern Region
• Patrick County	Western Region
• Roanoke City	Piedmont Region
• Russell County	Western Region
• Virginia Beach	Eastern Region



# Allegations

<b>Agency Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff bias against complainant</li><li>• Agency culture</li><li>• Records contain false information</li><li>• Lack of responsiveness</li><li>• Worker changes</li></ul>
<b>ALAs/In Home Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of support for parents</li><li>• Placement decisions</li><li>• Lack of support for children</li><li>• Lack of support for relative caregiver</li><li>• Visitation issues</li></ul>
<b>CPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigation process/procedures</li><li>• Removals</li><li>• Family Assessment process/procedures</li><li>• Validation process</li><li>• Safety Plans</li></ul>
<b>Foster Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inadequate services</li><li>• Case mismanagement</li><li>• Placement decisions</li><li>• Visitation</li><li>• Inadequate reunification efforts</li></ul>

# Findings

<b>Agency Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agency case documentation</li><li>• Lack of responsiveness</li><li>• Agency culture</li><li>• Supervision</li></ul>
<b>ALAs/In Home Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of services to caregiver</li><li>• Placement decision</li><li>• Inadequate services to child</li></ul>
<b>CPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigation process/procedures</li><li>• Family Assessment process/procedures</li><li>• Validation process/decision</li><li>• Inadequate services</li><li>• Safety plan issues</li></ul>
<b>Foster Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inadequate reunification efforts</li><li>• Inadequate services</li><li>• Worker visits with children</li><li>• Visitation issues</li><li>• Licensing issues</li></ul>

# Noteworthy Practice Issues

LDSS participation in local Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) for child abuse investigations

CPS follow up with mandated reporters

Case transfers and collaboration between LDSS

Permanency placement decisions

Engagement with fathers

# Child Fatalities

Va. Code § 2.2-443. Fatality alleged to have occurred due to child abuse or neglect AND:

- the child died during an active child protective services investigation or open services case, or there was a valid or invalid child protective services complaint within 12 months immediately preceding the child's death.
- the child died while in foster care, unless the death is determined to have resulted from natural causes and there were no prior child protective services or licensing complaints concerning the foster home.
- the child was returned home from foster care and there is an active foster care case.
- a foster care case involving the deceased child or sibling was closed within 24 months immediately preceding the child's death.

# Child Fatalities - Data

## 49 Notifications Received

- 54 in FY 2024
- 50 in FY 2023
- 36 in FY 2022

Gender	Number of Children
Female	20
Male	27
Not Reported	2

Race	Number of Children
Black	14
Multi Racial	8
White	27

Age	Number of Children
≤1 month	7
1 – 2 months	4
2 months	4
3 months	3
4 months	1
5 months	3
6 months	3
7 months	1
8 months	1
1 - 2 years	7
2 – 3 years	2
3 years	1
4 years	2
10 years	1
11 years	2
13 years	1
15 years	1
16 years	1
17 years	4



# Child Fatalities - Data

## Conditions at the time of death/Family history

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Unsafe sleep</b> - 14 children (29%)</li><li>• <b>Substance Exposed at Birth</b> – 12 children (25%)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Cannabis (4 children)</li><li>– Amphetamine (4 children)</li><li>– MAT (3 children)</li><li>– Opiates (3 children)</li><li>– Cocaine (2 children)</li><li>– Fentanyl (2 children)</li><li>– Methamphetamine (1 child)</li><li>– Nicotine (1 child)</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Parental Substance Use</b> – 25 children (51%)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 22 were 3 years old or younger</li><li>• 5 were &lt;1 month old</li><li>• 9 also involved unsafe sleep conditions</li><li>• THC, Cocaine, Alcohol, Meth, Amphetamines, Opiates, MAT, Fentanyl, Heroin, Morphine and PCP</li></ul></li><li>• <b>Domestic Violence</b> – 9 cases (18%)</li><li>• <b>Parental Mental Health Conditions</b> – 13 cases (27%)</li></ul> |
|---|---|

# Child Fatalities - Data

## Children under the age of 6 months

Gender	Number of Children
Female	9
Male	14
Not Reported	2

Race	Number of Children
Black	7
Multiracial	3
White	15

Conditions/Family History	Number of Children
Unsafe Sleep	11
Substance-Exposed Infants	10
Parental Substance Use	17
Domestic Violence	4
Parental Mental Health Diagnoses	7

## Parental Cannabis Use – 19 cases

Age	Number of Children
6 months and younger	12
6 – 12 months	3
1- 3 years	3

# Recommendations for System Changes

## 1. Workforce Support

- Competitive Compensation
- Equal pay scales across jurisdictions
- In-Person Training
- Workforce Support Program (Peer Support Line)
- State pool of emergency FSS
- Consolidate smaller adjacent LDSS

## 2. Child Protective Services

- Centralized Intake and Validation
- 24-hour response for CPS referrals involving children < 3 yrs.
- Parental Substance misuse
  - Plans of Safe Care
  - Training

## 3. State Oversight of Local Administration

- State intervention in CPS cases
- Appointment/performance/removal of directors

## 4. Legal Representation

- Guardians ad litem – compensation increase
- Pilot programs for multidisciplinary legal representation model for parents

## 5. Children's Cabinet



# Office of the Children's Ombudsman

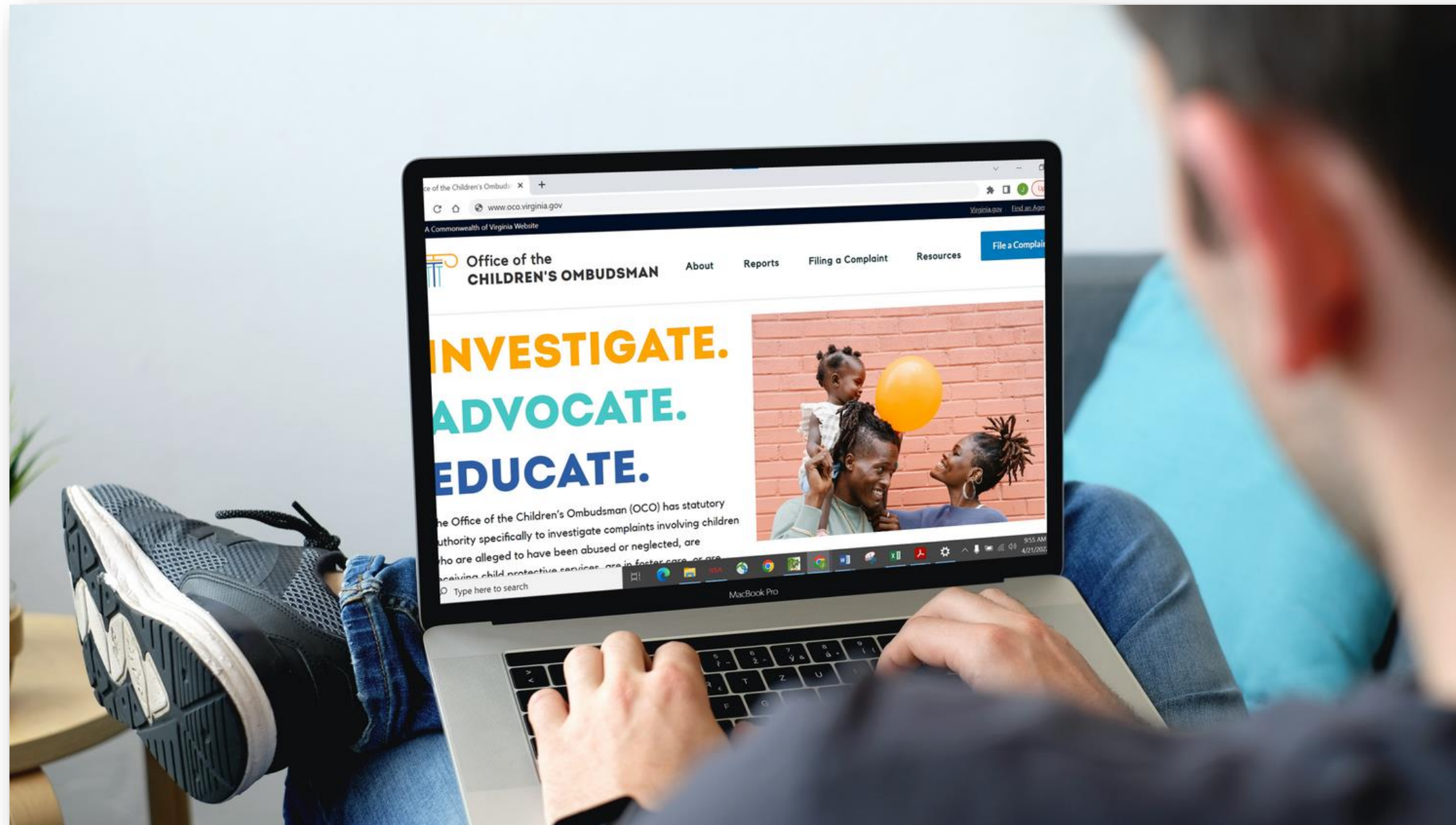
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- [complaints@oco.virginia.gov](mailto:complaints@oco.virginia.gov)
- (804) 225-4801
- [www.oco.virginia.gov/complaints](http://www.oco.virginia.gov/complaints)





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