

Office of the Children's Ombudsman



# Unlocking the Doors to Systemic Improvements

## 2024 OCO Annual Report Findings, Data, and Trends

CSA Conference  
October 2024





# Virginia's Office of the Children's Ombudsman

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# 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

**487** Complaints Received

**92 of 120** local departments of social services

**1** licensed child placing agency

## Complainants:

**259** parents (**55%**)

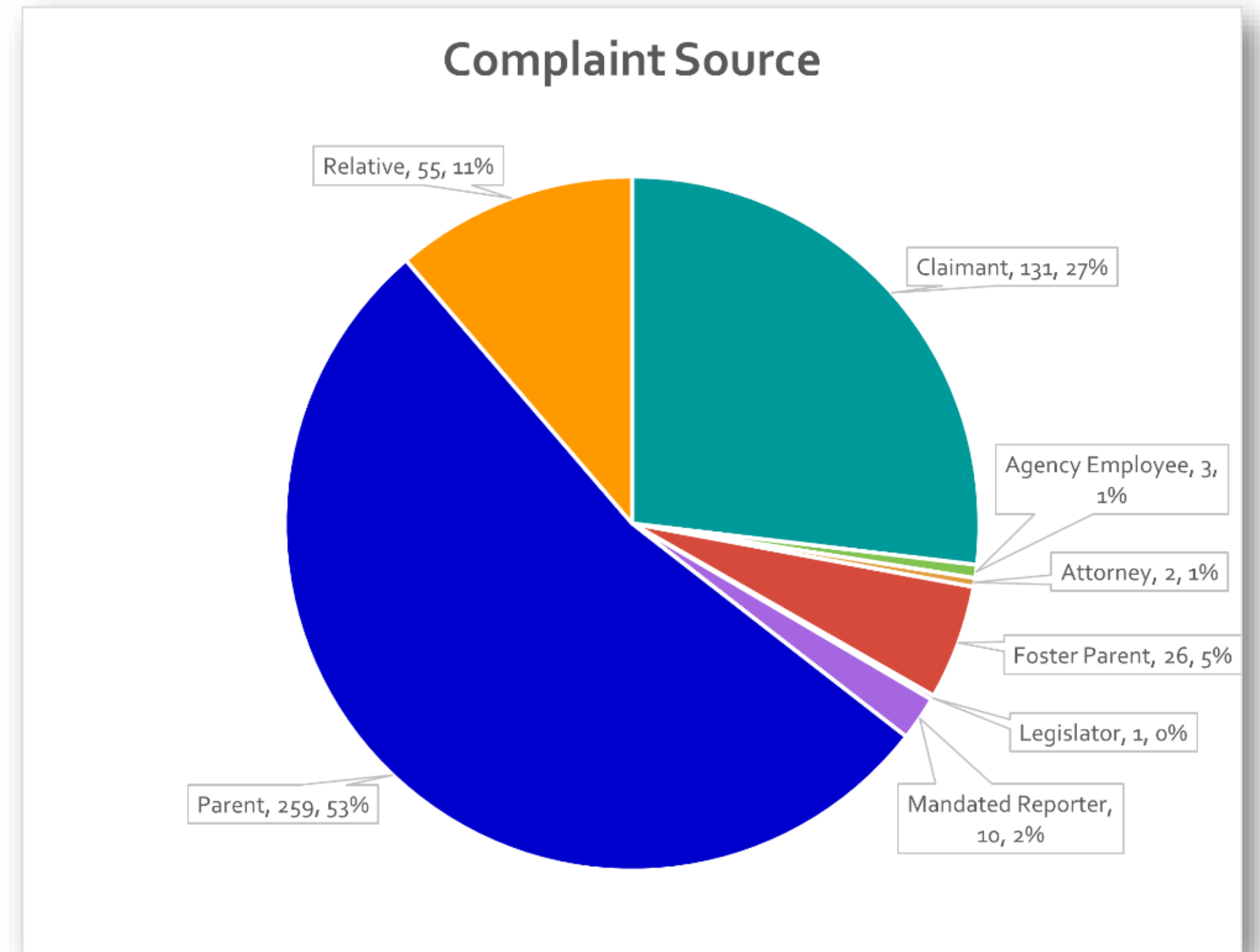
**55** relatives (**11%**)

**26** foster parents (**5%**)

**10** mandated reporters (**2%**)

**3** LDSS employees (**1%**)

**Others** (**28%**)

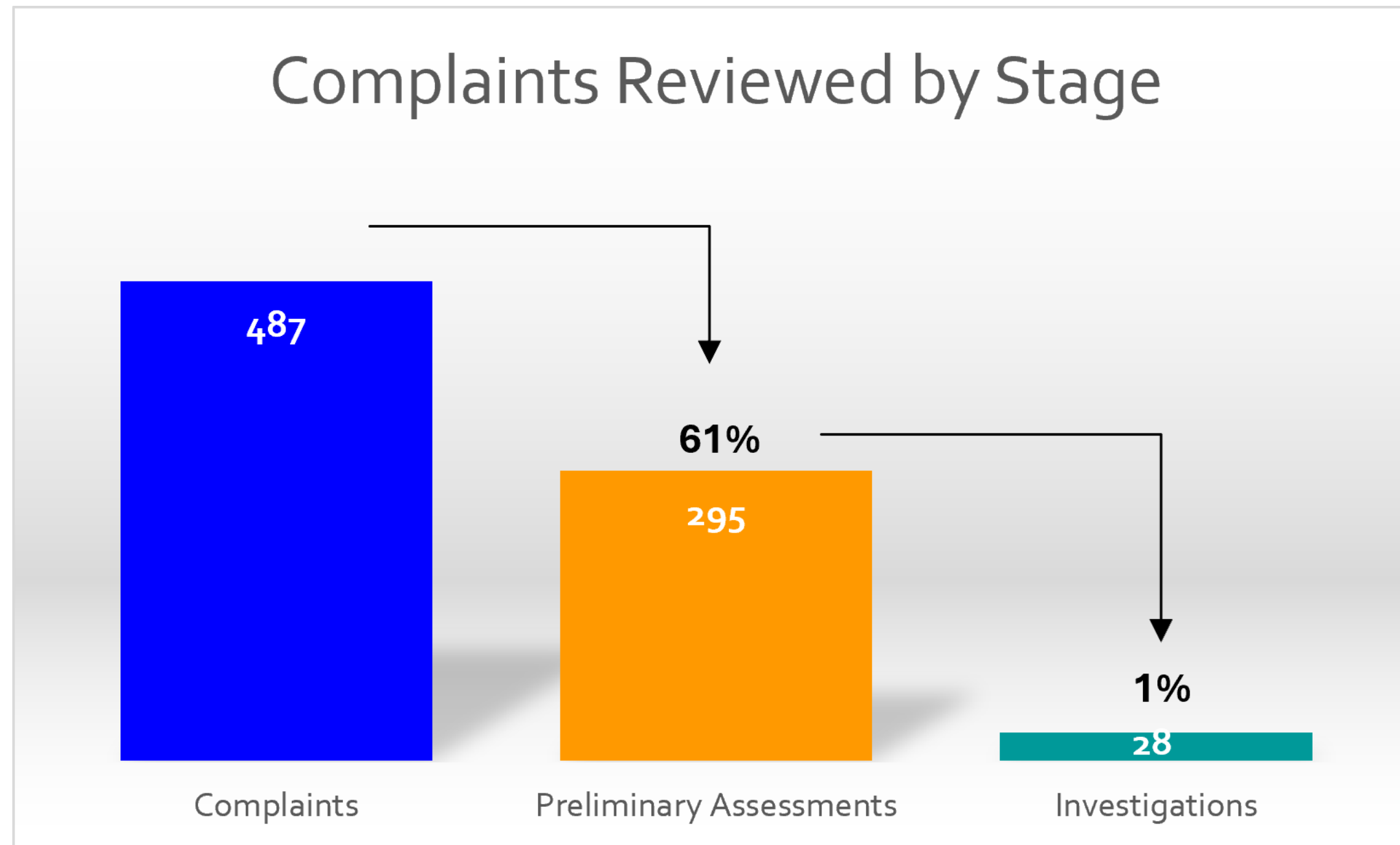


# Data

**195** complaints screened out (**39%**)

**295** preliminary assessments (**61%**)

**28** investigations initiated



# Agencies Investigated

- Botetourt County
- Carroll County
- Chesterfield-Colonial Heights
- Dinwiddie County
- Franklin City
- Frederick County
- Lynchburg
- Mecklenburg County
- Patrick County
- Portsmouth
- Prince William County
- Roanoke City
- Roanoke County
- Rockbridge-Buena Vista-Lexington Area
- Russell County
- Shenandoah County
- Shenandoah Valley (Augusta County, Staunton, Waynesboro)
- Sussex County
- Washington County
- Westmoreland County
- York County-Poquoson
- Intercept Health



# Findings

<b>CPS Investigation Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigation procedures</li><li>• Mandated contacts/interviews</li><li>• Recording interviews</li><li>• Not timely</li><li>• Lack of notice re: extensions</li></ul>
<b>Family Partnership Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not being held at critical stages</li></ul>
<b>Agency Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incomplete</li></ul>
<b>CPS Family Assessment Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment procedures</li><li>• Mandated contacts/interviews</li><li>• Safety/Risk Assessments</li><li>• Not timely</li></ul>
<b>CPS Safety Plans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unclear</li><li>• Copies not given to all parties</li><li>• Not signed by proper parties</li></ul>

# 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

## 54 Notifications Received

- 50 in FY 2023
- 36 in FY 2022

Gender	Number of Children
Female	24
Male	30

Race	Number of Children
Asian	1
Black	18
Multiracial	9
White	26

Age	Number of Children
1 month	10
6 weeks	1
2 months	8
3 months	2
4 months	7
5 months	1
6 months	1
7 months	2
8 months	1
9 months	2
1 year	1
2 years	4
4 years	3
5 years	2
8 years	3
12 years	3
14 years	1
16 years	2

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# Child Fatalities – Data

## Conditions at the time of death/Family history

Unsafe sleep - 24 cases (44%)

Parental Substance Use – 25 cases (46%)

- 24 were 4 years old and younger
- 16 were Substance-Exposed Infants
- 12 also involved unsafe sleep conditions
- THC, Cocaine, MAT, Meth, Heroin, and Fentanyl

Domestic Violence – 17 cases (31%)

Parental Mental Health Conditions – 9 cases (17%)



# Child Fatalities – Data

## Children under the age of 6 months

Gender	Number of Children
Female	15
Male	15

Race	Number of Children
Asian	0
Black	12
Multiracial	5
White	13

Conditions/Family History	Number of Children
Unsafe Sleep	22
Substance-Exposed Infants	12
Parental Substance Use	16
Domestic Violence	11
Parental Mental Health Diagnoses	6

# Recommendations for System Changes

1. Foster Care Placement Changes
2. Children Entering Foster Care due to Behavioral Health Challenges
3. Communication with Family
4. MDTs and Joint Child Abuse Investigations
5. Housing Support for Families and Youth Aging out of Foster Care
6. Substance Exposed Infants and Plans of Safe Care
7. Safe & Sound Task Force Initiatives
8. Legal Representation in Child Welfare Cases
9. Investments in Prevention and Protection

# OCO Observations

## 1. Case Management

- CPS Investigation and Family Assessments
- Documentation
- Clear and consistent Communication
- Intra-office collaboration (CPS, In-Home, FC)

## 2. Permanency

- What are reasonable efforts to achieve the goal?
- Are there clear expectation?
- Placement Decisions
- FCSPs: one size does not fit all
- Can the child return home safely today and if not, why not?

# OCO Observations

## 3. Safety

- Do the services meet the safety needs?
- Is that evaluation necessary? Is it useful? Is it reliable?
- Is the child's own behavior causing the risk, or the parents'?

## 4. Family Engagement

- Are you being responsive to the family?
- Trauma-informed practices/empathy
- Customer Service
- Fathers

# Executive Order 36:

## Stand Tall–Stay Strong– Succeed Together Reentry Initiative

The initiative builds on VADOC's reentry infrastructure and data to create a new dataset to proactively improve reentry outcomes for returning citizens and utilizing state infrastructure across agencies.

- The dataset tracks outcomes on six success factors linked to successful reentry.
  - Employment
  - Housing
  - Health Care Coverage
  - Mental Health Treatment
  - Substance Abuse Treatment
  - Appropriate VADOC supervision





# Why Reentry?

- Significance in impact
  - 20% of VA adults have criminal record
  - 50% of VA inmates were previously incarcerated in prisons and jails
  - Incarceration costs total over \$2 billion to the state and localities
  - If we do nothing, we will continue to see 50% recidivism rates and generational incarceration

## Reentry Improvements:

- Reduce crime
- Increase economic development
- Increase societal benefits



# Parenting Groups to Promote Family Stability

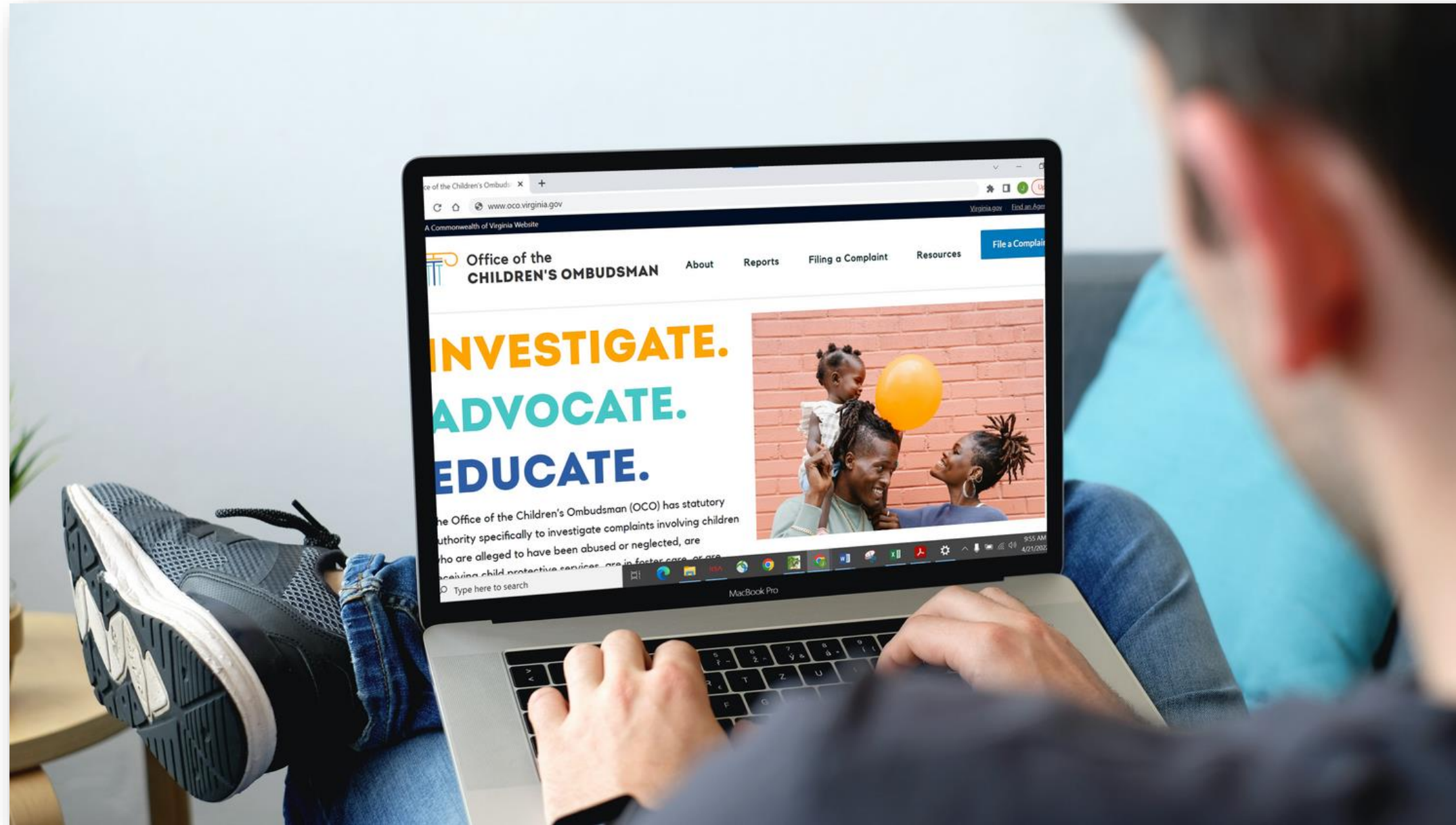
Inside Out Dads for Fathers

Partners in Parenting for Mothers

- Give inmates purpose as parents to their children (50% of inmates are parents)
- Empower them to be good parents
- Break generational incarceration with their kids (60+% of inmates come from fatherless homes)
- Integrate non-profits and volunteer networks in a state-wide partnership across an inspirational goal



# OFFICE of the CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN



[www.oco.virginia.gov](http://www.oco.virginia.gov)





# Office of the Children's Ombudsman

To file a complaint:

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

