

# Introduction

The Alaska State Ombudsman is responsible for investigating citizen complaints about state executive branch agencies. The Ombudsman can also review complaints about the administrative actions of the Alaska Court System, Legislative Affairs Agency, and quasi-governmental organizations.

## **The Ombudsman is not a citizen advocate.**

The Ombudsman's role is to objectively review the administrative actions of state agencies to determine whether they were unlawful, unreasonable, unfair, or based on unacceptable grounds. The Ombudsman helps ensure that state government is serving Alaskans as efficiently, effectively, and equitably as possible.

## **Our Mission:**

The Alaska State Ombudsman investigates citizen complaints about administrative acts of state agencies and determines appropriate remedies.

## **Our Vision:**

The Alaska State Ombudsman promotes fair and efficient government through objective inquiry and well-reasoned recommendations for meaningful and measurable improvement.

## **CORE VALUES**

### **Objectivity:**

We are committed to reviewing citizen complaints without bias or preconception.

### **Curiosity:**

We are committed to looking carefully at citizen complaints and the larger context in which they arise. We are also committed to a culture of perpetual learning and discovery.

### **Respect:**

We are committed to treating everyone with respect and compassion, to listening to understand, and to maintaining a work environment that fosters acceptance, compassion, and understanding.

### **Integrity:**

We are committed to performing our work with honesty, fairness, and authenticity and in accordance with professional and statutory ethical guidelines.

### **Public Service:**

We are committed to helping people resolve complaints individually and to improving the effectiveness and equity of government systems.

## What We Do

The Alaska State Ombudsman serves Alaskans in a variety of ways.

**Information and referral:** We help connect citizens, service providers, state agencies, and policymakers to resources. Whether it's a referral to a rental assistance program to prevent eviction, consumer protection programs, a community service to fill a gap in state programs, or legal assistance, we try to ensure that the next phone call or visit is the last one the person makes. We actively update and expand our referral resources, so that we make the best connections possible.

**Brief Assistance:** Many of the complaints we receive can be resolved quickly and informally with a phone call or email to the agency or by providing the complainant with information to help resolve their problem themselves.

**Investigation:** Complaints that involve complex problems require more time and review. Investigators interview state agency staff and witnesses, review records, research legal authority and policy, and develop a clear and objective picture of what happened and why. If the allegations in the complaint are found to be justified, the Ombudsman will recommend a solution to the agency.

**Report and Recommendation:** When a complaint requires an in-depth investigation, there is a report developed by the investigator(s). This confidential report is shared with the state agency, which has the opportunity to respond and comment on the report. The agency's comments are carefully considered and incorporated into the final confidential report to the agency. When the issue addressed in the investigation is one that is of public interest, an executive summary of the report is released.

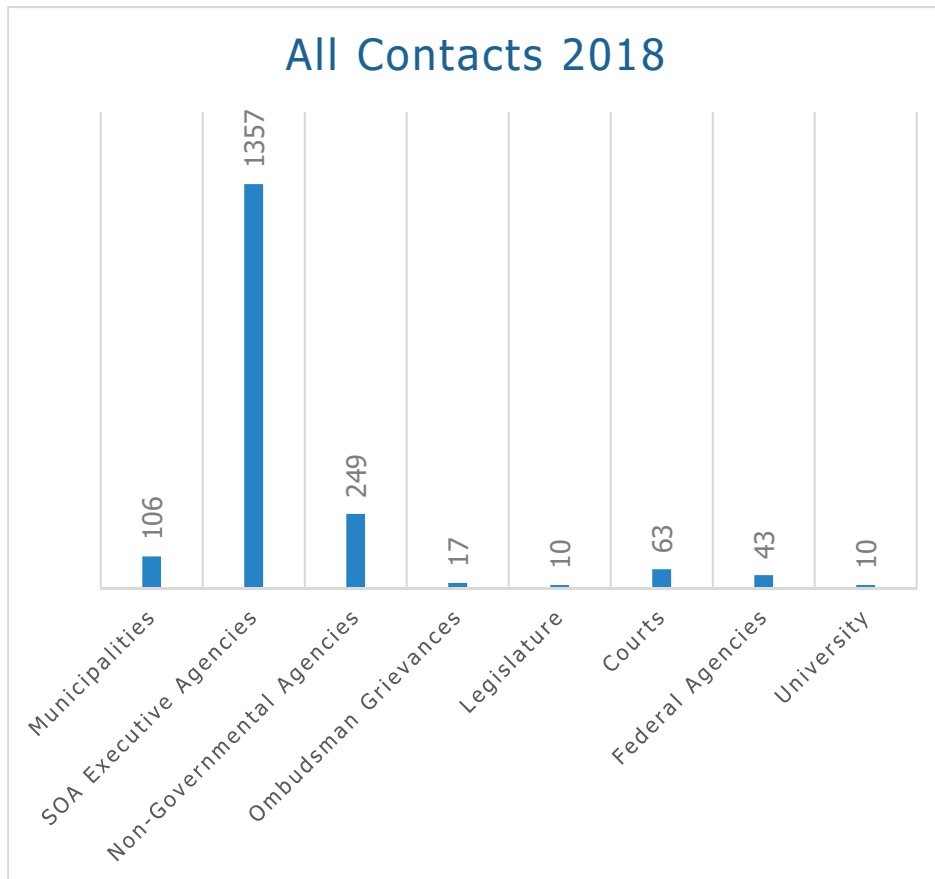




# Overview of Contacts

The Alaska State Ombudsman received **1,855** requests for assistance (“contacts”) in 2018. These include requests for information, referrals for non-jurisdictional complaints, and jurisdictional complaints. In 2018, 73% of contacts with our office were related to questions or complaints about Alaska executive branch agencies. The remainder were about municipal governments, federal agencies, the University of Alaska System, the Court System, or non-governmental organizations.

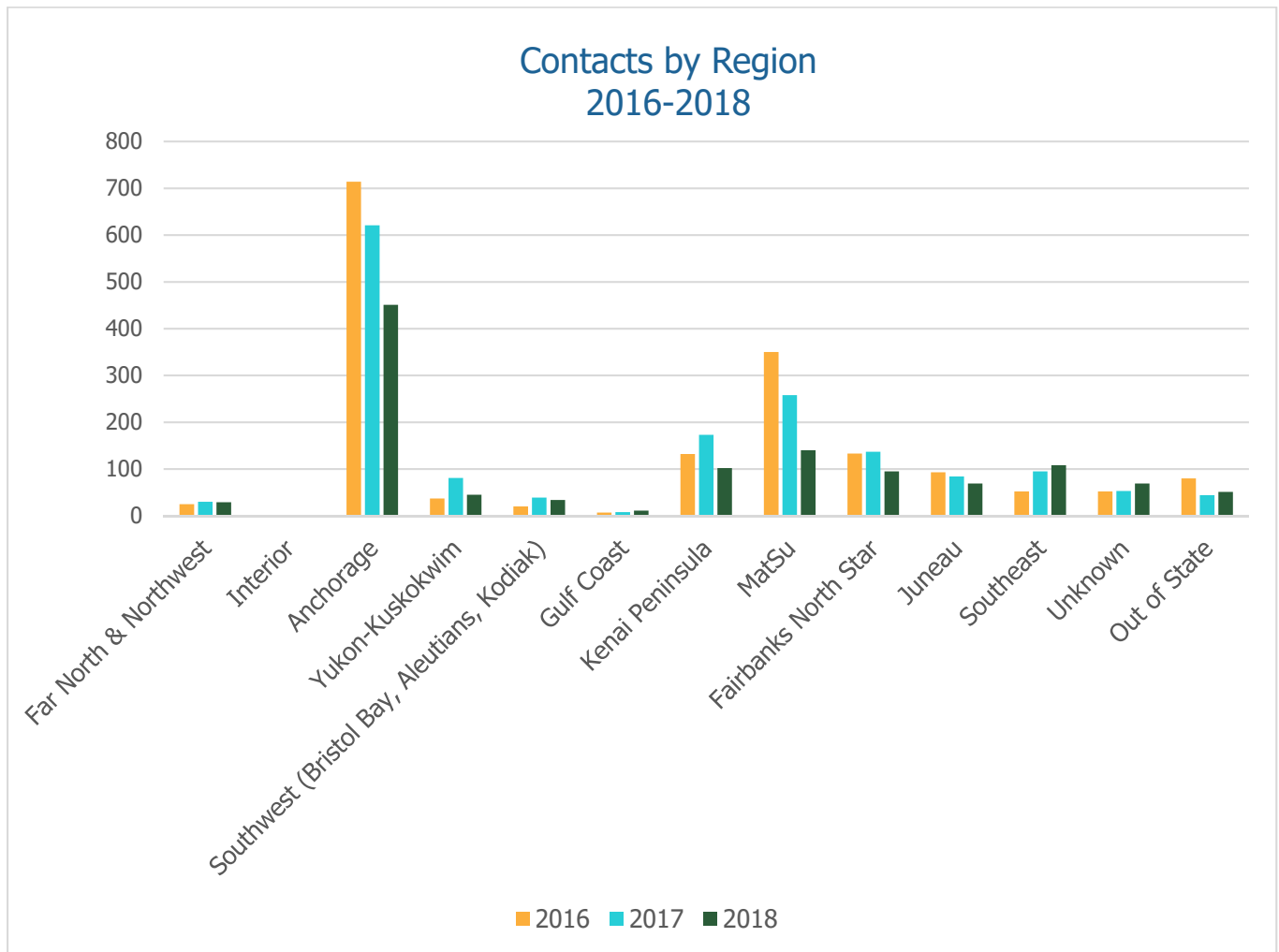
The number of contacts in 2018 decreased by 20% compared to 2017. There are several contributors to the decrease in contacts in 2018. The Ombudsman launched a new, user-oriented website in April 2018. There is now an easy-to-use guide to community and state services on our website, [www.ombud.alaska.gov](http://www.ombud.alaska.gov). This allows Alaskans to find information and referrals 24/7 at their convenience. Our website received 16,401 visits from the date of launch to the end of 2018.





The Ombudsman set specific priorities for review of complaints about the Department of Corrections, which has resulted in fewer complaints being made about non-priority issues. A major driver of complaints about the Department of Corrections – the administrative grievance process – was improved in the summer of 2018, resulting in decreased complaints in the last half of the year. Finally, ombudsman staff have increased quality assurance processes to avoid duplication of contacts in the case management system.

Most contacts with the Alaska State Ombudsman come from people in Anchorage, followed by the Mat-Su Valley and Kenai Peninsula. Contacts from rural Alaskan communities have increased since 2016, while contacts from more urban regions have decreased.



## The Complaint Process

The Alaska State Ombudsman reviews every complaint objectively to determine whether there is merit to the allegations being made about a state agency, whether a reasonable remedy is available, and whether we have resources to dedicate to an investigation.



All contacts and new complaints are handled by the Intake Team. The Intake Team evaluates whether a complaint is jurisdictional for the Alaska State Ombudsman and whether the complaint is ripe for review. If the complaint is not jurisdictional, the Intake Team will connect the person to community resources that can help them resolve their problem. In 2018, we provided information and referral to community resources to **528** contacts requesting assistance with non-jurisdictional complaints.

If the complainant has not yet attempted to resolve their problem with the agency, either informally or through a grievance or appeal process, the Intake Team will provide them with the information they need to contact the agency to resolve their problem. All complainants referred to an agency's conflict/complaint resolution process are encouraged to return to the Alaska State Ombudsman if the agency is not responsive or the outcome is not satisfactory.



In 2018, we declined 44% of the 1,855 complaints we received. These complaints were usually about non-jurisdictional matters, or about problems that the person had not yet tried to resolve with the state agency. Some were declined because the person was not directly affected by the problem, while others were declined because they were about problems that occurred more than a year ago. Whenever we decline a complaint for investigation, we provide referral information to other resources whenever available and appropriate.

Often, the Intake Team can quickly identify the root of the complainant's problem and resolve it with brief communications with the state agency. Complaints that are not easily resolved are reviewed by all staff each week. Investigators and the Intake Team discuss the facts alleged, whether it presents evidence of a pattern or systemic problem, and whether resolution is possible. An investigator will accept the complaint for more in-depth review and determine whether investigation is appropriate. In 2018, we opened **1,327** complaints for review and **472** for investigation.

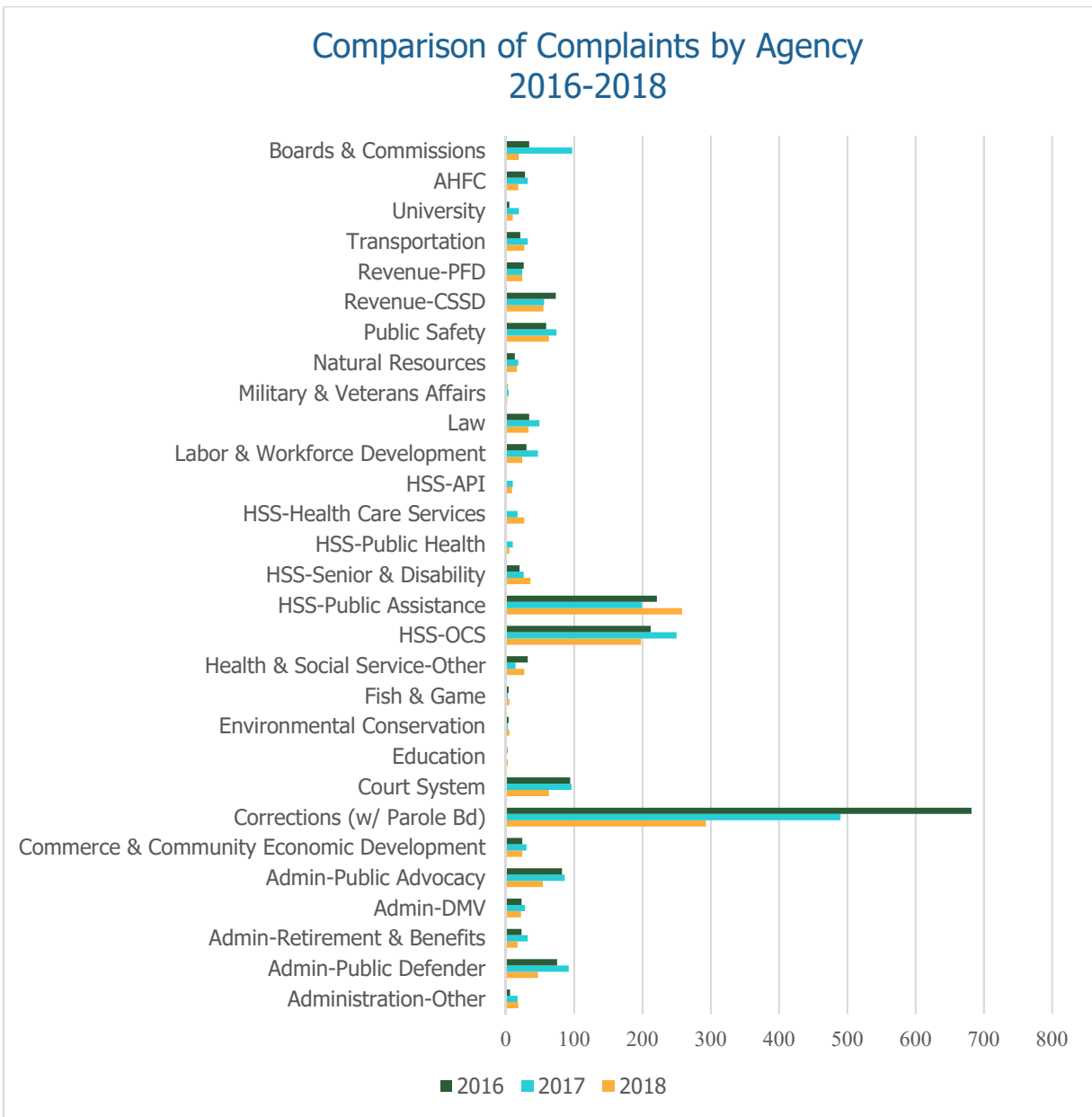
The Alaska State Ombudsman is a neutral, non-partisan, independent organization. All investigations are conducted without bias or preconception. Individual complaints are evaluated in the context of past investigations and larger systems issues. An investigation typically includes extensive review of legal authority, evidence and documentation from the complainant and state agency, case files, court files and records, witness interviews, and other information. The Ombudsman can issue subpoenas and depose witnesses when required.

Some investigations can be completed in a matter of days. More complex or systemic complaints can take months. We closed **1,302** complaints in 2018. Of these, **442** were resolved informally. The number of complex investigations continued to increase in 2018, to **49** (there were 23 complex investigations completed in 2017); **93%** of these complex investigations were closed within one year of receipt.

The Alaska State Ombudsman's focus is ensuring that state government serves citizens fairly, effectively, and efficiently. We strive to offer well-reasoned recommendations for resolving complaints that are justified by the evidence. Recommendations are based on the evidence collected during the investigation, as well as best-practices, research, and stakeholder input.

# Complaints by Agency

While the Ombudsman receives complaints about all state agencies, the majority of complaints are about departments and government programs that have the most direct impact on the lives of Alaskans. Complaints about the Departments of Health and Social Services (560) and Corrections (293) made up 46% of all complaints in 2018. Complaints about the Court System (63) and the Departments of Administration (160), Public Safety (62), and Law (32) made up 13.7% of all complaints in 2018.





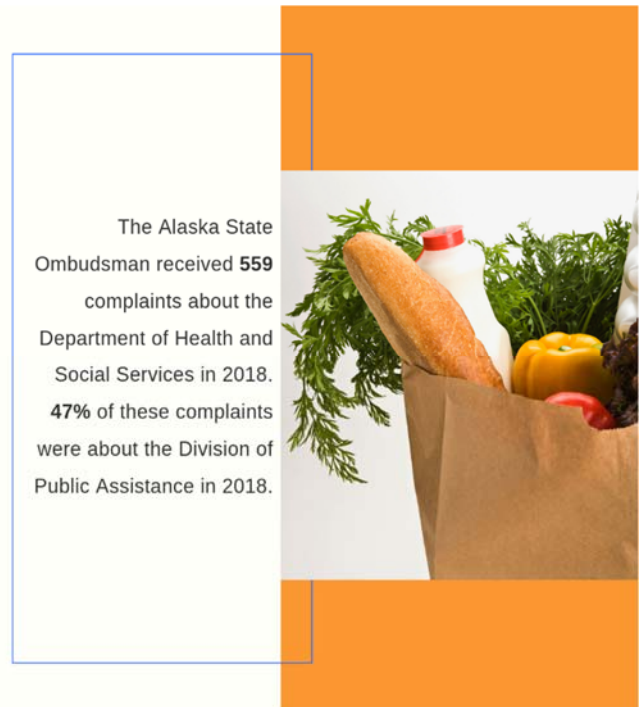
## Department of Health and Social Services

There were **559** complaints about the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) in 2018. Nearly half (47%) of the complaints were about the Division of Public Assistance, primarily about delays and lack of communication related to applications for public benefits (Food Stamps/SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/TANF, Medicaid, Adult Public Assistance, Interim Assistance, etc.). Complaints about the Office of Children’s Services accounted for 35% of complaints about DHSS. Complaints about the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services accounted for about 8% of all DHSS complaints.

### Division of Public Assistance

The Ombudsman initiated a systemic investigation of the Division of Public Assistance on January 3, 2018, based on the more than 400 complaints received in 2016-2017. The Ombudsman investigated three allegations:

- **Contrary to Law:** The Division of Public Assistance does not meet mandated timelines for processing applications and recertifications for program benefits as required by state and federal law.
- **Unreasonable:** The Division of Public Assistance does not consistently respond to telephone calls, emails, or other forms of communication from the public.
- **Performed Inefficiently:** The Division of Public Assistance’s processing model for managing clients’ long-term care cases is inefficient and ineffective.



A team of four investigators were assigned to the investigation, which was conducted in close collaboration with agency staff. Substantial stakeholder input was collected, to inform the Ombudsman’s evaluation of the evidence and the impact of agency delays and lack of resources on individual Alaskans. Recommendations were developed with input from operations experts, eligibility staff, Division leadership, and stakeholders. This investigatory model allowed





the Ombudsman to conclude the investigation and issue a report and recommendations within four months of the start of the investigation.

The Ombudsman found all three allegations justified by a preponderance of the evidence and made seven (7) recommendations to support efficient and accurate processing of applications for and recertification of eligibility for public benefits. The Ombudsman recommended that the Division of Public Assistance:

- Increase staff capacity to meet workload demands;
- Strengthen quality assurance processes;
- Improve document management practices;
- Create a “document hub” to centralize receipt, processing, and filing of documents;
- Ensure all Division of Public Assistance offices have accurate caller ID;
- Address obstacles to recruitment and retention; and
- Implement a case management model for the Long-Term Care Unit.

The Division accepted all the Ombudsman’s recommendations. The Alaska Legislature appropriated funding for 20 positions in the FY2019 budget to increase capacity to meet needs identified in the Ombudsman’s report. The Division reported that hiring for those positions was delayed by the need to renovate the Wasilla office to create workstations, and damage caused by the November 30, 2018 earthquake. The Division hired staff to streamline the application process and support the eligibility technician position classification study recommended by the Ombudsman. The Division hired additional quality assurance staff and revised training curricula. Supervisors received training on how they support and motivate eligibility technicians, use data and performance metrics in supervision, and work collaboratively with staff.

The Division began to improve document management practices by streamlining their shared server system, upgrading bandwidth in the Wasilla office, and continuing to pursue a Virtual Call Center. The Division also began planning for the recommended “document hub” in the Wasilla location and for a uniform caller ID for all offices.

The Division of Public Assistance implemented the new case management model and added staff to the Long-Term Care Unit in May and June 2018, and stakeholders reported improved communications and services soon after.



The Division of Public Assistance still reports a backlog in processing applications for and recertifications of eligibility for public assistance programs. The Division reported that the backlog had been reduced from more than 15,000 in June 2018 to less than 6,000 in April 2019.

## Office of Children’s Services

The Ombudsman received **196** complaints about the Office of Children’s Services (OCS), primarily about foster care and relative placement issues (35%) and the actions or conduct of caseworkers (36%). Complaints about visitation accounted for 15% of all complaints about the Office of Children’s Services. Of the 48 complaints about OCS that were investigated and closed in 2018, all were resolved informally with the agency.

A large proportion (75%) of complaints about the Office of Children’s Services were about matters that had been or would be decided by a judge in a Child in Need of Aid (CINA) case. The Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction to review judicial decisions or intervene in legal actions, so these complaints were declined with referrals to legal and family support services.



## Other Divisions

The Ombudsman reviewed **33** complaints about the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. Of these, more than a quarter were related to Adult Protective Services. The remainder were about the General Relief program (which funds assisted living services in very limited circumstances) and the home and community-based services programs the Division administers. There were **15** complaints about the Division of Health Care Services. Most of these involved problems with payment for Medicaid services or approval of travel for medical services.



## Department of Corrections

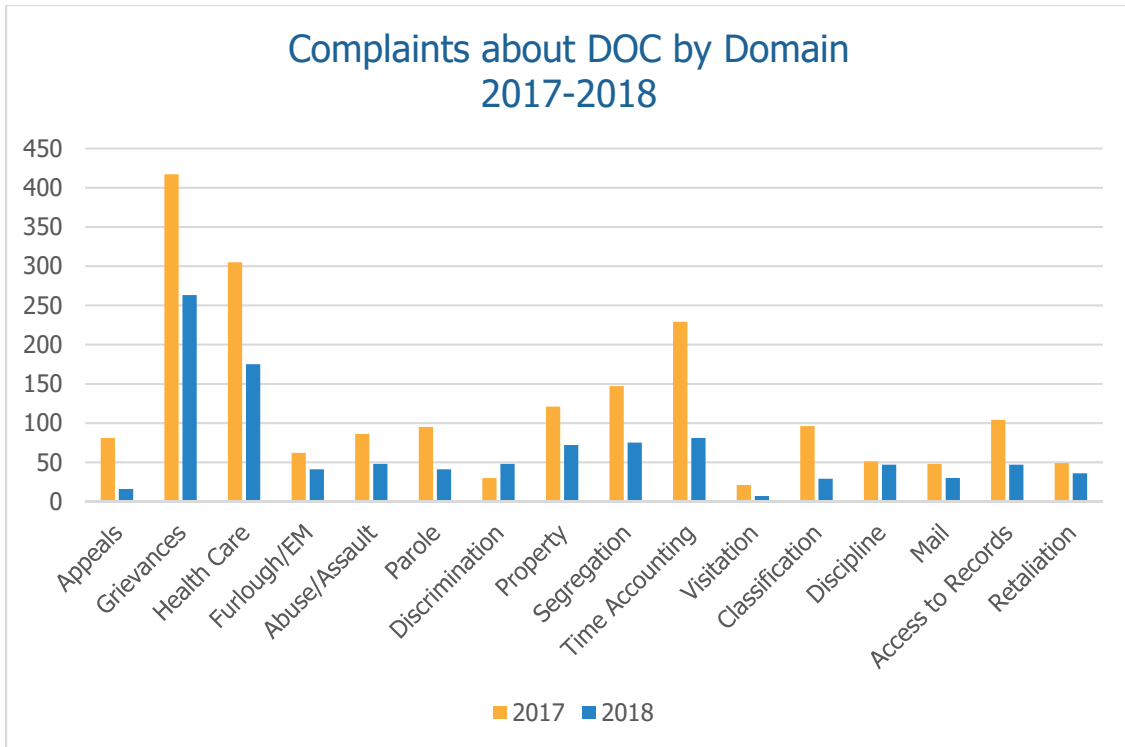
There were **779** complaints to the Ombudsman about the Department of Corrections (DOC). Most of these (90%) were about conditions, staff, and policies in DOC institutions. Probation and Pre-Trial Services followed with 4.7% of complaints, and then Health Care Services (inclusive of behavioral health) with 22%.

In 2018, the Ombudsman set priorities for investigation of complaints about DOC, due to the very large number of complaints — and the significant number of repeat complainants. Pursuant to 21 AAC 25.070, the Ombudsman has prioritized investigation of complaints about health, safety, access to health care, the grievance process, segregation, and emergencies. Complaints about any other subjects are typically declined with referrals to other resources. This has resulted in an overall reduction in complaints about DOC by 40% compared to 2017.

Most complaints (75%) about DOC are declined as non-jurisdictional, premature, or as outside our investigatory priorities. Of complaints investigated, most (70%) were resolved quickly by communicating with DOC staff to determine what happened, why, and whether a remedy is appropriate. Very few complaints (5%) required a formal report and recommendations to be resolved.

### Complaints by Domain

The most frequent complaints (263) to the Ombudsman about DOC involved the administrative grievance process in the institutions. Complaints about health care services (175), including mental health services, were the second most prevalent. The number of complaints across all domains decreased in 2018. As noted above, part of the overall reduction in complaints about DOC is due to the Ombudsman setting priorities for investigation in 2018.



Even considering the impact of the Ombudsman’s priorities, there have been notable reductions in complaints in some key areas. Continuous reductions in the number of complaints about time accounting across all institutions appear to be due to increased training and staff capacity over time. In 2017, we experienced a spike in complaints related to time accounting and furlough, as inmates learned about the new law enacted in SB91.

We expect that complaints about property will continue to decrease after DOC’s efforts in 2017-2018 to make property policies consistent across all institutions. Significant reductions in complaints about grievances, health care, and segregation appear to be driven by improvements in capacity, programs, and practices at three institutions: Anchorage Correctional Complex, Goose Creek Correctional Center, and Spring Creek Correctional Center.

### Complaints by Institution

Anchorage Correctional Complex (ACC) accounted for 33.6% of complaints to the Ombudsman in 2018. According to the 2017 DOC Offender Profile, ACC only held 19.4% of the prisoner population. However, this is a transient population of primarily unsentenced offenders, which creates a different environment than sentenced facilities. ACC also holds the acute mental health treatment module. Goose Creek Correctional

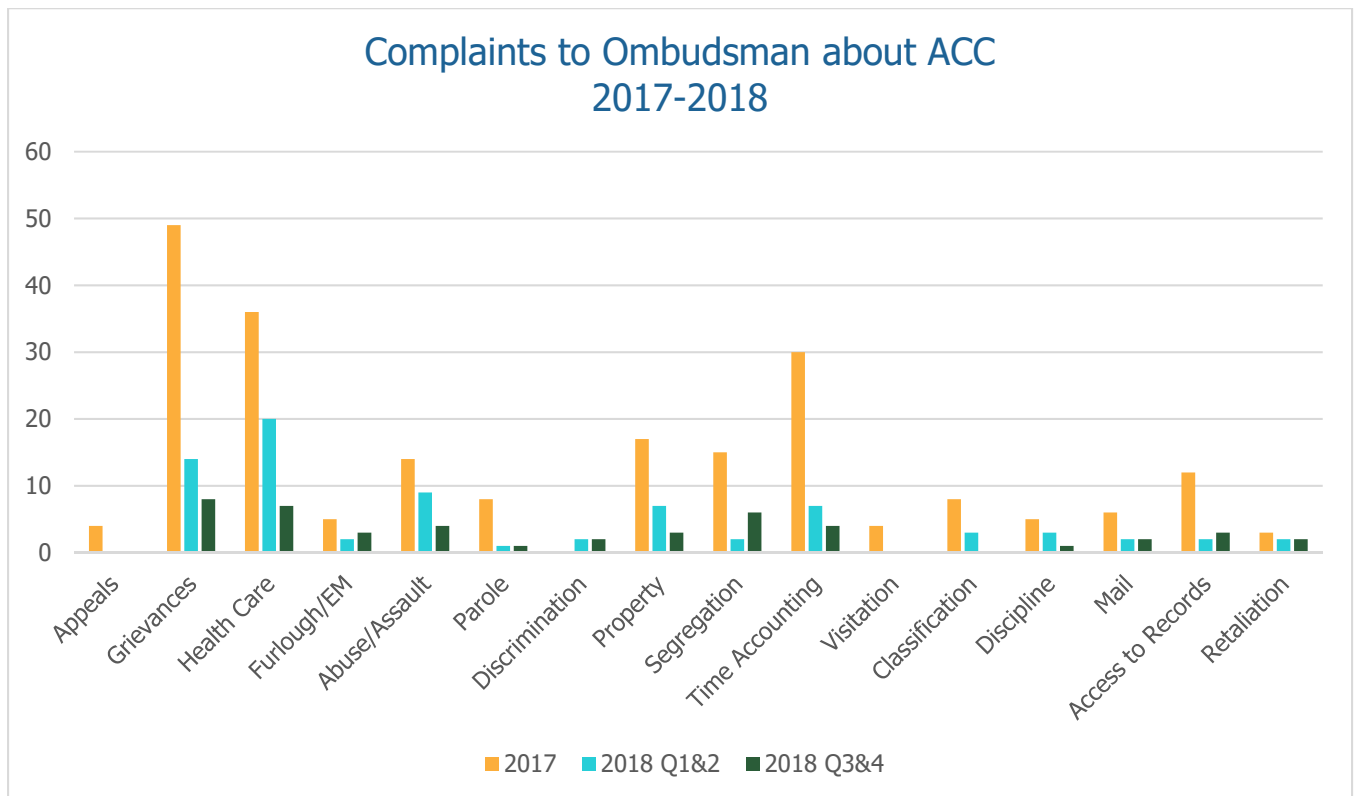


Center (GCCC) accounted for 21% of complaints and housed 30.71% of the prison population in 2017. Spring Creek Correctional Center (SCCC) accounted for 9.37% of complaints and held 9.39% of the prison population. This indicates that prison population size has less impact on complaint trends over time than the conditions and policies at each institution.

### Anchorage Correctional Complex

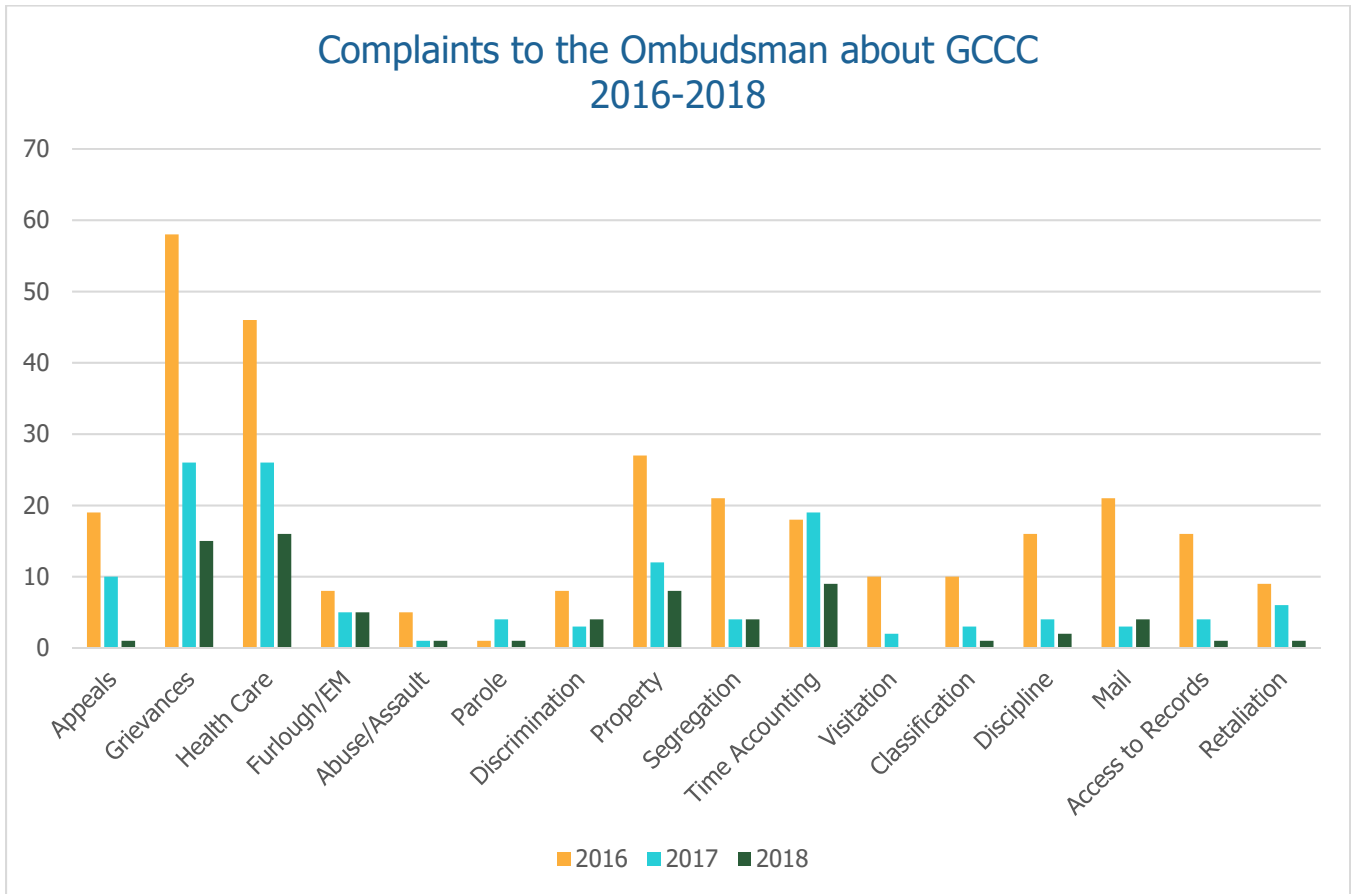
For several years, the Ombudsman received a substantial number of complaints about the grievance process at ACC. Our investigations documented long delays, lost paperwork, and a generally ineffective process for both inmates and corrections staff. The Ombudsman met with DOC leadership in June 2018 to identify options to address these pervasive problems. DOC agreed to implement targeted strategies to improve grievance staffing and processes within 30 days.

New complaints about the grievance process at ACC decreased by 55% in 2018, with most of that decrease occurring after changes were implemented. ACC staff worked hard to address the backlogged grievances, expand staff capacity with training and support, and ensure that inmates have a fair opportunity to resolve their complaints directly with the institution.



## Goose Creek Correctional Center

Complaints about GCCC have decreased since 2016. The reduction in complaints is most notable for the grievance process (-74%), access to health care (-65%), and segregation (-81%). The implementation of the Quay Assessment model for housing inmates may be a contributing factor, as it provides additional housing and programming options for protective custody inmates who previously were confined to administrative segregation.

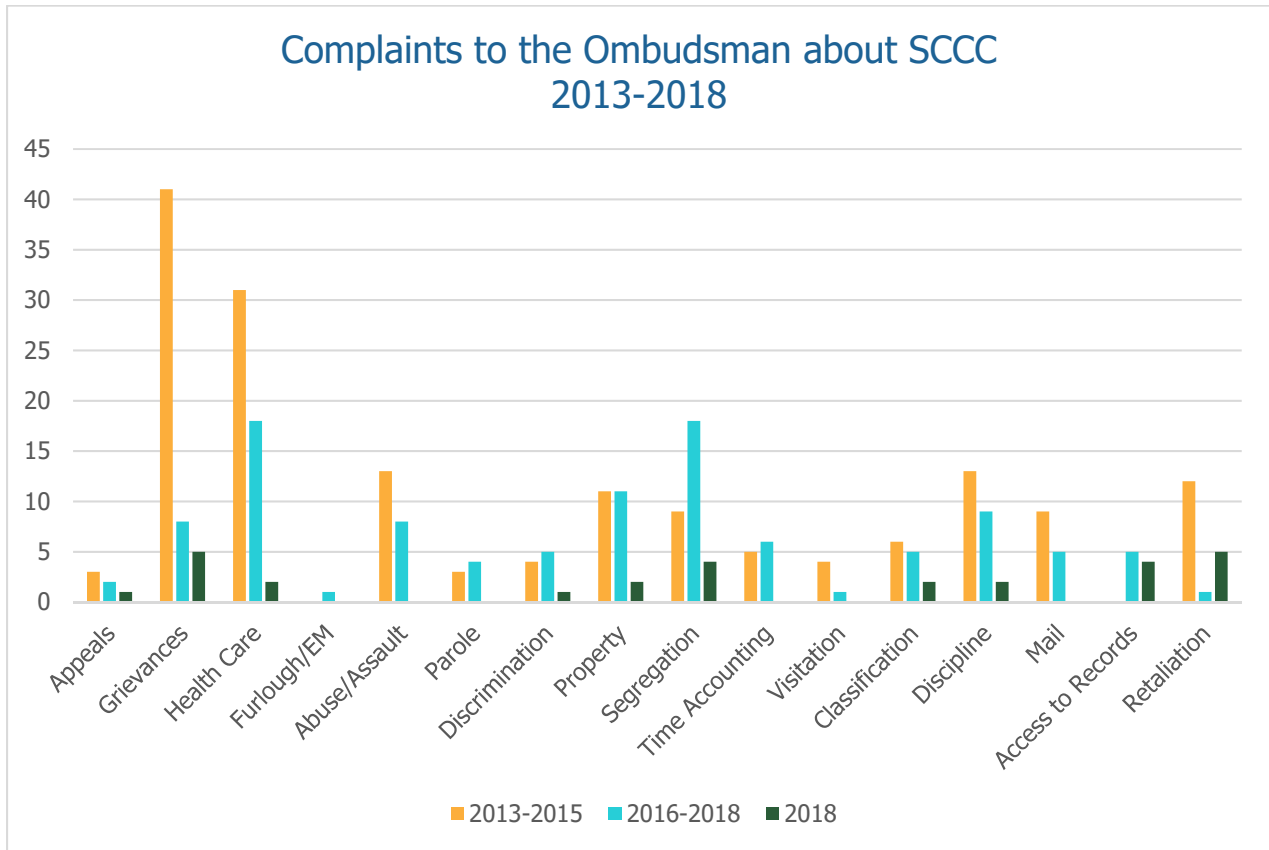


## Spring Creek Correctional Center

SCCC has been a consistent source of inmate complaints to the Ombudsman. In 2017, the Ombudsman released a report on the investigation of the abuse of several inmates at SCCC in 2013. However, in the past three years, the number of complaints from inmates housed at SCCC has decreased. Of particular note is that, after a trend of receiving 4-7 complaints per year of assault or abuse at SCCC, there were no complaints of assault or abuse by SCCC staff in 2018.



The decrease in grievance and discipline complaints may be the result of SCCC's efforts to engage inmates in the restorative justice workgroup. Other contributors may be the changes in corrections practices, increased programming, and other innovations implemented at SCCC since 2016.



The data about segregation and health care complaints needs further analysis to determine whether reductions are related to the changes in SCCC segregation and practices for working with inmates experiencing mental illness.





## Department of Administration

The Ombudsman received **159** complaints about the Department of Administration. Most involved complaints about the legal services provided by the Public Defender Agency and the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA). There were **22** complaints about the Division of Motor Vehicles and **17** complaints about the Division of Retirement and Benefits. Complaints about Human Resources, Shared Services, and other functions of the Department made up the remainder of complaints.

### Public Defenders and Appointed Defense Counsel

Clients of public defenders and attorneys appointed through the Office of Public Advocacy most often raised allegations about the lack of communication with their attorneys or the effectiveness of the legal representation being provided. In 2018, there were **48** complaints about the Public Defender Agency and **9** complaints about court-appointed defense attorneys provided through OPA.

The Public Defender Agency provides legal representation in criminal cases, as well as to indigent parties in Child in Need of Aid cases and individuals subject to commitment to involuntary treatment under Title 47 of the Alaska Statutes. Agency attorneys' "current caseloads exceed the American Bar Association guidelines [of 150 cases per year] for maximum ethically permissible caseloads."<sup>1</sup> The agency requested additional funding for FY19, which was appropriated by the Alaska Legislature. This funding allowed the agency to fill three attorney vacancies in the summer of 2018 but did not add positions for attorneys.<sup>2</sup> Staffing for the agency has remained flat since FY2015 (174 permanent full-time positions).<sup>3</sup>

Between 2013 and 2017, complaints about the Public Defender Agency and defense counsel appointed through OPA grew steadily. Over those five years, complaints about the Public Defender Agency increased 86% and complaints about private defense counsel

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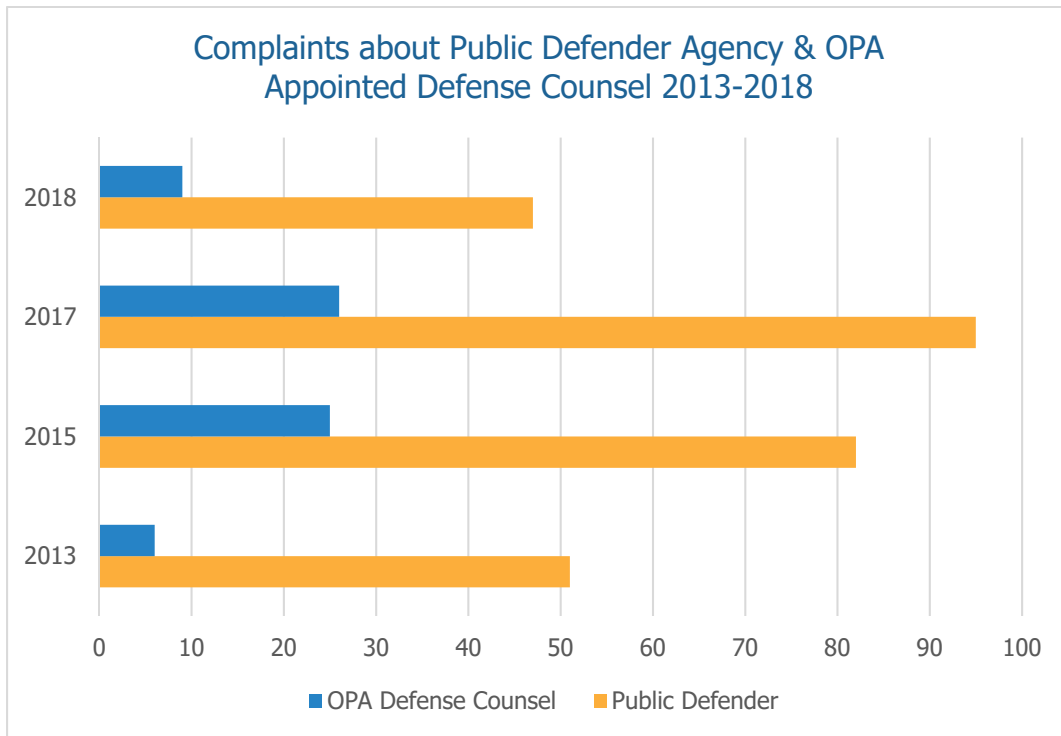
<sup>1</sup> "Department of Administration FY19 - Summary of Significant Budget Issues," Legislative Finance Division, prepared for the Senate Finance Subcommittee on the Department of Administration on February 5, 2019 at 2 (online at [http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get\\_documents.asp?session=31&docid=10381](http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get_documents.asp?session=31&docid=10381)).

<sup>2</sup> "Department of Administration FY19 – Increment Status Report," Legislative Finance Division, prepared for the Senate Finance Subcommittee on the Department of Administration on February 5, 2019 at 2 (online at [http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get\\_documents.asp?session=31&docid=10382](http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get_documents.asp?session=31&docid=10382)).

<sup>3</sup> See FY2015-2018 Enacted Budget Transaction Detail documents for the Department of Administration, prepared by the Legislative Finance Division (available online at <http://www.legfin.akleg.gov/DynamicReports/Operating/SelectReport.php>).



appointed through OPA increased more than fourfold. In 2018, complaints about both sources of appointed representation decreased sharply – to 2013 levels or lower.



Most of these complaints dealt with matters within the professional standards and ethics of the attorneys, or with delays in proceedings that were not necessarily attributable to the attorney. Both agencies have grievance processes available to clients with complaints. Clients can also request a change in representation through the court. Complainants were usually referred to the Public Defender or supervisors within the agency, and the Alaska Bar Association, for help resolving their complaints. Complaints about a lack of communication were usually resolved by ombudsman staff contacting the attorney and requesting contact with the complainant, and documenting that contact occurred.

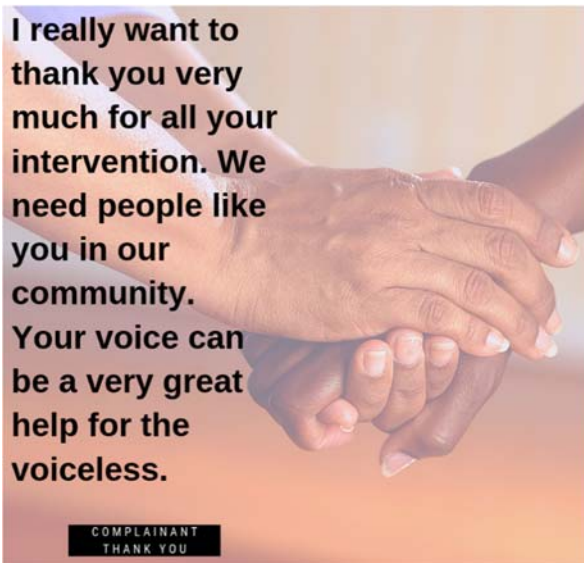
## Office of Public Advocacy

OPA acts as the guardian or conservator for adults (wards) who have been determined by a court to require legal protection under Title 13 of the Alaska Statutes. There were **45** complaints about OPA to the Ombudsman (9 additional complaints were about criminal defense discussed above). These complaints came from wards, family members, and community social service providers. Most often, complaints involved difficulty communicating with the public guardian or conservator. Complaints were typically



resolved informally, with ombudsman staff facilitating communication between the parties.

Ombudsman staff investigated a complaint about an OPA guardian, alleging that the guardian refused to release the ward's funds or provide financial reports. The investigation revealed that the complaint had been made by someone seeking to take advantage of the ward. The ward told ombudsman staff they were satisfied with the guardian's services but would appreciate having more of their funds each month. Ombudsman staff determined that the ward's finances were in order and offered to facilitate a meeting between the ward and the guardian. With our assistance, the ward was able to ask for and understand the information they wanted from the guardian. Ombudsman staff also determined that OPA implemented reasonable measures to protect the ward from further economic predation.



In another complaint about lack of communication and action by the public guardian, the investigator determined that the root of the complaint was a lack of public resources to provide for the ward's needs. The ward experienced serious mental illness and a long pattern of institutionalization. The public guardian had not been able to identify services to help the ward, given the ward's meager resources.

The investigator identified staff from several state agencies and treatment providers who could collaborate to find additional community-based services for the ward, and then facilitated a series of meetings with the complainant, public guardian, and others to develop a plan for bringing more services to the ward. New community-based services were offered to the ward, and the complainant had a better understanding of the role and resources of the Office of Public Advocacy.

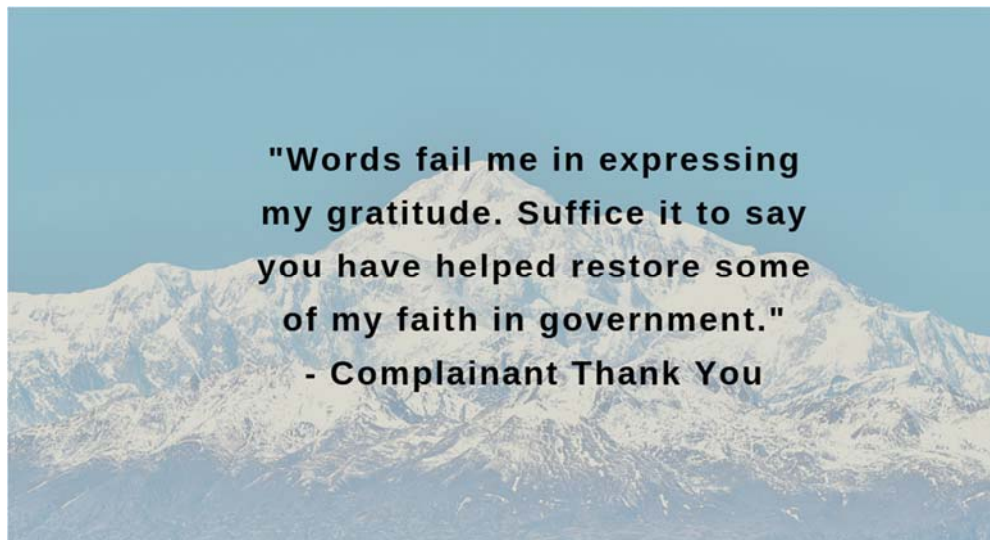
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## **Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development**

There were 24 complaints to the Ombudsman about the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED). Almost half (11) were about delays or communication difficulties with licensing boards supported by the Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing. Other complaints involved the Alaska Railroad Corporation, the Division of Insurance, and the Division of Banking and Securities. All of the complaints about DCCED were resolved informally in 2018.

Ombudsman staff were able to informally resolve a complaint about the overpayment of filing fees by a corporation to the Division of Banking and Securities. The complainant had mistakenly overpaid the fee associated with its annual filings, which the Division acknowledged. However, the Division declined to refund or credit the overpayment to the complainant.

The ombudsman investigator confirmed the overpayment, and determined that, while a refund was not permitted by state law, the Division had discretion to consider other ways to resolve the complaint. After the investigator communicated with the agency about the complaint, the Division identified a way to credit to the overpayment, ensuring that the complainant did not lose the more than \$10,000 paid in error.



## Department of Public Safety

In 2018, the Ombudsman received **63** complaints about the Department of Public Safety (DPS). The majority of complaints involved how DPS did – or did not – investigate crimes. These complainants were referred to the local detachment commanders and the Office of Professional Standards, which conducts internal investigations of professional conduct by DPS officers.

The Ombudsman received a complaint related to the Alaska State Troopers' investigation of a death that had been determined to be a suicide. The complainant alleged that the investigation was rushed and arrived at the wrong conclusion. The ombudsman investigation determined that DPS, based on the complainant's concerns, had three experienced investigators independently review the primary investigation. This review resulted in additional lines of inquiry, which the Troopers followed up. The additional investigation resulted in the same finding. DPS also assigned a senior officer to be the complainant's point of contact to ensure that they could communicate with DPS and that DPS would respond to them in a timely manner. While the complainant's dispute of the determination of cause of death was not resolved, the complainant was provided with a clear explanation of how the agency responded to their concerns and was offered an ongoing channel of communication with the Department.



Of the complaints about DPS, **13** were about the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. In January 2018, the Board refused to allow public comment on regulations it was considering, even though the regulations package was noticed as an agenda item for the January board meeting. During the ombudsman investigation, the Board acknowledged that the public notice for the January meeting was deficient.

The Board proceeded to correct the error, invalidating its actions on the regulations at the January meeting. Because the Board's actions effectively resolved the complaints, the Ombudsman discontinued the investigation.

## Performance Indicators

The Alaska State Ombudsman adopted a strategic plan, with indicators to monitor our organizational performance, in the fall of 2017. This is the first report of our progress toward our five-year goals. All indicators are for 2018.

### **Goal 1. Alaskans are aware of the role, work, and value of the Alaska State Ombudsman.**

Selected Performance Measure: 1A. Alaskans receiving outreach information: est. 1,100

*Ombudsman staff provided outreach at the Alaska State Library Association Conference, the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, Ombudsman Day, and through local events in Fairbanks, Sitka, Anchorage, and Juneau.*

### **Goal 2. The Ombudsman provides welcoming, accessible, and safe environments for people to come for help with their problems.**

Selected Performance Measure: 2A. People visiting ombudsman website: 16,401

*The Alaska State Ombudsman website was redesigned in 2018 to provide a more user-focused experience. Visitors can easily determine whether their complaint is appropriate for ombudsman review, make a complaint online, and find other community resources.*

### **Goal 3. Ombudsman investigations are conducted and reported in a timely fashion.**

Selected Performance Measure: 3A. Investigations completed: 46

*The vast majority of complaints are resolved informally with the agency and complainant. The formal process of reporting findings and recommendations is reserved for those investigations in which the Ombudsman is making critical findings and substantial recommendations for action or change by the agency. The Ombudsman published two formal reports in 2018.*



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**Goal 4. Ombudsman recommendations are tracked for implementation and evaluated for effectiveness.**

Selected Performance Measure: 4C. Recommendations implemented within 1 year: 5 of 8

*The Division of Public Assistance accepted all of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman, and made substantial progress toward implementation within 6 months.*

**Goal 5. Internal ombudsman operations are efficient and effective.**

Selected Performance Measure: 5B. Intakes reviewed and referred for investigation within 14 days: 94%

*All new jurisdictional complaints are reviewed weekly by the full investigatory staff. Investigators discuss the allegations and the remedies sought by the complainant and accept complaints appropriate for additional review.*

**Goal 6. The Alaska State Ombudsman has capacity to investigate complex, technical, and systemic complaints.**

Selected Performance Measure: 6B. Investigations of complex, technical, or systemic complaints completed: 1

*The Alaska State Ombudsman initiated two major systemic investigations in 2018. The first dealt with complaints about the backlog in operations at the Division of Public Assistance and was completed within four months. The second systemic investigation was initiated in June 2018 and focused on complaints about patient safety, abuse, and seclusion and restraint at Alaska Psychiatric Institute. It concluded in 2019 (and will be reported in the 2019 Annual Report).*

**Goal 7. State agencies appreciate the role of the Alaska State Ombudsman and the value that it offers to public systems.**

Selected Performance Measure: 7A. Complaints resolved prior to formal report: 426

*We encourage complainants to attempt to resolve their problems directly with the agency. When that is not possible, or is not successful, we review the allegations objectively and determine whether the agency made a mistake. Often, the complaint can*





*be resolved by assisting the complainant and agency to communicate effectively. When the agency has acted in error, or there has been a delay in responding to the complaint, the agency often works to resolve the matter right away. When the agency has acted according to law and policy, our staff will explain the situation to the complainant and help them identify other ways to resolve their problem (if possible). This is why so many complaints are closed without a formal report.*

**Goal 8. The Alaska State Ombudsman is a source of expertise and technical assistance on complaint resolution policies and procedures.**

Selected Performance Measure: 8B. Technical assistance or training provided to agencies updating or adopting complaint resolution or grievance regulations, policies, and/or procedures: 1

*In October 2018, the Alaska State Ombudsman hosted expert trainers from the Ontario Ombudsman to provide two days of professional development for 60 investigators and complaint resolution staff from state and municipal agencies.*

## Conclusion

The State of Alaska provides many critical services, and the actions of state agencies can have a big impact on the lives of Alaskans. The Alaska State Ombudsman provides citizens with an objective and independent resource to help them navigate bureaucracy and find solutions to their problems. We also work with our communities to ensure that we can connect people to the sources of information and help they need to address their problems. While we may not resolve each complainant’s problem the way they would like, we ensure that everyone who contacts the Ombudsman for help is provided some assistance – and is treated with respect and compassion.