

# OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONS OMBUDS

**STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2021**



## **Statutory Authority**

Per RCW 43.06C.040, one of the first duties required of the Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) is to “establish priorities for use of the limited resources available to the Ombuds.”

## **Process**

OCO engaged in a multi-step process of seeking community stakeholder input via first sending out an online survey to a list of almost 300 people associated with the DOC Statewide Family Council and an additional 100 organizational partners. OCO also offered an open invitation to anyone to join the strategic planning meeting in person. Nine community stakeholders participated. The group first reviewed OCO Values and Mission Statement that had previously been drafted by OCO staff. Next, they developed four strategic objectives and examples of actions that they would like to see OCO take to meet those objectives. Last, after reviewing the feedback from the online survey of stakeholders, the group selected via majority vote five strategic issue priorities for OCO to invest resources and conduct a systemic review in 2020.

OCO recognizes several limitations with this process, including that although people on the eastern side of the state were contacted with the survey and also invited to participate in the strategic planning meeting, no one from the eastern side participated. OCO also recognizes that the incarcerated population was not directly consulted or involved, and that OCO staff could have better utilized data from its internal database to inform the selection of the strategic issue priorities for 2020. OCO will work to improve its methodology for future priority-setting meetings.

## **OCO Mission**

The mission of the Office of the Corrections Ombuds is to reduce the likelihood of actions or inactions of DOC negatively impacting the health, safety, welfare, and rights of incarcerated individuals by intervening in individual cases and making public reports with recommendations for systemic improvement to the Governor, the Legislature, and agency officials.

## OCO Values

- **Dignity:** We recognize the dignity of all persons.
- **Impartiality:** We are neutral, independent, and unbiased in our work.
- **Confidentiality:** We respect and protect the information entrusted to us.
- **Integrity:** We are honest, ethical, and dedicated to our work.
- **Promoting Public Awareness:** We create systemic reform by publishing reports that influence change and outcomes.

## OCO Strategic Objectives

- 1. Build awareness and confidence with the incarcerated population in OCO's role as an independent, impartial, and factual complaint resolution service.**
  - a. Attend tier rep, Black Prisoner Caucus, Concerned Lifers Organization, cultural events, and visitation to spread awareness of OCO and its mission.
  - b. Seek new opportunities to ensure awareness of OCO by all incarcerated individuals, such as inclusion in the institutional handbook given to the incarcerated and orientation.
  - c. Ensure the incarcerated have access to all OCO reports.
- 2. Respond to complaints efficiently and take action to resolve them.**
  - a. Respond to all complaints within an average of 30 days, with either a resolution, information, or elevation to an Assistant Ombuds.
  - b. Respond to all complaints within an average of 90 days with a final response and resolution.
- 3. Focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions and system integrations of DOC and the day to day lives of the incarcerated.**
  - a. Regularly publish both investigation and systematic issue reports with recommendations.
  - b. Ensure all corrections-related policymakers, legislators, stakeholders, incarcerated DOC population, DOC staff, and the Governor's office are aware of OCO reports, findings, and recommendations.

- c. Provide external tracking of recommendations and outcomes for increased accountability.
- 4. Build ongoing relationships with community partners to identify and resolve problems to make recommendations to improve the corrections system.**
- a. Hold quarterly public stakeholder meetings.
  - b. Regularly attend both Statewide and local family council meetings and interact with family council members.
  - c. Create opportunities to increase community awareness of OCO, including regular outreach to communities impacted by incarceration.

### **OCO Issue Priorities for 2020**

Participating stakeholders reviewed the results from the stakeholder survey and created a list of potential issue priorities, which included everything from language barriers, race equity, work release, legal access, religious rights access, gate pay, incarcerated job pay, the mailroom, and reentry planning. Out of the list, the group of stakeholders and OCO staff voted and the following topics received the most votes for issues for OCO to invest resources into as systemic issue priorities for 2020:

- Mental/behavioral health
- Mattresses
- Disciplinary Sanctions
- Property
- Educational access/options

OCO is committing to assigning staff and other resources to these topics. In addition, although some topics were not selected, OCO still sees them as priorities and plans to work on them in 2020. These include race equity and work release.