



# 2024

## **BIANNUAL REPORT**



*Duties and Activities of the Office  
July — December*

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## Executive Summary

The 81st Texas Legislature established this office to protect the rights of residents in the state's 13 State Supported Living Centers (SSLC). The Office of the Independent Ombudsman for SSLCs is comprised of 19 dedicated professionals committed to safeguarding the rights and safety of the individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities served by the SSLCs. Each center has an assigned Assistant Independent Ombudsman who is responsible for identifying concerns, investigating complaints, conducting audits, and advocating for the rights and well-being of residents. Alongside these are six professionals who provide direction, training, and administrative and specialized support. Together, our collective passion and dedication drives our advocacy for residents of the SSLCs, ensuring their needs and rights remain at the forefront of everything we do.

This biannual report covers the duties and activity of our office from July 1 to December 31, 2024. During this biannual period, we observed an increase in complaints from both staff and family members and/or guardians, ranging from concerns about residential services to communication gaps. It is an honor to be trusted by the people who are closest to residents, and we are committed to addressing their concerns with integrity. This trust underscores the vital role we play in a resident's life. This report features a case study from each ombudsman, offering valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the services carried out by each ombudsman.

Last year, we concluded a systemic investigation report regarding timeliness and responsiveness by SSLCs in abuse and neglect cases for residents who have experienced or may have experienced abuse. Our Senior investigative team has provided a follow-up to that investigation in this report. We hope that the state's leadership finds our report helpful in improving practices and policies to better serve and protect vulnerable residents.

In Gratitude,

Dr. Candace Jennings  
Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers

# Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers

This office was established to investigate, assess, and protect the rights of residents within State Supported Living Centers. The responsibilities and authority of the Independent Ombudsman are dictated by the Texas Health and Safety Code, Title 7, §555.

The mission of the Office of the Independent Ombudsman is to serve as an independent, confidential resource that advocates for SSLC residents' rights, dignity, and respect.

Our vision is that OIO advocacy enables SSLC residents to lead safe, meaningful, self-determined lives.



## Central Office Staff



**Candace Jennings, Ph.D.**

*Independent Ombudsman*

Dr. Jennings has over 25 years of experience supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She found her passion as a direct support specialist while attending college in San Marcos, Texas. She earned a bachelor's degree from Texas State University School of Social Work. In her professional experience, she served the San Antonio community as a Child Protective Services investigator, Local IDD Authority service coordinator and manager, and Rights Protection Officer at the San Antonio SSLC. She joined the OIO in 2010. After 12 years of serving as Deputy Independent Ombudsman, the governor of Texas appointed her to lead the office in June 2021. Dr. Jennings has earned a Master of Public Administration degree and a PhD in Applied Demography from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is certified by The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices as a Person-Centered Thinking trainer and leads organizational change through a person-centered perspective.



**Carrie Martin**

*Deputy Independent Ombudsman*

Carrie Martin has pursued social justice for over 20 years and has over 15 years' experience serving in various roles advocating on behalf of those living with IDD. She is a champion of change, is skilled in process improvement practices and strategic planning, and values systemic problem solving, open communication, and enhancing our community. She is passionate about leading the ombudsmen across the state and creating a culture that facilitates meaningful change and improves the lives of the residents of the SSLCs. Mrs. Martin formerly served as the Lead Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the OIO, then Operations Manager. In August 2021, she was hired as the Deputy Independent Ombudsman.



**Brianna Teague**

*Project Specialist*

Brianna Teague, a Houston native, brings a rich academic background and diverse professional experience to her role. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology with a minor in English from Texas A&M University before pursuing a master's degree at the University of Houston, specializing in Medical Anthropology. Ms. Teague's expertise extended to her previous roles as a research assistant and as a disability specialist. Beyond her professional engagements, she shares her knowledge as an Adjunct Professor at Austin Community College. With a focus on research, data analysis, and management support, Ms. Teague's skills are both nuanced and extensive. Her commitment to her field led her to join the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO) in December 2021, where she continues to contribute her expertise to support and enhance the well-being of individuals within the SSLC community.



**Harrison Jensen**

*Project Specialist*

Harrison Jensen was born in Salt Lake City, Utah and raised in Southern Oregon. He received his bachelor's degree in Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. Subsequently, Mr. Jensen worked for the Louisiana Department of Health, where he helped improve health care quality and accessibility for Medicaid-enrolled Louisianans. Mr. Jensen joined the OIO in June 2023.



**Jessica Rosa**  
*Administrative Assistant*

Jessica Rosa was born and raised in Austin, Texas. She attended Austin Community College and Concordia University where she studied Finance. She began her professional career working for several financial institutions providing banking services for the community. She eventually moved on to provide billing and money management assistance for D&S Community Services, a leading provider of residential services and supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, where she experienced how rewarding it was to help others in need. She then transitioned to Excel Finance Company, where her results driven personality led her to effectively streamline processes and provide administrative and accounting support for over 30 offices across Texas, New Mexico, and Louisiana. Ms. Rosa has experience in report development, data management, and administrative operations. After years of tenure and much experience gained, she joined the OIO central office team in 2019.



**Gevona Hicks**  
*Ombudsman Educator, Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

Gevona Hicks' goal is to be a valued resource for Texans with disabilities, their families, and service providers. She has supported people with IDD by coordinating services for home and community-based service providers and state-operated and community intermediate care facilities. She served as the human rights officer at the San Antonio SSLC, advocating for and protecting the rights of residents. Mrs. Hicks joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman in April 2014 as the AIO for the San Antonio SSLC, became part of the systemic investigation team as a Senior AIO in February 2022, and in October 2024, accepted her current role as Ombudsman Educator, where she is responsible for the development and implementation of agency training programs. As a certified person-centered thinking trainer, she supports Texans in living the lives they envision for themselves. Mrs. Hicks is committed to enhancing her knowledge by pursuing a Master of Public Administration, which will equip her with the skills needed to continue to create meaningful impact in public service.



## SSLC Resident Population

### Overview of State Supported Living Centers (SSLCs)

The State of Texas administers 13 State Supported Living Center (SSLCs), which are home to 2,604 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These centers provide comprehensive support, including essential life skills training; occupational, physical, and speech therapies; and medical and dental services to cater to the diverse health needs of the SSLC resident population.

SSLC residents actively engage in the local community. Residents receive vocational and employment services, with many employed off-campus or involved in volunteer activities. Local school districts play an important role in providing public education tailored to residents aged 22 and younger. Access to public education further enhances the residents' potential for personal growth and development and promotes lifelong learning.

The demographic data presented in this report was provided on January 2, 2025, by the Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, which oversees the management of the SSLCs.

### Changes in SSLC Census and Admissions

Since its inception in 2010, the OIO has observed a notable shift in the demographic makeup of the SSLC population. In 2010, there were 4,342 SSLC residents. The total SSLC population has since decreased by 1,738 individuals, with Austin and San Angelo SSLCs experiencing the greatest percentage decline. This can be attributed to residents either moving out of the SSLC system or passing away. Despite this trend, the SSLCs continue to admit new residents, given the continued need to provide comprehensive support services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Between June and December 2024<sup>1</sup>, there were 132 new admissions. During the same period, 42 residents passed away and 49 were discharged to alternative living environments, such as home and community-based services.

Table: Resident Census, 2024

SSLC	Number of Residents
Abilene	242
Austin	167
Brenham	226
Corpus Christi	165
Denton	372
El Paso	102
Lubbock	193
Lufkin	220
Mexia	244
Richmond	297
Rio Grande	70
San Angelo	121
San Antonio	185
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,604</b>

Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

### Designated Forensic Facilities: Mexia and San Angelo SSLCs

Mexia and San Angelo SSLCs have been designated as forensic centers, meaning that they serve residents who have been committed by a criminal court. These individuals, termed

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<sup>1</sup> Resident admissions data presented in this section does not align with the July – December biannual reporting period. Data provided by the Health and Specialty Care System used in the January – June Biannual Report included resident admissions through May 31, 2024. This report includes resident admissions from June 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024.

alleged criminal offenders, have been charged with a crime but have been deemed incompetent to undergo criminal proceedings.

Between June and December 2024, Mexia SSLC admitted 28 residents, the most of any SSLC, During the same period, San Angelo SSLC admitted 14 residents. Due to the nature of the alleged criminal offender population, admissions and discharges are more frequent at Mexia and San Angelo than at other SSLCs. Currently, Mexia SSLC is home to 109 residents who are alleged criminal offenders, representing 65% of all SSLC residents classified as alleged offenders. An additional 32 residents, representing 19% of all SSLC residents classified as alleged offenders, reside at San Angelo SSLC.

As of the publication of this report, Mexia SSLC is home to 14 alleged offenders deemed to be at high risk of endangering themselves or others, which legally requires them to live in a highly restrictive environment. San Angelo SSLC is home to three individuals deemed high risk.

Table: Number of Alleged Offenders by Center

SSLC	Number of Alleged Offenders
Austin	3
Corpus Christi	8
Denton	5
Lubbock	5
Mexia	109
Richmond	3
San Angelo	32
San Antonio	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>

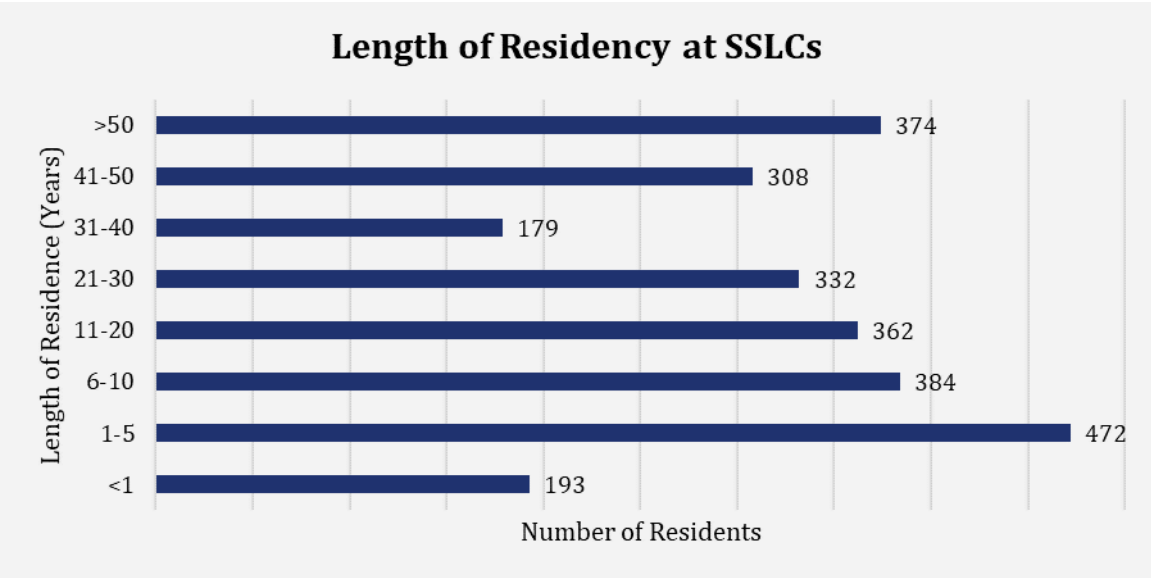
Source: Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

## Tenure and Admission Trends

The average tenure (the length of time a resident resides at an SSLC) is 23 years, with 47% of residents having lived at an SSLC for 20 years or more. Forty percent of residents were admitted within the last decade, with the majority of those being admitted within the past

five years. The earliest a current resident was admitted was in 1942, when they were nine years old.

The average age at the time of admission for current residents is 25 years. There are 235 current residents who were admitted as children under the age of ten before 1980. Since 1980, only 42 current residents were admitted when they were under the age of ten. The youngest resident admitted to an SSLC between June and December 2024 was 9 years old. These trends are indicative of shifts in admission demographics and underscore changes in the availability of residential services over the years.

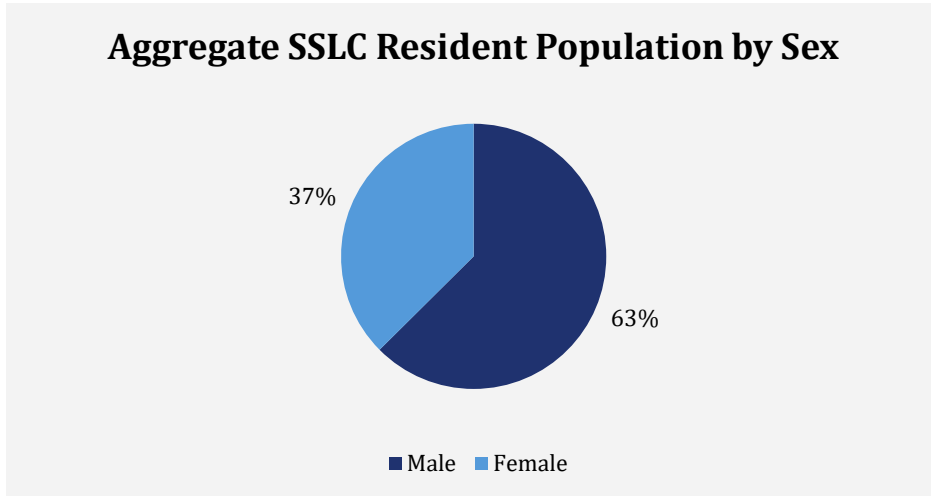


Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

## Demographic Composition

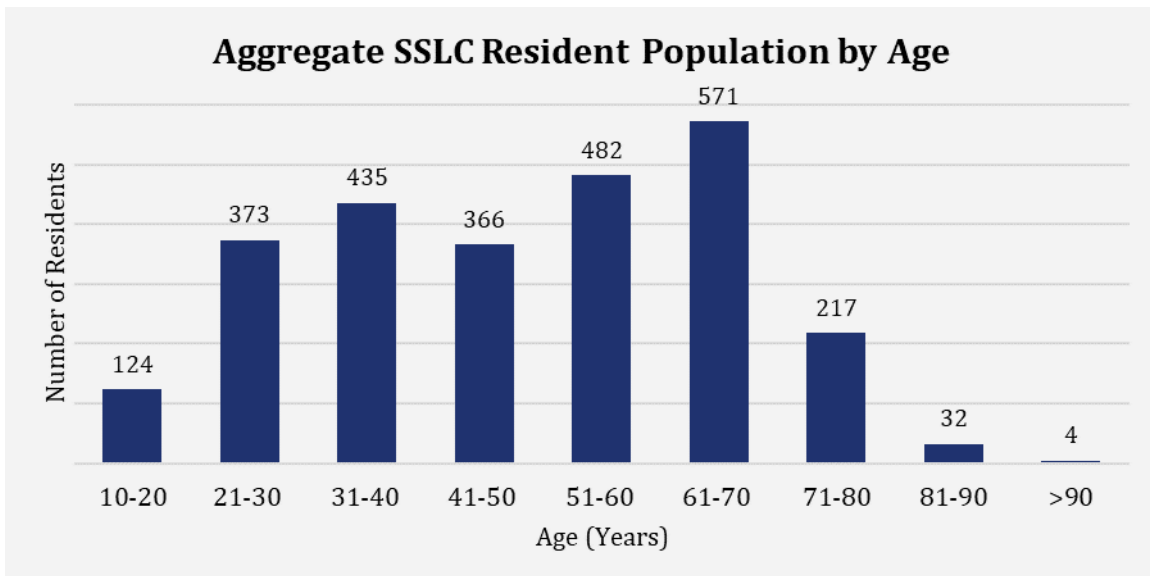
### Gender and Age Distribution

Of the current SSLC resident population, 1,629 are men and 975 are women. There are more men than women in all age groups except those aged 81 and older. A total of 583 individuals, representing 22% of the entire SSLC population, are aged 65 or older.



Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

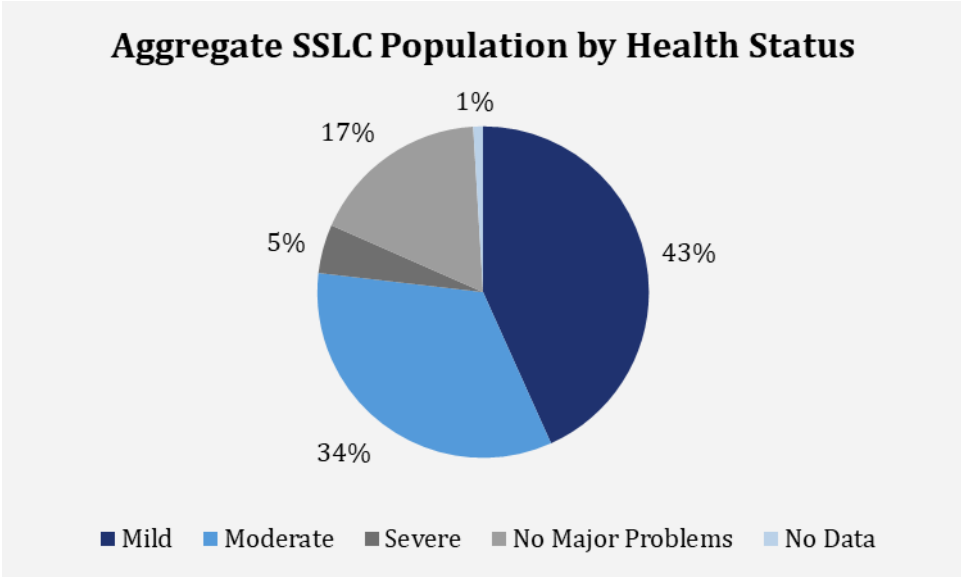
There are 182 residents aged 22 and younger. Persons under the age of 22 are eligible to attend public school. Of this cohort, there are 66 residents who are below the age of 18. Most adult residents have a family member who serves as their legal guardian or conservator. There are 886 adult residents, comprising 34% of the total adult SSLC resident population, who are not under any form of guardianship or conservatorship.



Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

**Health Status**

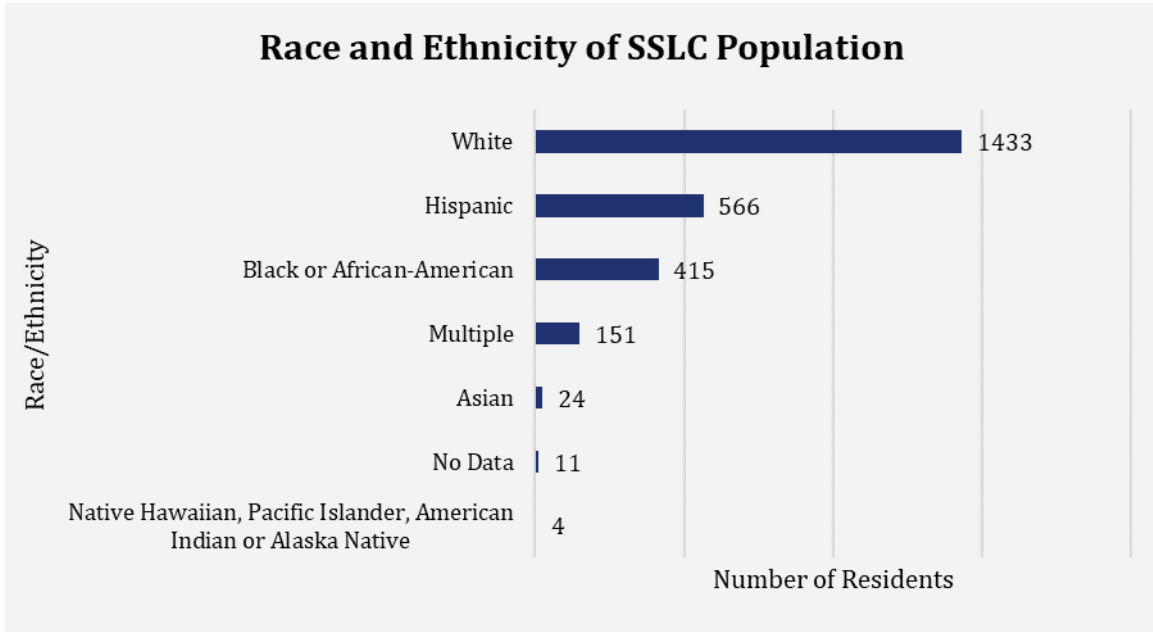
Thirty-eight percent of residents have a moderate or severe health status. Per the HHS definition, a moderate health status refers to chronic health issues which require professional intervention less than daily. A severe health status refers to health issues of an intensity and complexity that require daily and often constant professional intervention. There are 124 residents with a severe health status and 874 residents with a moderate health status.



Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

**Race and Ethnicity**

The majority of SSLC residents (55%) identify as white. Twenty-two percent of SSLC residents identify as Hispanic, 16% as Black or African American, and 6% as multi-racial. Around 1% of SSLC residents identify as Asian. Less than 1% identify as Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native.



Source: The Health and Specialty Care System division of Texas Health and Human Services, January 2, 2025

# Duties and Activity of the Office

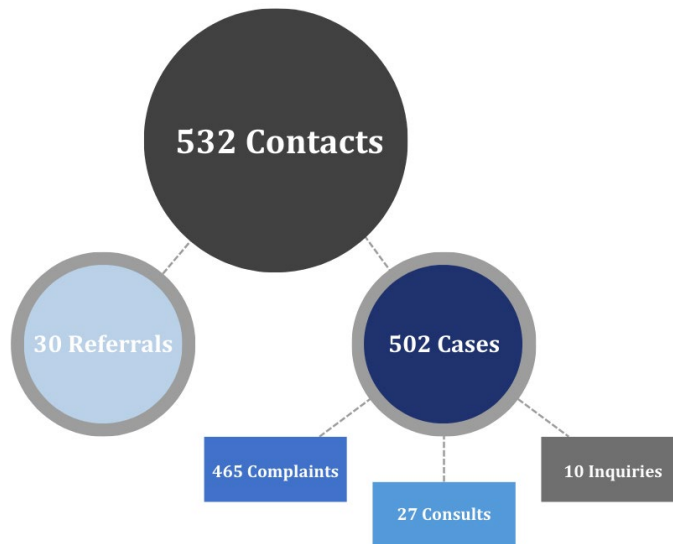
## Overview

The OIO assigns an ombudsman to each SSLC to maintain a visible presence and actively engage with residents and the center’s operations. All contacts and investigations are documented and securely tracked in an online case management system. These records are confidential and can only be disclosed through a special court order.

The ombudsman occasionally receives inquiries regarding matters outside the office’s scope. When a concern is beyond the office’s jurisdiction, it is directed to the appropriate entity for resolution. During this reporting period, 532 contacts were received, with 30 of them referred to another entity. Additionally, staff members at SSLCs frequently reach out to the ombudsman regarding personnel issues, which are redirected to the SSLC or referred to HHS Human Resources.

Of the 532 contacts received, the OIO handled 502 cases in this biannual period which were not referred to another entity. There are three types of cases: consults, inquiries, and complaints. Consults and inquiries are concerns that the ombudsman provides their expertise and insight on, but which do not require an investigation. Complaints are concerns that require an investigation by the ombudsman. Complaints made up 93% of all cases this biannual period.

### Aggregate Number of Cases



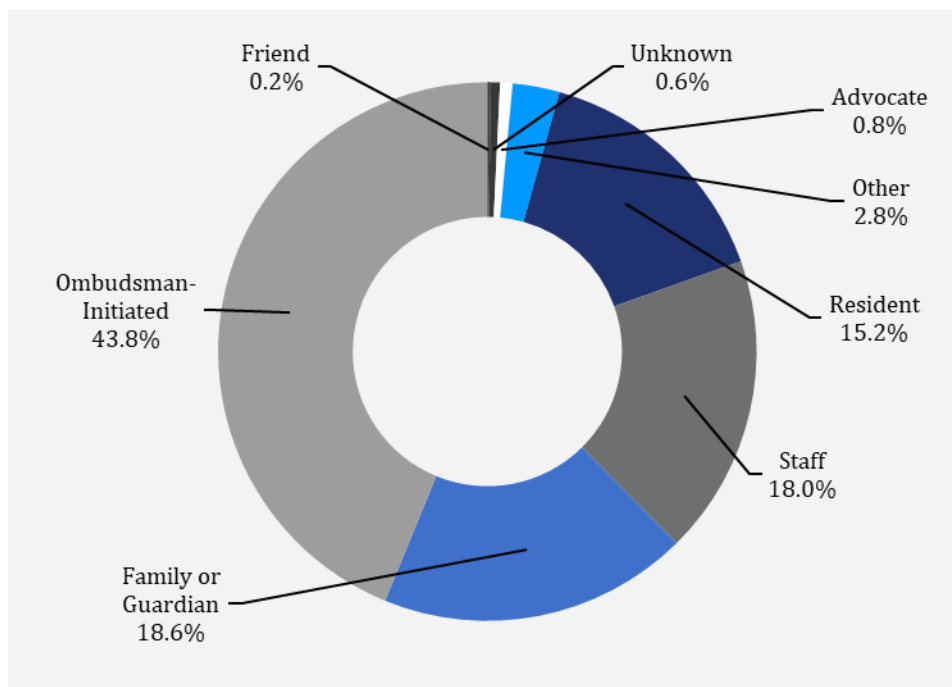
Source: OIO - HHS Enterprise Administrative Report and Tracking



## Complainant's Relationship

The most common source of contacts during this biannual period were concerns identified by the ombudsmen, followed by family members or legal guardians. In the biannual period between July and December 2024, the number of contacts initiated by the ombudsman increased from 180 the previous biannual period to 233. The number of contacts initiated by family members or legal guardians also increased, from 89 the previous reporting period to 99.

### Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



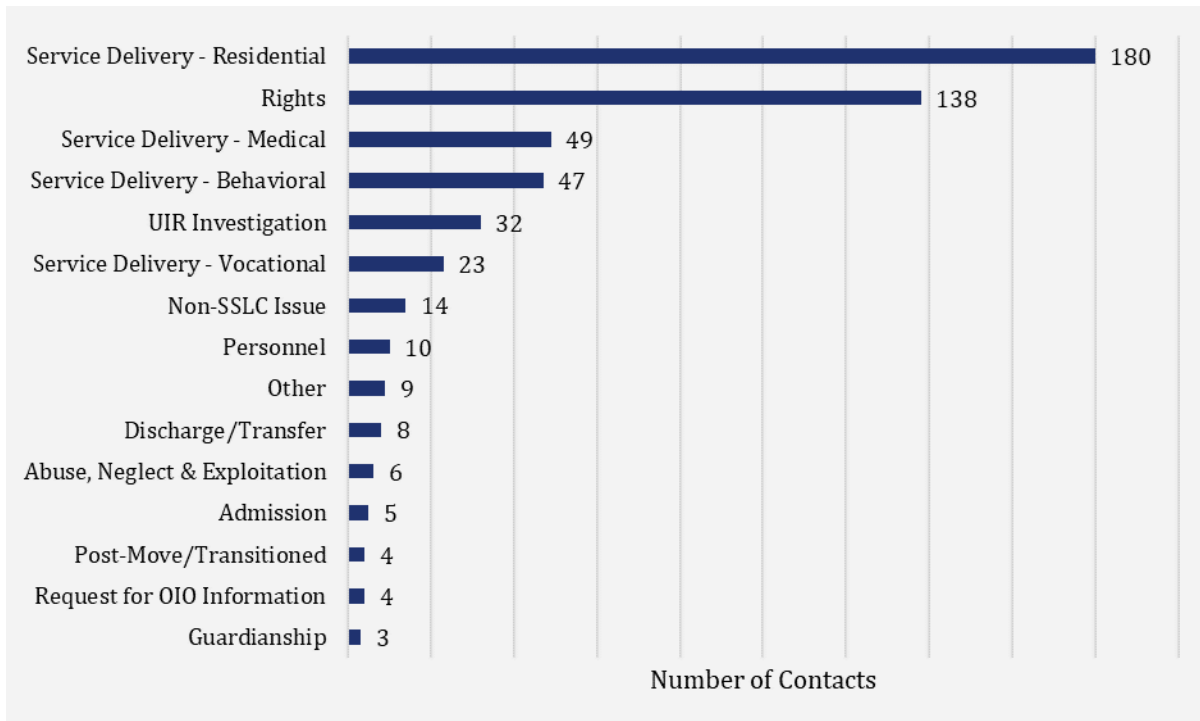
Source: OIO - HHS Enterprise Administrative Report and Tracking System

## Types of Concerns

The ombudsmen are contacted by staff, residents, family members, and others regarding concerns that affect the well-being and quality of life of residents. Following an investigation, the ombudsman may provide recommendations which they then monitor to evaluate if, and how, the issue is addressed by the facility.

Like the last biannual reporting period, the most common concerns investigated by the ombudsmen were related to residential service delivery, with the second-most common being rights-related issues. These two types of concerns have consistently been the most common reported by the OIO.

**Number of Contacts by Type**



Source: OIO - HHS Enterprise Administrative Report and Tracking System

In addition to monitoring service delivery and investigating complaints, the ombudsman at each SSLC evaluates the way the center investigates serious incidents. Each ombudsman attends incident meetings, reads all SSLC investigation reports, and monitors actions taken

by the SSLC after each incident. While reviewing final investigation reports or attending incident management meetings, the ombudsman may identify issues from incident reviews that prompt an AIO investigation. The ombudsman may also recommend that the facility continue to pursue an ongoing investigation or provide additional recommendations to the facility from the final incident investigation report. There were 32 investigations of this type between July and December 2024.

The ombudsmen do not investigate abuse, neglect, and exploitation (ANE) allegations. The role of OIO is to monitor recommendations made by ANE investigators to ensure that the SSLC protects residents and implements measures to prevent ANE from occurring.

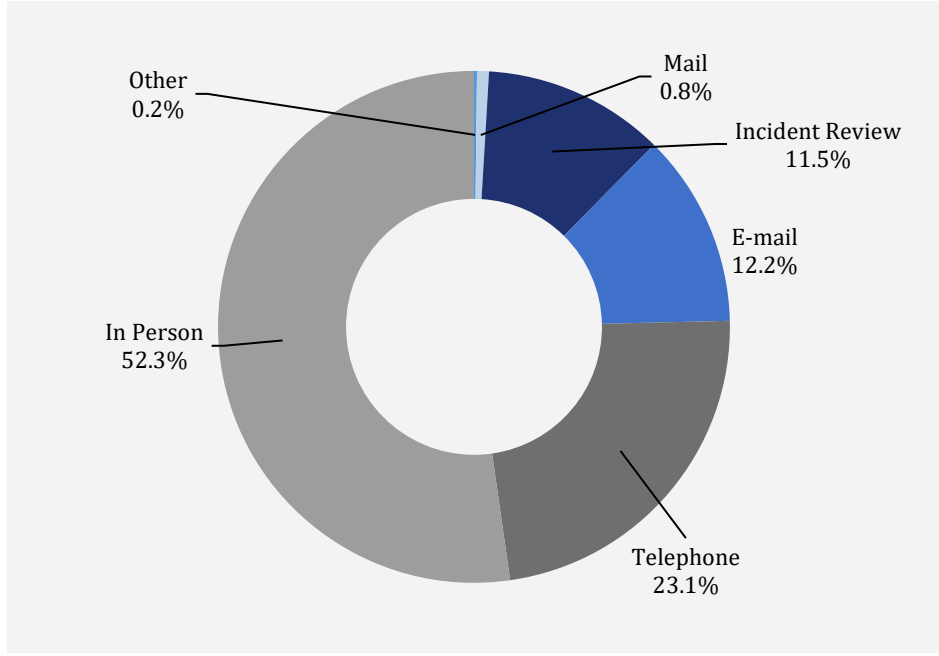
When allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation are made, the SSLC is responsible for protecting the alleged victim, acting to prevent further incidents or allegations, and reporting the ANE to HHS Complaint and Incident Intake (CII). The SSLC is responsible for investigating the ANE and providing the results of their investigation to Long-Term Care Regulatory (LTCR) upon their arrival. The LTCR surveyors enter the facility within a timeframe determined by CII. The surveyors evaluate the SSLC's investigation, determine whether the allegation is substantiated or unsubstantiated, and cite the facility if violations of ICF regulations are discovered. When ANE is reported to CII by someone other than the SSLC, LTCR notifies the SSLC within timeframes determined based on priority.

### **Method of Contact**

Each ombudsman has an office at the SSLC that is easily accessible to residents and staff. Most contacts to the ombudsmen were made in-person, with the second-most common being by telephone.

The office maintains a toll-free number which directly connects to the ombudsman's office phone. The toll-free number, the ombudsman's name, direct phone line, office location, and email address are displayed prominently on posters and brochures in common areas at each SSLC. The office also maintains a website that provides contact information and explains the role of the office.

### How was the Contact Made?



Source: OIO - HHS Enterprise Administrative Report and Tracking System

# Systemic Investigation Follow-Up: SSLC Response to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation

## Overview: Initial Investigation Findings & SSLC Response

The previous biannual report published in July contained findings of a comprehensive investigation conducted by the Office of the Independent Ombudsman regarding SSLC and SSLC State Office (SO) responses to instances of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The investigation concentrated on confirmed instances of abuse and cases with inconclusive findings in FY 2023<sup>2</sup>. The investigation brought to light significant concerns about the lack of accurate and timely reporting of ANE and witnesses' failure to report instances of ANE immediately. The investigation found that SSLC Unusual Incident Reports (UIR) lacked evidence that investigators' recommendations were implemented, making it a challenge to assess the effectiveness of SSLCs' practices in preventing, reporting, and protecting against ANE.

SSLC SO provided a written response to the investigation findings and recommendations that detailed how they reviewed ANE incidents. SO also shared that as of April 1, 2024, a Special Projects Coordinator (SPC) position was assigned to review all ANE cases with confirmed or inclusive dispositions. The focus of the SPC reviews was reported to include evaluating the timeliness of reporting and ensuring that recommendations are thoroughly assessed by the SSLC. The SSLC SO response also noted the legislatively mandated changes to ANE reporting and investigation procedures that went into effect on March 1, 2024.

The full investigation with findings, the SSLC SO response, and OIO recommendations can be found in the [January - June 2024 Biannual Report](#).

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<sup>2</sup> Inconclusive findings indicates that there was not a preponderance of credible evidence – i.e., a lack of witnesses or other available evidence – to confirm whether abuse occurred.

## OIO Monitoring: Overview

To determine what, if any, actions SSLC SO took to address the concerns identified in the systemic investigation, the Sr. AIOs conducted an additional review of confirmed ANE cases that occurred between July and September 2024 (the period corresponding to the last quarter of FY 2024) at all 13 SSLCs that had been reviewed by the SPC. This approach was used to capture outcomes from the new reporting and investigation practices. The Sr. AIOs evaluated the most recent SPC-reviewed cases of ANE for each of these three months to assess timeliness of reporting, determine if recommendations provided by investigators were implemented, and identify any disciplinary action taken against employees who witnessed and failed to report ANE, as required by policy.

Information requested and reviewed by the Sr. AIOs during this monitoring period included the following:

- Policies and procedures related to the SPC's UIR case reviews.
- All documentation related to the reviews completed by the SPC, including all documents used to review each case.
- ANE incidents with confirmed findings from July 2024 through September 2024.
- Evidence that recommendations were completed, including any relevant disciplinary actions taken with staff involved in the case.

## OIO Monitoring: Findings

According to data provided by SSLC SO, a total of 80 confirmed or inconclusive ANE cases were investigated by SSLCs between July 2024 and September 2024, of which 55% (44 of the 80) were logged as reviewed by the SPC. The Sr. AIOs analyzed 25 ANE incidents reviewed by the SPC and found notable progress in various areas, including the timeliness of reporting, the implementation of actions based on investigation recommendations, and appropriate disciplinary measures for employees who witnessed incidents of abuse but did not report them promptly. This monitoring review concentrated on recent cases that underwent the SSLC SO review, while the initial systemic investigation comprehensively examined all confirmed cases from FY 2023.

## Reporting Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

The SSLCs consider incidents to have been reported timely if the report is made within one hour of administrative leadership *learning* of incidents. The SSLC UIRs reviewed between July and September 2024 indicated incidents were reported within one hour in nearly all (21 of 25) cases reviewed by Sr. AIOs. Only one SSLC listed a case that was not reported within one hour. Another SSLC did not indicate whether the case was reported within an hour in the documentation provided.

However, when using the time and date of the incident, there continue to be discrepancies between the actual occurrence, identification, and reporting of ANE incidents.

- The average time between occurrence and reporting was within one day (22 hours, 35 minutes). This is a significant improvement from five days (135 hours, 46 minutes) when AIOs analyzed FY 2023 incidents.
- Reporting incidents within the required one-hour timeframe of suspecting ANE increased to 52%, compared to only 14% of FY 2023 cases reviewed.
- Of the 25 incidents where the date and time were known, 28% were reported more than 24 hours after the incident.
- It took more than one day to identify and report abuse for four incidents, with the most extended delay in reporting being six days.

As with the initial investigation, confirmed cases were sorted by those with “witnesses” identified and “reporting” as keywords in the UIR recommendations.

- Five cases were identified that included recommendations to address staff observing but not immediately reporting incidents.
- Disciplinary actions taken on these five staff included two terminations from employment. Other corrective actions included employee training on reporting incidents.

## SSLC State Office Review of Incident Report Recommendations

The OIO received the following response regarding the request for policies and procedures related to the SPC review of cases: “We have no policies or procedures related to the Field Based Coordinator (FBC)<sup>3</sup> review of UIR cases.” The Sr. AIOs analyzed 25 cases that were reviewed by the SPC. During their review, they were unable to identify a standard process utilized by the SPC to review UIRs. The previous response from SSLC SO stated that all evidence of completed recommendations is held within the UIR file. The Sr. AIOs’ review did not find this to be accurate.

- Upon analyzing the recommendations in the sample of cases reviewed by the SPC, 76% (19 out of 25) of ANE UIRs contained evidence that follow-up actions to address recommendations were completed by the SSLCs.
- The information provided by SO indicated the SPC had provided recommendations on 16 UIRs, but no details were found in the spreadsheet or case files that identified the SPC’s specific recommendations. This limited the ombudsman’s ability to analyze the SPC’s actions and their role in the quality assurance of ANE cases.
- Only one center indicated in the UIR that recommendations were made by state office; however, the UIR did not specify if these recommendations were made by the SPC.
- The SPC did not provide recommendations for all cases. It was not clear whether any further actions were required in these cases.

## OIO Monitoring: Recommendations

Based on the ombudsman’s continued monitoring of SSLC responses to ANE, the OIO provides the following recommendations:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive statewide approach for reviewing all confirmed and inconclusive ANE incidents. This initiative should involve a thorough

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<sup>3</sup> Initial response from SSLC SO indicated Special Projects Coordinator (SPC) as the position title. In response to data requested for this monitoring review, SSLC SO referenced the Field Based Coordinator (FBC). Both titles refer to the same position; SPC is used in this report.



analysis conducted on a quarterly and annual basis to identify any emerging patterns that may shed light on the circumstances surrounding these occurrences.

- Develop and implement a defined process for State Office SPC reviews. Include processes that identify SPC recommendations and any outcomes of those recommendations.

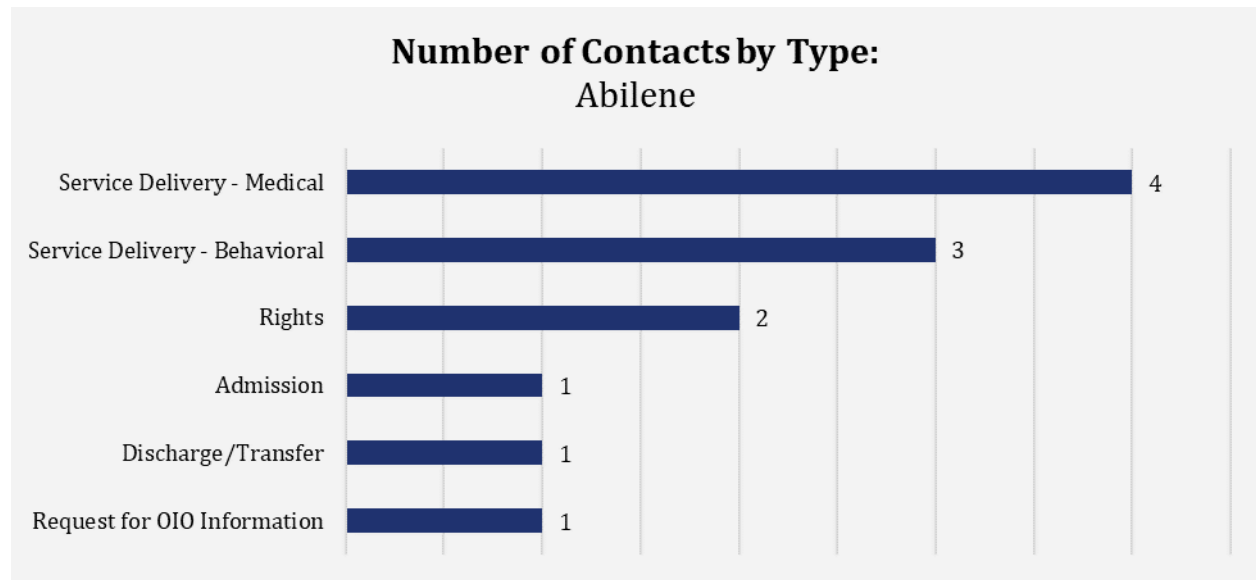
# Disaggregate Activity



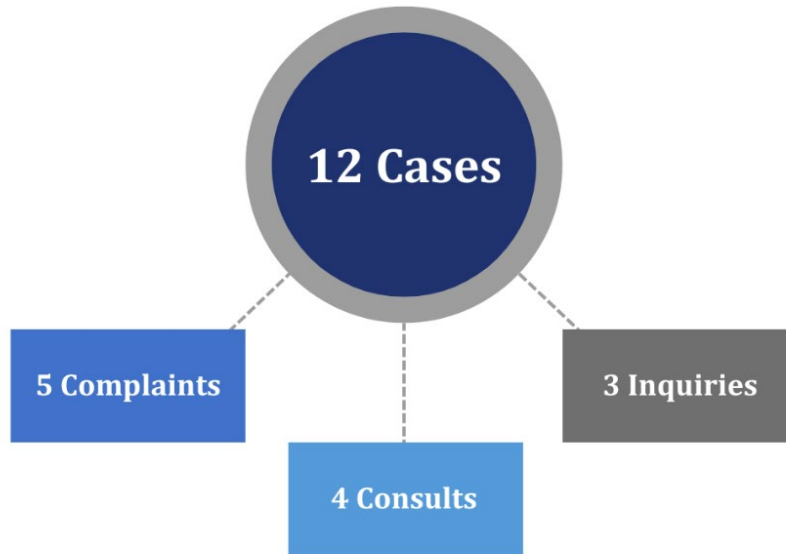
## Abilene State Supported Living Center

Jill Antilley, *Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

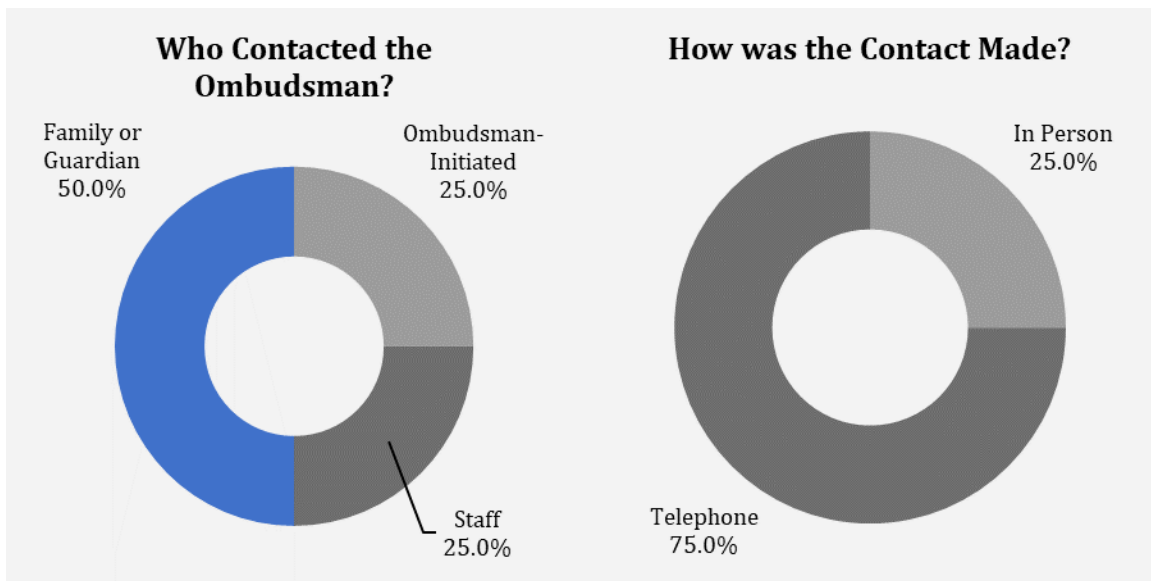
With over two decades of dedicated service, Mrs. Antilley has been a steadfast advocate for the residents of Abilene SSLC. Beginning her career in 2000 as direct care staff in the Recreation Department while pursuing her education at Hardin Simmons University (HSU), she obtained her bachelor's degree in Police Administration in 2000. After graduating, Mrs. Antilley ventured into roles at a juvenile correctional facility, contributing as a case manager and later as a juvenile probation officer. Returning to Abilene SSLC in 2002, she assumed the role of Qualified Developmental Disability Professional and took on the responsibilities of Human Rights Officer. In 2010, Mrs. Antilley took on a fresh and rewarding challenge as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Abilene SSLC. Her exemplary contributions led to a well-deserved promotion in 2022, elevating her to the position of Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman.



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Abilene



### Ombudsman Contacts: Abilene



## Case Study: Abilene

### Connecting a Guardian to SSLC Resource

**Background:** The AIO was contacted by the guardian of a resident who had recently been admitted to Abilene SSLC. The resident was owed money by the group home they had lived at previously. The guardian had attempted to get the money on their own and was unsuccessful. The guardian did not know who to contact to help retrieve this money.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO connected the guardian to the Reimbursement Manager at Abilene SSLC, who handles resident trust funds. The AIO explained to the Reimbursement Manager that the guardian and resident needed assistance retrieving money owed by the resident's prior group home placement and the guardian would contact them directly for further details.

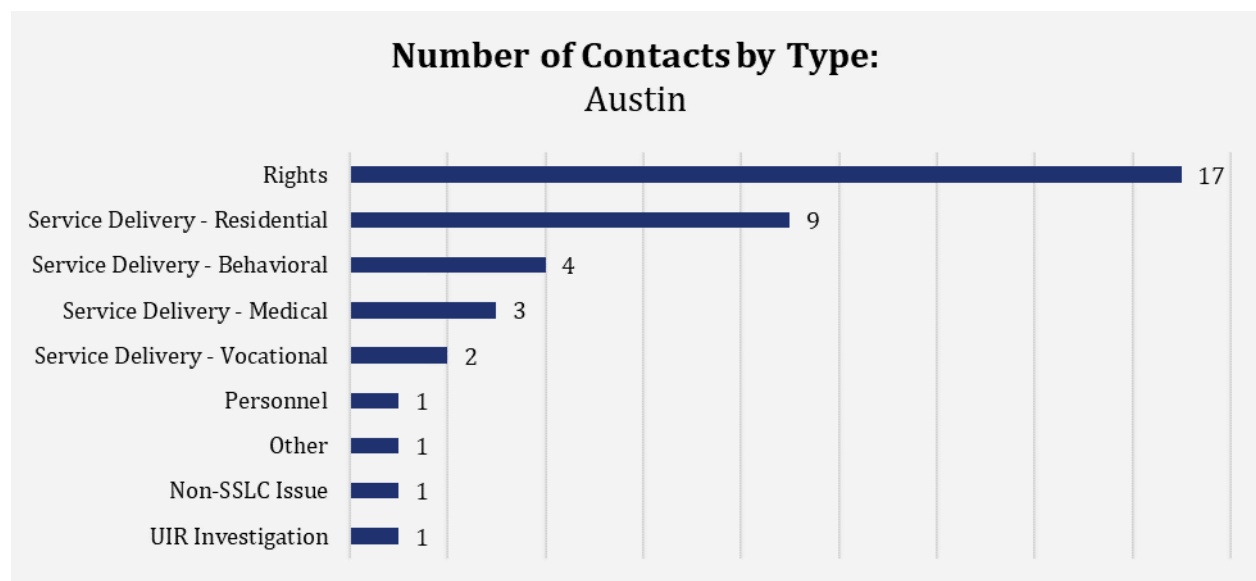
**Results:** The AIO followed up with the Reimbursement Manager who informed the AIO that the funds owed by the group home had been successfully deposited into the resident's trust fund at the Abilene SSLC, which the resident was able to access. The guardian stated that they appreciated the AIO's assistance.

## Austin State Supported Living Center

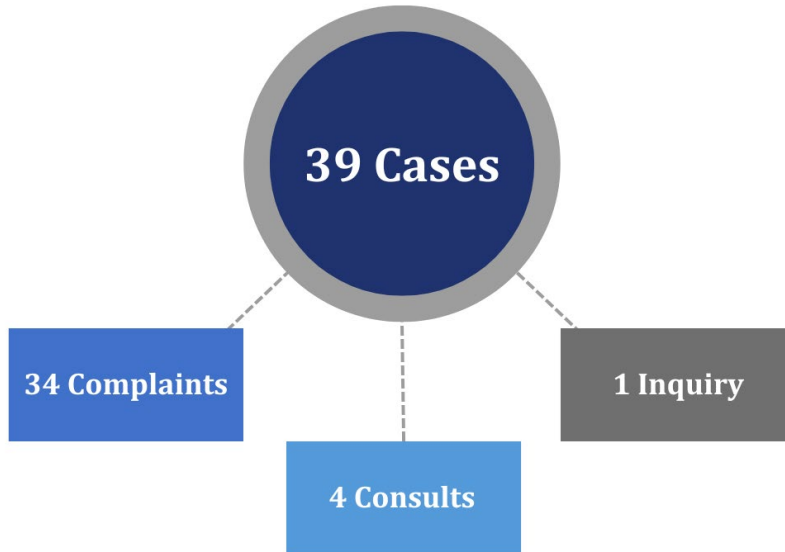


*Talya Hines, Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

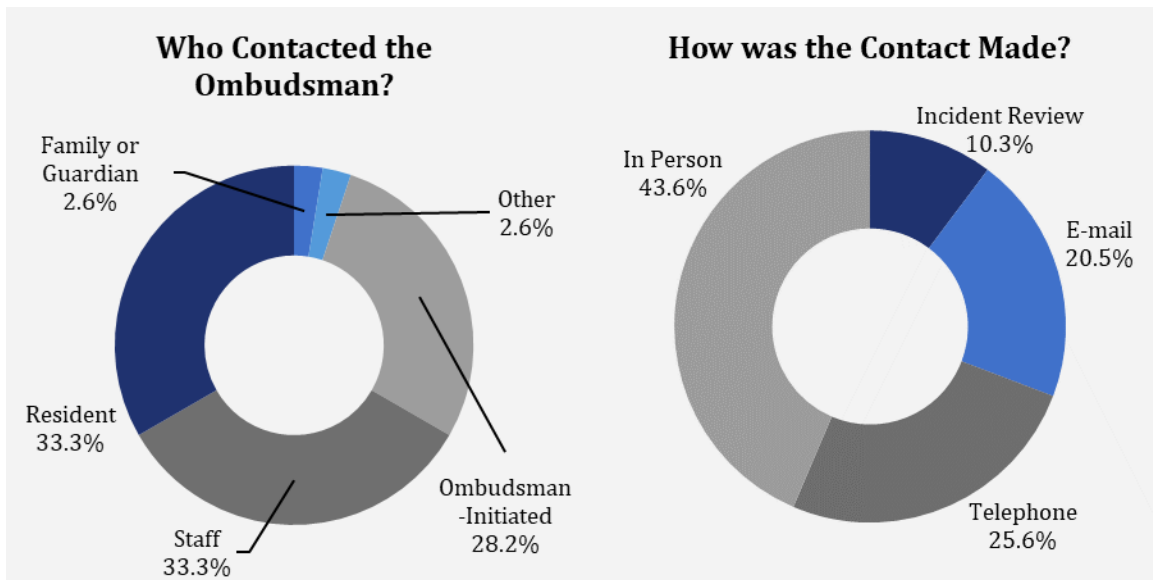
Mrs. Hines, a native of Grayson County, Texas, currently resides in Pflugerville with her family. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology and a Master of Science Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of North Texas. She began her professional journey as a Child Care Licensing Specialist at the Department of Family and Protective Services in Dallas. Upon relocating to Austin, Mrs. Hines transitioned into a role as a case manager for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. Driven by her passion for assisting others, Ms. Hines took on the role of Post-Move Monitor at the Austin SSLC, providing crucial support to individuals transitioning into community settings. Prior to assuming her current position as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Austin SSLC in 2018, she honed her expertise as a Curriculum Developer for HHS. Mrs. Hines is certified as a Person-Centered Thinking trainer by The Learning Community for Person-Centered Practices. Her dedication and expertise were acknowledged in 2023 when she earned a promotion to the role of Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman.



**Cases Opened this Biannual Period:**  
Austin



**Ombudsman Contacts:**  
Austin



## Case Study: Austin

### Restoring a Resident's Right to Personal Property and Communication

**Background:** The AIO was contacted by a staff member at Austin SSLC on behalf of a resident who had been asking about their cell phone. With initial consent from the guardian and HRC approval, the San Antonio SSLC confiscated the resident's cell phone over a year ago to be used as evidence in multiple investigations of abuse and neglect. Subsequently, the resident was transferred to Austin SSLC. After arriving, the resident requested that the Austin SSLC retrieve the cell phone from San Antonio. As the investigations were ongoing, the San Antonio SSLC kept the resident's phone.

The cell phone had been the resident's primary means of communicating with family members and friends. Furthermore, the resident's family member continued to pay the resident's phone bill while the cell phone was being held at San Antonio SSLC. No effort was made to purchase a new phone.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO contacted staff at the San Antonio SSLC, as well as the San Antonio AIO, about returning the resident's cell phone. The Austin AIO explained that the resident has a right to her personal belongings and that they were restricting this right without due process. However, the San Antonio SSLC staff were concerned about the cell phone being available for ongoing criminal investigations. In working with the staff, the San Antonio AIO determined that the contents of the phone related to the investigations had already been transferred and stored securely as evidence.

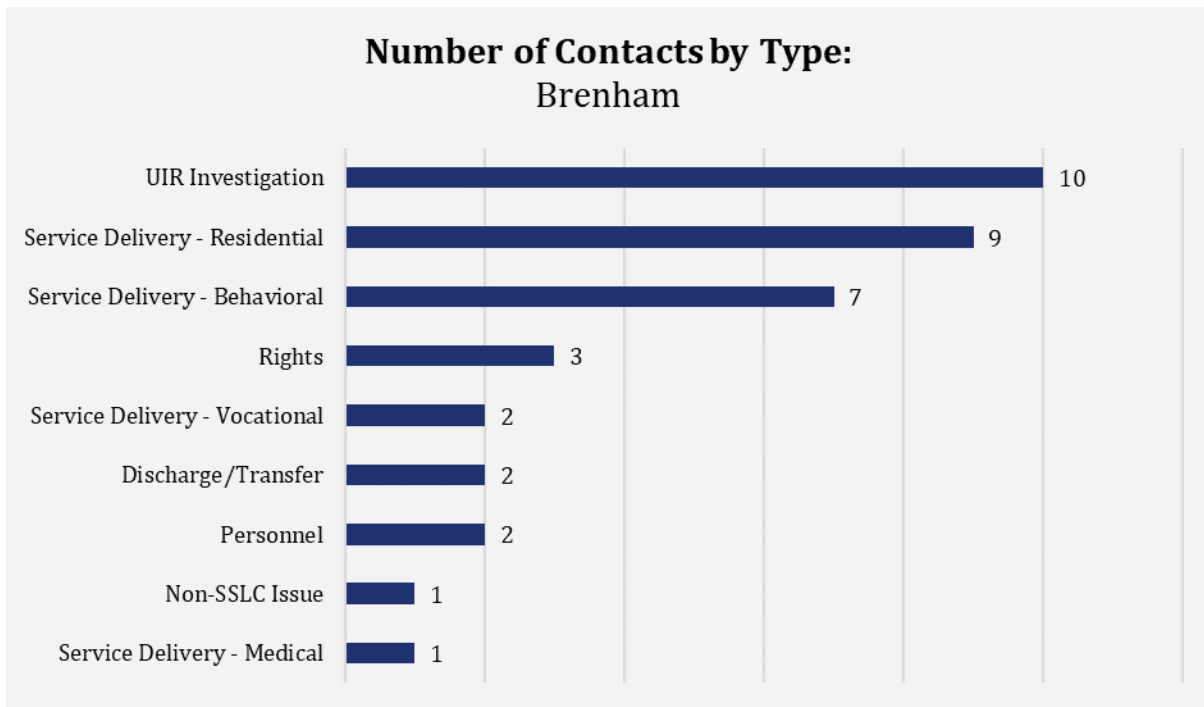
**Results:** After arranging to have the resident's phone sent to Austin SSLC, the Austin AIO recommended that the San Antonio SSLC reimburse the resident's family member for phone bill payments made while the phone was withheld from the resident. The resident received their cell phone, and the family was reimbursed. The family member and resident were thankful that both AIOs resolved this matter and provided restitution.

## Brenham State Supported Living Center



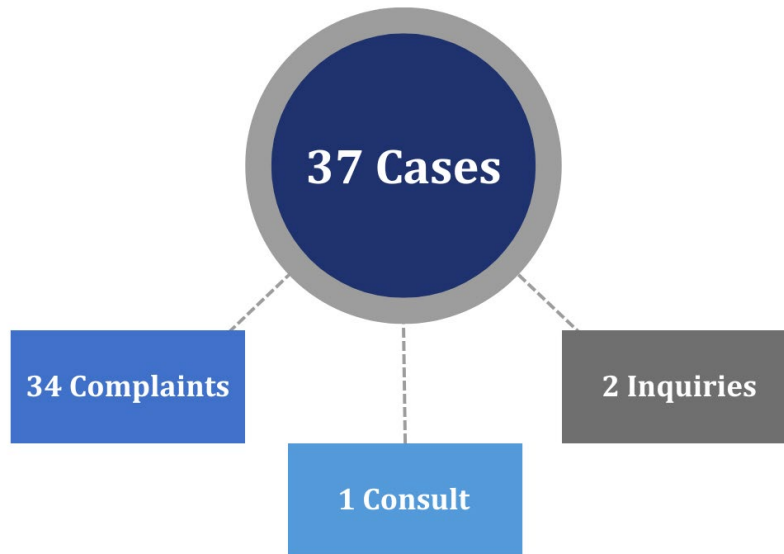
Susan Aguilar, *Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

Ms. Aguilar holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Texas Lutheran University. Her professional journey began in the realm of early childhood intervention before she assumed the role of a Qualified Developmental Disability Professional at the Brenham SSLC. During her tenure at the Center, Ms. Aguilar demonstrated versatility, serving as a program facilitator, person-directed planning coordinator, level of need coordinator, and interim rights protection officer. Since 2010, Ms. Aguilar has been dedicated to her role as Assistant Independent Ombudsman, bringing her diverse expertise to advocate for the well-being and rights of individuals within the SSLC community.

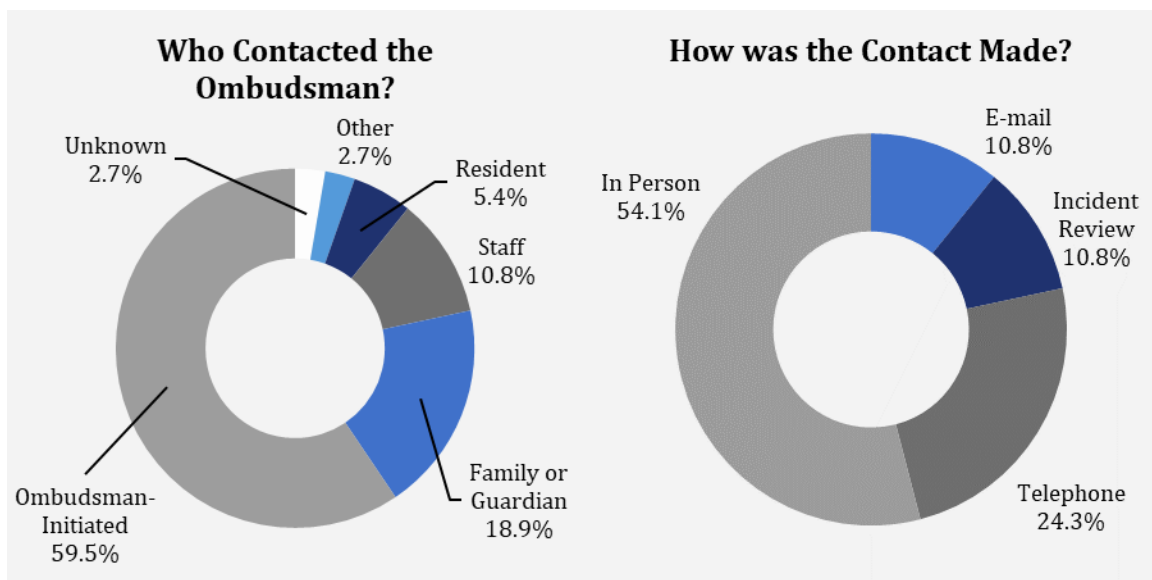




### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Brenham



### Ombudsman Contacts: Brenham



## Case Study: Brenham

### Advocating for Guardian Access to Critical Information

**Background:** A resident's guardian received an after-hours notification from the SSLC of an alleged physical abuse incident involving the resident. The guardian was informed that the resident's condition was stable but was not given specific information about the nature of the injury or whether emergency care or hospitalization was required. The nurse cited confidentiality concerns as the reason for withholding further details. This lack of clarity caused the guardian significant worry, prompting them to contact the AIO the following business day.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO conducted a thorough review of the electronic record, which confirmed the details reported by the guardian. The documentation showed that, while the resident's condition was stable, the notification the guardian received lacked sufficient detail to address their concerns. The AIO determined that more comprehensive information could have been shared at the time of notification to alleviate the guardian's anxiety.

The guardian requested access to photos of the resident related to the incident but was denied because the photos were evidence in the ongoing investigation. The AIO's request was also denied. Recognizing the need for clarity, the AIO recommended consulting with SSLC State Office (SO) to verify this policy. SO confirmed that the photos could indeed be shared securely. Upon receiving this information, the AIO informed the SSLC Director, and consent was promptly secured to release the photos to the guardian. The photos were then sent to the guardian that same day, four days after the initial request.

Following the conclusion of the abuse investigation, the guardian was notified of the unconfirmed disposition of the allegations. The guardian expressed a desire to discuss the matter further with the Incident Management Coordinator (IMC). The AIO conveyed this request and recommended that the IMC contact the LAR in a timely manner. This follow-up was completed, and a copy of the investigation report was also provided to the guardian to ensure transparency.

**Result:** The Director and IMC reviewed the incident and acknowledged that additional information, such as a description of the injury and any required treatment, should have been shared during the initial notification. To address this issue, the SSLC took steps to improve communication protocols and ensure that family members are provided with

adequate information about the wellbeing of their loved ones when incidents of abuse or neglect are reported.

The guardian expressed gratitude to the AIO for assisting with their concerns and ensuring their requests were addressed. The guardian also requested the AIO's continued involvement in team meetings to advocate for their loved one.

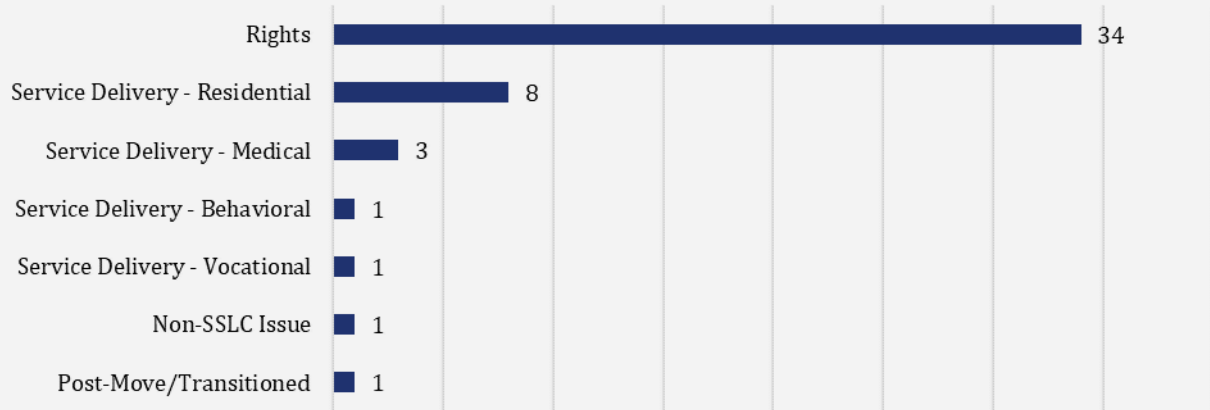
## Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center



*Kellen Davis, Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

Mrs. Davis embarked on her career journey in 1988 while pursuing her education at Howard Payne University. During this time, she contributed her skills as the Recreation Supervisor at the Texas Youth Commission (TYC). Her academic pursuits led her to graduate from HPU with a degree in Physical Education and a minor in English. In addition to her degree, she obtained her LVN in 1995. Over the course of 15 years, Ms. Davis continued her dedicated service with the TYC, holding various roles within the organization. Demonstrating entrepreneurial spirit, Mrs. Davis ventured into business ownership with her own doughnut coffee shop. With a wealth of diverse experiences, she served as a Transition Specialist at the Mexia SSLC for four and a half years before assuming the role of Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Corpus Christi SSLC in 2017. Mrs. Davis continues to bring her multifaceted skills and commitment to advocate for and support individuals within the SSLC community.

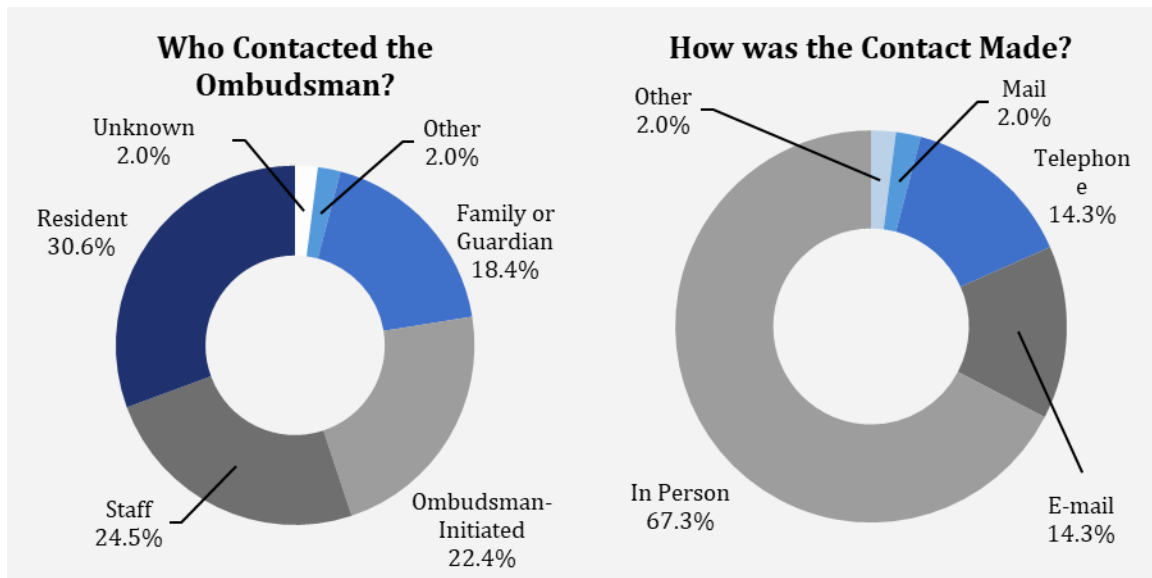
**Number of Contacts by Type:  
Corpus Christi**



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Corpus Christi



### Ombudsman Contacts: Corpus Christi



## Case Study: Corpus Christi

### Safeguarding Resident Protections in Policy

**Background:** Corpus Christi SSLC had a local policy for searching individuals for contraband or prohibited items. A revised version of the policy was under review by the Corpus Christi SSLC Human Rights Officer (HRO) in March 2024.

Per the revised policy, a resident can consent to a search. There are residents at the SSLC that do not have the capacity to give consent. Therefore, consent would have to be obtained from the resident's guardian. A search that has not already been approved as a restriction in the resident's ongoing program plans would be considered an emergency restriction, which requires due process and must be reviewed by the Human Rights Committee (HRC). The revised policy stated that a search of a resident's person or personal belongings would not be considered a restriction if the resident consented to it.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** In reviewing the policy, the AIO became concerned about this change in protocol. The procedures for searching residents for contraband or prohibited items were already covered in the HHS SSLC Statewide Rights Policy.

The AIO wrote to the HRO and Corpus Christi SSLC administration about their concerns and recommended that the policy be eliminated. While facility administration heard the AIO's concerns, the revised policy was implemented.

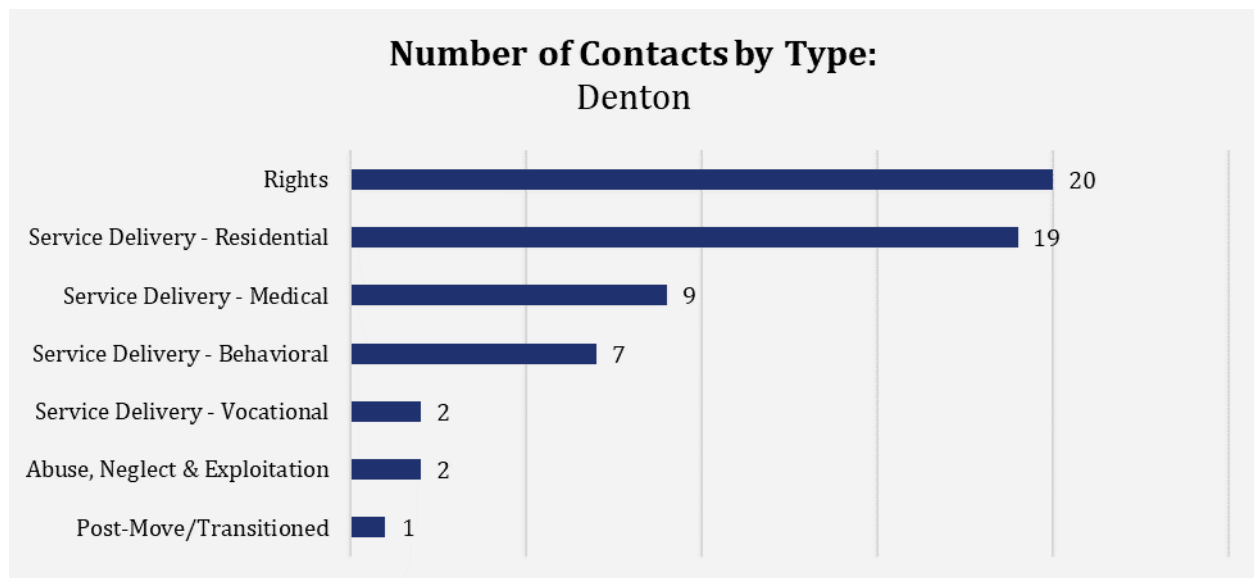
**Results:** This policy was revisited when Corpus Christi SSLC leadership changed in August 2024. The AIO reviewed their previous concerns about the policy and again recommended that it be eliminated. SSLC administration agreed with the AIO and determined that the policy was unnecessary, given that the HHS SSLC Statewide Rights Policy already covered searching residents for contraband or prohibited items. The local policy was removed.



## Denton State Supported Living Center

*Alejandra Loya, Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

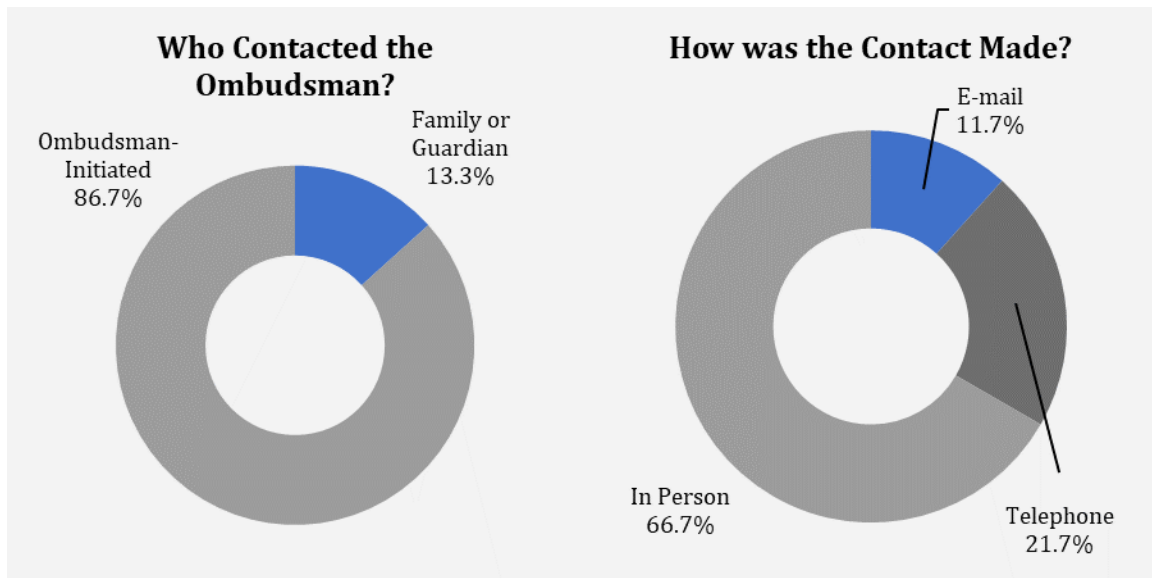
Prior to joining the OIO in January 2024, Mrs. Loya worked with the Department of Family Protective Services where she served as an integral team member, dedicating herself to the advocacy and support of families and children, including those with disabilities. In her previous position as a bilingual Family Group Conference Specialist, Mrs. Loya became a trusted mediator and fostered dialogue and understanding among diverse families, legal and medical professionals, community providers, CPS program specialists, and other parties as they navigated the challenges of the child welfare system. Driven by a desire to make a more direct impact on the lives of one of the most vulnerable populations, Mrs. Loya accepted the role of the Assistant Independent Ombudsman. Mrs. Loya has a Master of Science degree and brings her wealth of experience advocating for the rights and well-being of individuals with intellectual disabilities. She seeks to serve as a bridge between individuals, their families, and staff to ensure SSLC residents support needs are met, their voices are heard, and their rights are protected.



**Cases Opened this Biannual Period:**  
Denton



**Ombudsman Contacts:**  
Denton





## Case Study: Denton

### Ensuring Accountability in Staff Services for Residents

**Background:** The AIO was visiting residents at a building on the Denton SSLC campus where residents engage in life skills development and vocational programming. During the visit, a vocational staff member mentioned to the AIO that residents from a particular home had not returned from lunch and that residents from certain homes have often been late to return or do not return after lunch. Staff reported they had heard that, due to inadequate staff coverage, staff were returning to the home until the end of their shift at 2 PM. It was reported that staff on the next shift were then responsible for helping the residents return to the programming building.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO contacted the unit director of the home the following day. Unit directors oversee the operations, programming, and activities of a cluster of residential homes. The AIO explained that residents from one of the homes had been late to return from lunch the day before. The AIO informed the unit director that staff working the 6 AM – 2 PM shift were not returning residents to the programming building at 1:30 PM, reportedly due to a lack of staff. The unit director stated that there is always adequate staff coverage and reported that she would follow up with residential staff.

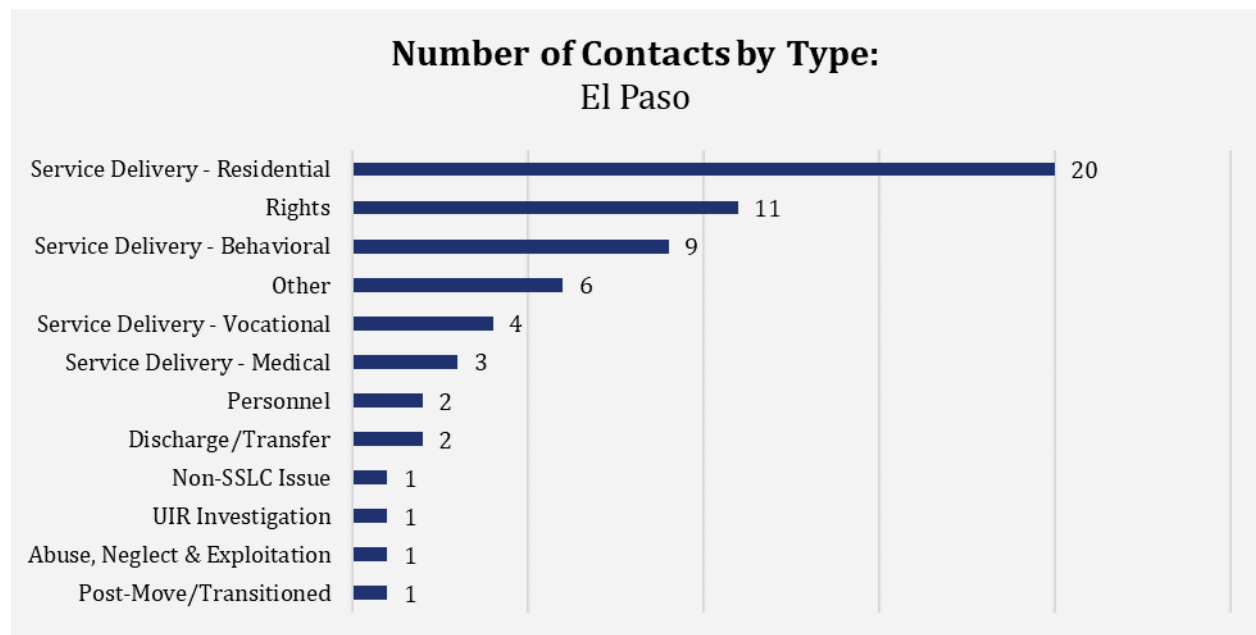
**Results:** The unit director later emailed the AIO after verifying that the residents had not returned to programming until 3 PM. The unit director instructed the staff in charge of that home to address this issue with those working on the days the residents were late. The unit director also instructed the staff in charge to walk through their homes at 9 AM and 1:30 PM to ensure all residents had left for their programming. The unit director expressed gratitude for bringing this to their attention.

## El Paso State Supported Living Center



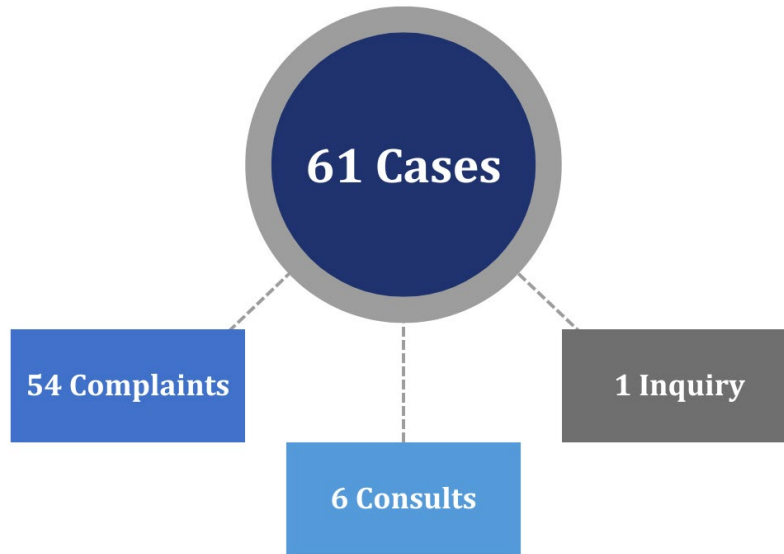
*Isabel Ponce, Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

A proud native of the Sun City, Ms. Ponce has dedicated over two decades to serving and advocating for the elderly, children, and individuals with disabilities. Her journey began in nursing homes, where she worked first as a certified nursing assistant and later as a certified medication assistant. Transitioning to the El Paso Head Start program, she extended her passion for community service by providing social services to children and their families through outreach programs. Ms. Ponce further expanded her impact by serving adults with developmental disabilities as a Residential Director. Her commitment to ensuring the well-being of others led her to become a Certified Internal Investigator, where she excelled as a Case Manager for the same HCS provider. With a wealth of community program experience spanning seven years, Ms. Ponce joined the OIO in December 2010. In her role as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the El Paso SSLC, she has continued her unwavering advocacy for individuals within the SSLC community. Trained in mediation and person-centered practices, Ms. Ponce brings a comprehensive skill set to her role, ensuring a person-focused and empathetic approach to her work.



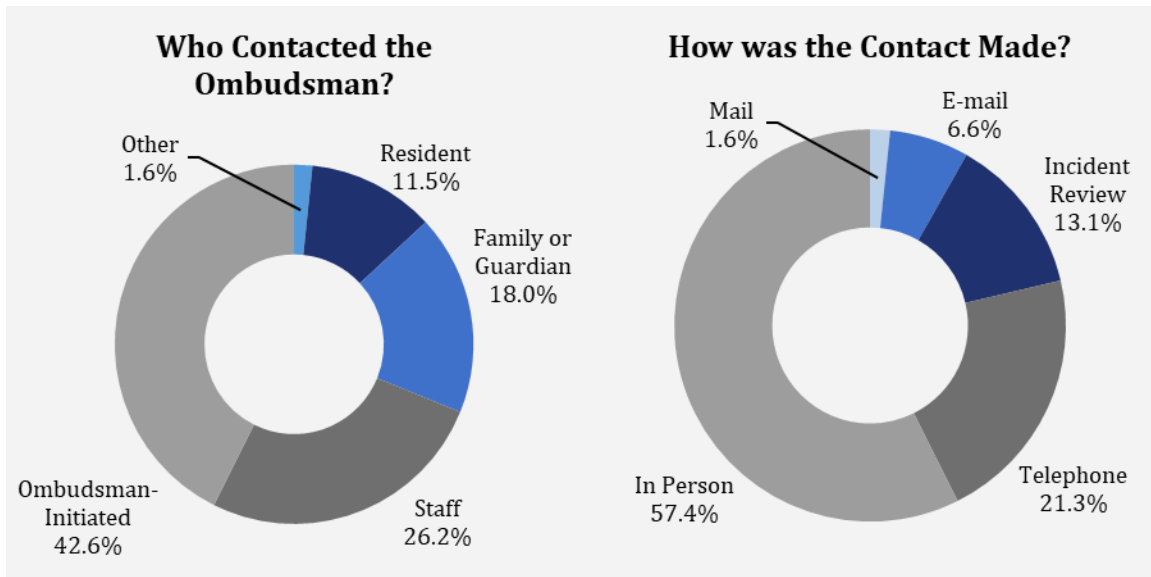
### Cases Opened this Biannual Period:

El Paso



### Ombudsman Contacts:

El Paso



## Case Study: El Paso

### Ensuring Due Process in Restriction Determinations for Admissions

**Background:** An individual was admitted to the El Paso SSLC with a restriction of one-to-one supervision due to allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior. Prior to the resident's admission, the facility team convened and collectively decided to implement the one-to-one supervision restriction based on the reported behavior. The Human Rights Committee approved this restriction in advance of the resident's admission to the SSLC.

The AIO requested the Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP) provide the data used by the team to determine the resident's one-to-one supervision level. Upon review, the AIO informed the QIDP that the resident's electronic file contained no documented evidence of previous incidents of inappropriate sexual behavior. The QIDP responded that all pertinent data could be found in the admissions packet.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO subsequently asked the HRO and Admissions and Placement Coordinator (APC) to provide all qualifying data from the admissions packet, specifically documents detailing instances of inappropriate sexual behavior.

The HRO stated that the reported incident of inappropriate sexual behavior occurred the day before the resident's discharge from their previous placement. The APC provided the AIO with a copy of the pre-admission documentation form. Through follow-up questions, the AIO determined that the form had been completed by the APC based on verbal communication with the discharging team from the resident's previous placement. The form contained no concrete documentation or detailed descriptions of inappropriate sexual behavior. The APC acknowledged that the data provided to the SSLC team had been primarily based on verbal reports from the resident's previous placement rather than documented evidence.

The AIO shared their findings with the SSLC staff, noting that all behavioral data collected since the individual's admission to El Paso SSLC pertained to self-injurious behavior rather than inappropriate sexual behavior. The AIO forwarded the resident's electronic record, which showed no incidents of inappropriate sexual behavior since admission.

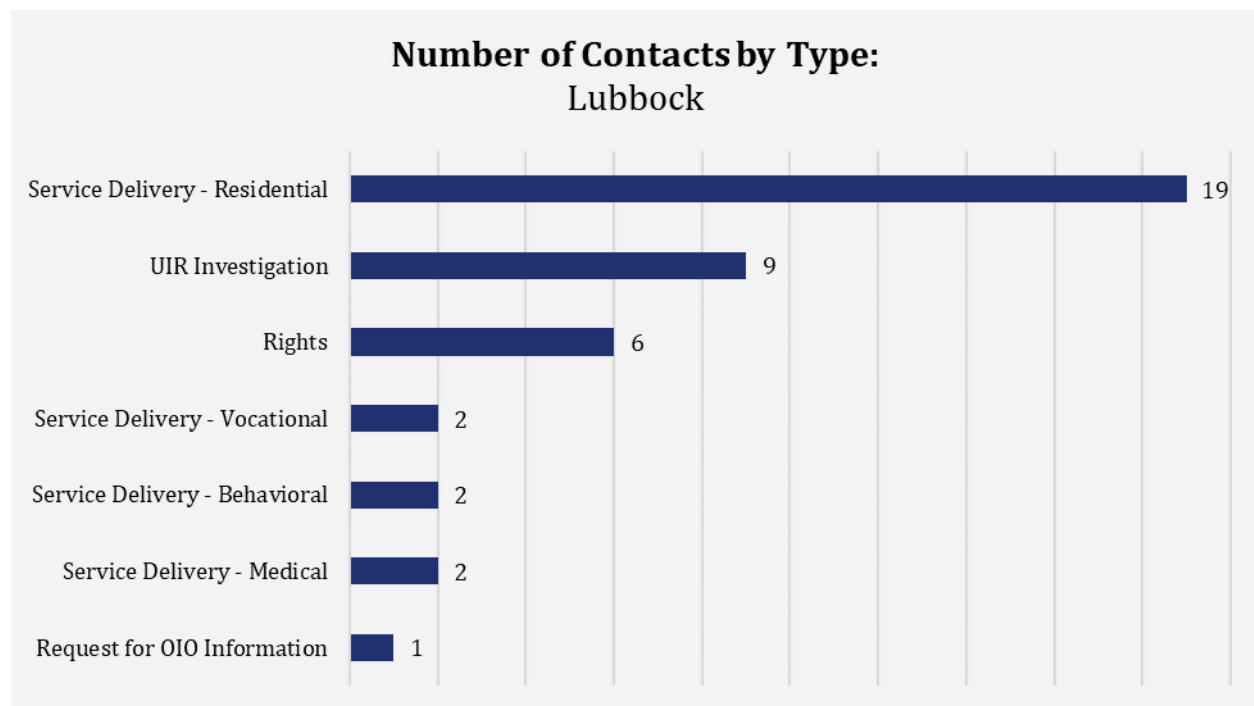
**Results:** The APC expressed gratitude for the AIO's thorough investigation and agreed that future admissions should rely on empirical data rather than verbal or circumstantial reports. The AIO recommended that any resident admitted to the SSLC from another entity be afforded due process, ensuring that data used to justify restrictions is properly vetted and supported by clear documentation.



## Lubbock State Supported Living Center

James Clark, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

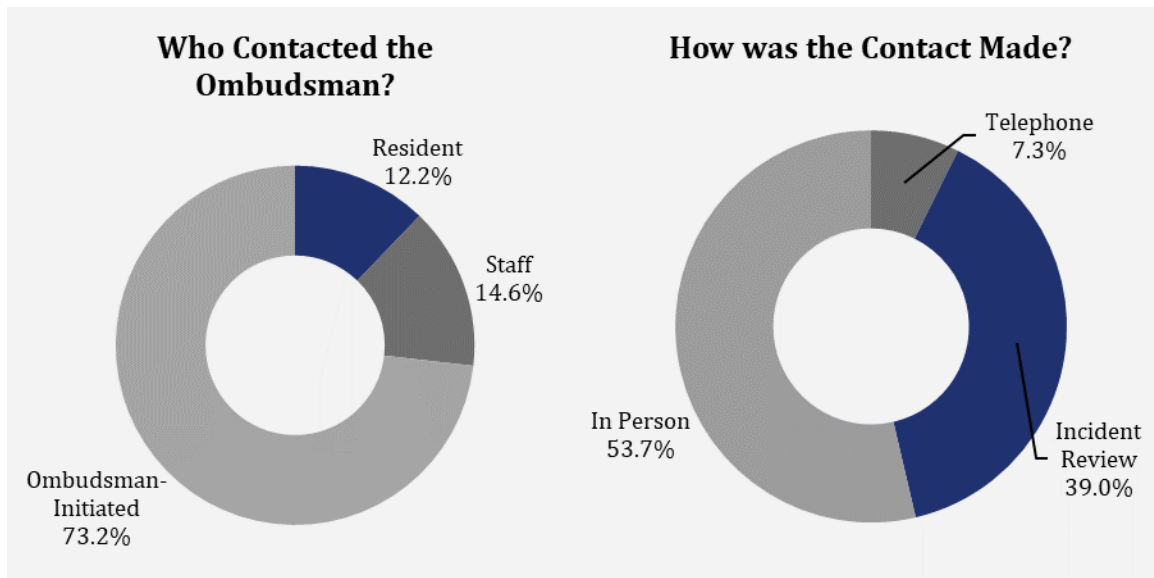
Mr. Clark was born and raised in Lubbock, Texas, and resides in Lubbock with his family. Mr. Clark earned a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Human Services from Wayland Baptist University. He began his career with the State of Texas at the Lubbock State School as a Direct Support Professional in 1999, where he worked 14 years in roles including Unit Director, Campus Administrator, and Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional. In 2013, Mr. Clark’s endeavors for career advancement led him to the Department of Family and Protective Services (Adult Protective Services) where he worked for 6 years as an APS Specialist to advocate for elderly and disabled Texans. In April of 2020, Mr. Clark’s career path led him back to the place he began his career with the State of Texas when he accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Lubbock SSLC with the OIO.



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Lubbock



### Ombudsman Contacts: Lubbock



## Case Study: Lubbock

### Expediting a Resolution in Resident Rights Restriction

**Background:** A resident at Lubbock SSLC received a cell phone restriction after using their phone inappropriately during an off campus pass to arrange a meeting with an acquaintance. The meeting reportedly resulted in the resident staying overnight in a hotel and returning to the SSLC a day later than scheduled. The facility imposed a phone restriction the next day.

The AIO participated in the Incident Management Review Team (IMRT) meeting to review the case. The team explained that the restriction was not solely based on the recent incident but also on a history of inappropriate phone use. They decided to maintain the restriction until the resident completed an online phone safety course to learn appropriate safety skills.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** Recognizing the impact of the phone restriction on the resident's rights, the AIO took proactive steps to expedite the situation. He encouraged the team to prioritize the recommended phone safety course to minimize undue delay in resolving the restriction. The AIO collaborated closely with the Human Rights Officer (HRO) and the Human Rights Committee (HRC) to address the restriction and ensure a clear plan was established for resolution. Additionally, the AIO met with the Director and worked with the HRC to accelerate the implementation of the phone safety course. He highlighted that the restriction had been in place for over 30 days without an approved plan of alleviation, leaving the resident uninformed about the steps needed to regain their phone privileges. Through these actions, the AIO facilitated the initiation of the course, enabling the resident to begin working on the curriculum while still under restriction.

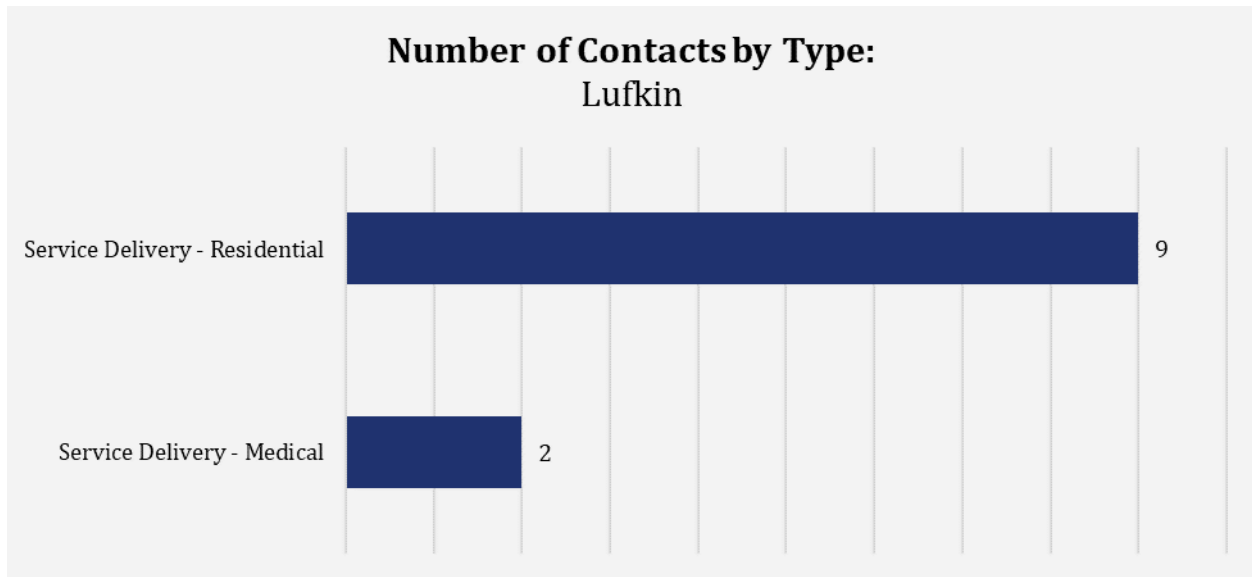
**Results:** The resident remains under a phone restriction but has completed two of the four modules in the phone safety course. The resident is expected to finish the course and regain full phone privileges by Christmas 2024. The AIO emphasized the importance of timely implementation and clear communication regarding restrictions. Any imposed limitation on a resident's rights should include a well-defined and promptly executed plan for resolution. This ensures residents understand the steps necessary to restore their rights and minimizes undue delays in the process.



## Lufkin State Supported Living Center

Seth Bowman, *Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

Raised in Lufkin, Texas, Mr. Bowman attended Stephen F. Austin State University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. After graduating in 2011, he began his professional career with Texas Health and Human Services as a Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional for the Lufkin SSLC. He then served as a training specialist in the Competency and Training Department where he trained employees on policies and procedures. While in this role, he was a faculty member and helped develop curriculum for the Safe Use of Restraints (SUR) program. Mr. Bowman joined the OIO as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Lufkin SSLC in May 2020.

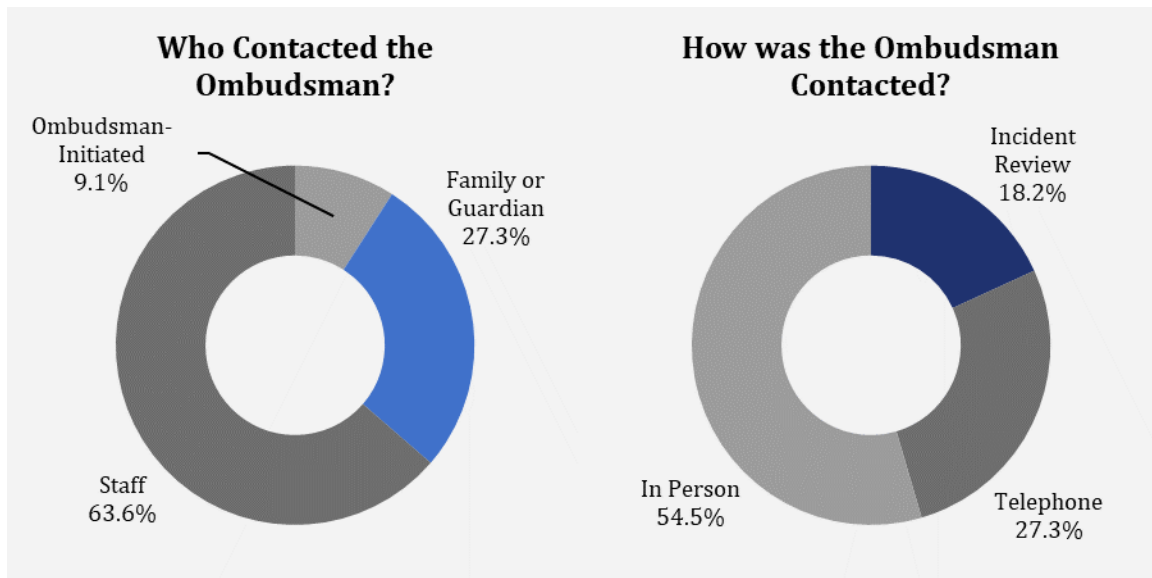




### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Lufkin



### Ombudsman Contacts: Lufkin



## Case Study: Lufkin

### Addressing Family Concerns by Bringing the Team Together

**Background:** A resident's family member contacted the AIO with concerns about direct care staff and the resident's Interdisciplinary Team (IDT). The family member had attended an SSLC event the week prior and had observed the resident being transported by wheelchair, although she had been told that the wheelchair was only to be used if the resident became unsteady. The family member also told the AIO that staff are outfitting the resident in a kind of adult brief that may cause rashes and, potentially, infections.

Further discussion with the resident's family member revealed a potential misunderstanding about the direct care staff's training. The AIO recommended that the family member communicate with staff about the appropriate use of the wheelchair and review instructions on the use of a pull-up style adult brief instead of a taped adult brief. The family member told the AIO that she has had several conversations with the resident's social worker and had asked for a meeting about her concerns. She planned to present this information to the IDT at an upcoming meeting.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO contacted the social worker, who confirmed that the resident's IDT was scheduled to meet, and the family member would attend. The AIO then interviewed direct care staff at the resident's home. Staff indicated that they were using the wheelchair and adult briefs as they were trained to according to the resident's program. The AIO asked the Habilitation Therapy Director whether the family member correctly understood the resident's program. She reported that she had spoken to the family member and explained that the wheelchair was a support for when the resident is unsteady. The resident was unsteady when walking at the SSLC event and so required the wheelchair. The director stated she would attend the resident's upcoming meeting.

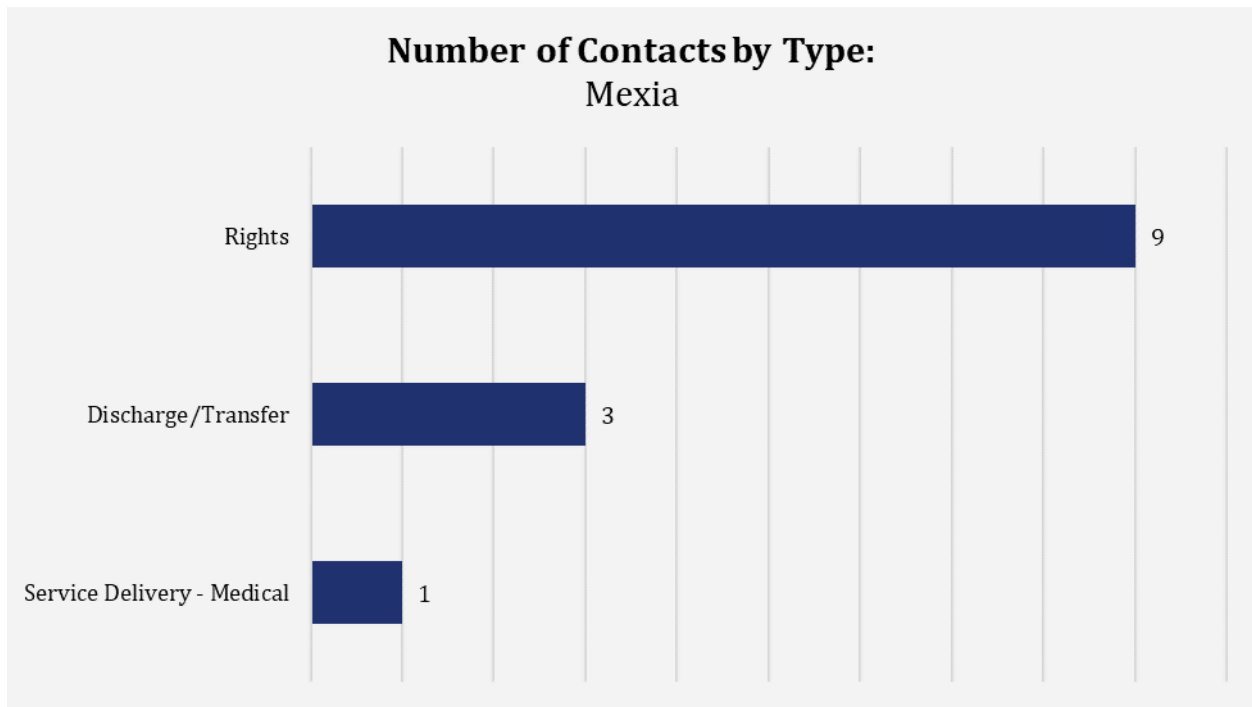
**Results:** The IDT met and discussed the supports the resident requires with the family member's input. The family member gained a clearer understanding of the staff's training regarding the appropriate use of the wheelchair and the instructions regarding the adult brief. After the IDT meeting, the resident continues to show progress with the supports implemented by the IDT.



## Mexia State Supported Living Center

*Adam Parks, Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

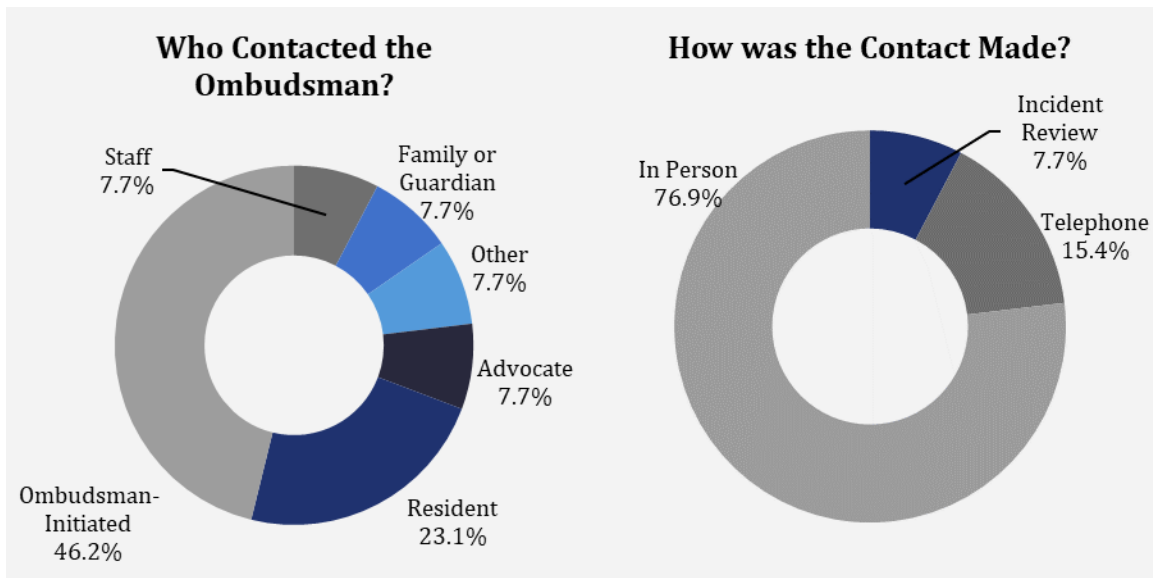
Mr. Parks was raised in Mexia, Texas. He attended Stephen F. Austin State University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. After graduation, he began his professional career as a conservatorship caseworker for the Department of Family and Protective Services in Angelina and Shelby Counties. Mr. Parks then accepted the position of Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP) at Lufkin SSLC. He was later appointed Lead QIDP for the Oak Hill Unit. He also served as a standing member of the Human Rights Committee during his time working at Lufkin SSLC. Mr. Parks accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Mexia SSLC in February 2014. In 2022, he received a promotion to Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman. Mr. Parks received a Master of Science degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling in May 2024. Later that year he became a Licensed Professional Counselor Associate and a Nationally Certified Counselor.



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Mexia



### Ombudsman Contacts: Mexia



## Case Study: Mexia

### Case Study: Ensuring Due Process for Resident's Food Restriction

**Background:** A staff member contacted the AIO with concerns regarding a resident's access to certain foods. They were particularly worried that specific foods and textures posed a significant risk to the individual's safety and sought guidance on implementing restrictions to address these concerns.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO discussed the issue with staff to provide clarity on the due process required to ensure the resident's rights were respected in implementing a restriction. To assess the situation thoroughly, the AIO reviewed the resident's electronic file which revealed that therapeutic measures were already in place but not clearly documented. Additionally, the record indicated that no current food restrictions had been implemented. The AIO recommended that the team improve documentation to ensure therapeutic measures were accurately captured, which could help prevent similar issues in the future. The AIO actively monitored the team's discussions and decisions, participating in their deliberations to ensure the resident's plan regarding therapeutic measures and potential food restrictions was clear, well-documented, and received the appropriate due process from the Human Rights Committee (HRC).

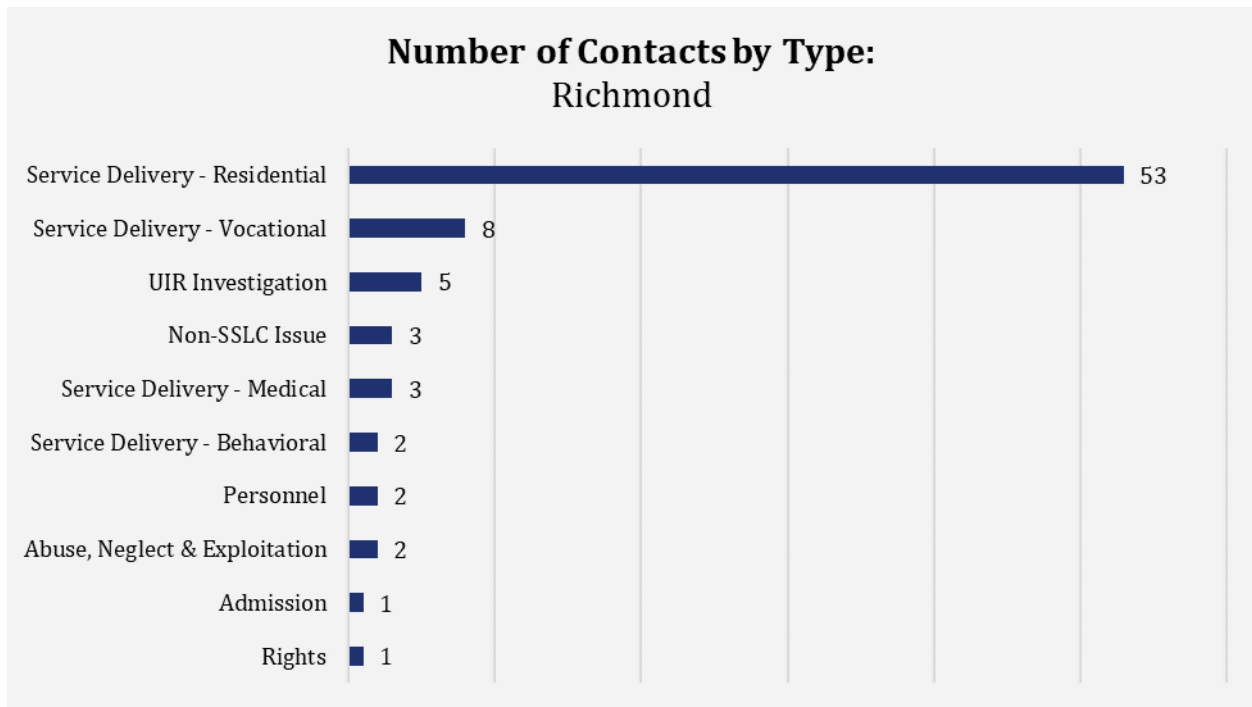
**Results:** The AIO's recommendations were adopted by the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT), and the resident's food restrictions underwent proper due process before implementation. The AIO followed up with staff to ensure they were comfortable with the outcome. Staff expressed their satisfaction with the final plan and thanked the AIO for their guidance and assistance.

## Richmond State Supported Living Center

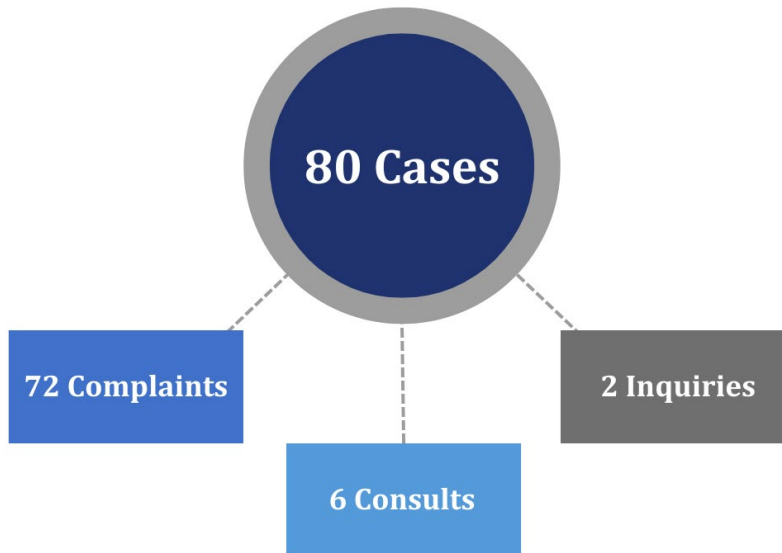


*Deatrice Potlow, Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

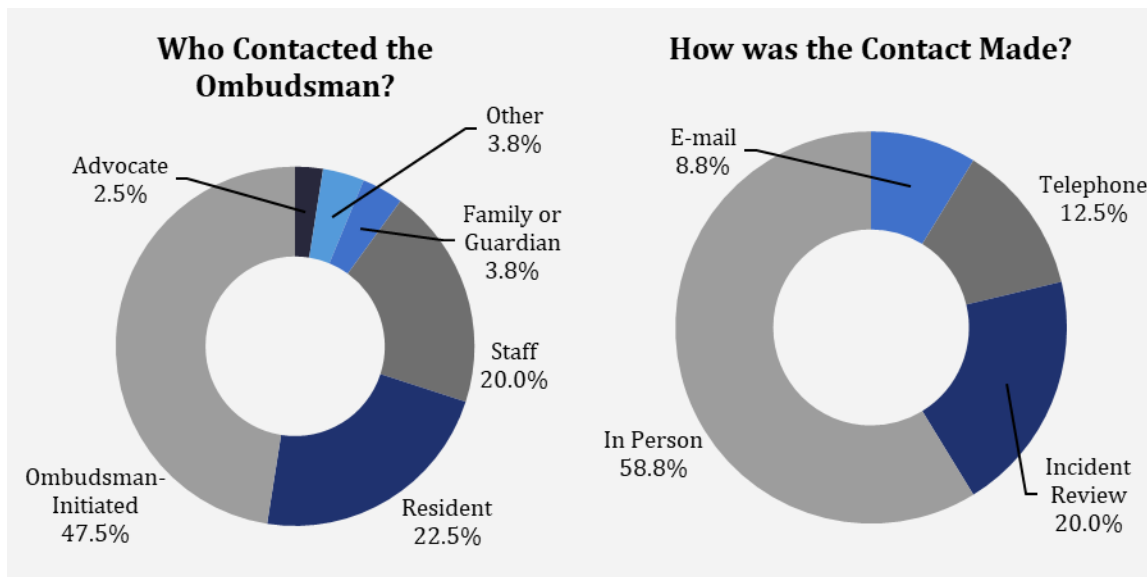
Born and raised in Greenwood, Mississippi, Ms. Potlow earned a Bachelor of Science in Office Administration in 1997. Shortly after graduating, she began working at a local hospital as a Medical Transcriptionist. She relocated to Houston, Texas, for career advancement and began a career with the State of Texas. During her tenure of employment, she served as an Investigator for children, adults, and persons with disabilities. Prior to joining the OIO as an Assistant Independent Ombudsman in 2012, she worked as a facility investigator responsible for investigating allegations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation at the Richmond SSLC.



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Richmond



### Ombudsman Contacts: Richmond



## Case Study: Richmond

### Advocating for Person-Centered Decision-making and Timely Action

**Background:** Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) members contacted the AIO regarding a delay of more than a year in obtaining a second opinion for a resident seeking dental implants. The resident expressed a desire for a "beautiful smile" and believed dental implants would help achieve this. After reviewing the situation, the AIO determined that the delay may have been caused by a change in Dental Directors. The current Dental Director had advised that the resident's bone structure was not strong enough for implants. Despite this, the resident requested a consultation with an off-campus dentist for a second opinion.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO thoroughly reviewed email communications and sought additional clarification to understand the factors contributing to the delay. In the absence of the Dental Director, the AIO asked an SSLC dentist to explain the rationale for not referring the resident for a second opinion. The AIO asked whether the consultation was unnecessary because the resident's bone structure was not strong enough for implants, if any medical concerns would prevent a consultation, and if any plans had been made to address the resident's desire for a "beautiful smile."

The IDT raised procedural questions about whether the resident could use their insurance or pay out of their trust fund to obtain a second opinion, and who would be responsible for scheduling the appointment. The AIO suggested that the IDT verify the resident's insurance coverage to determine whether costs could be covered by insurance or paid out-of-pocket. To address the resident's concerns comprehensively, the AIO recommended that the IDT include the individual's perspective and hear the medical rationale directly from the Dental Director. The AIO facilitated a meeting with the Dental Director, IDT, and resident to discuss the situation and the AIO's questions. During this meeting, the Dental Director explained that the resident was not a candidate for implants due to lifestyle, medical factors, and bone structure. Other potential options were explored as alternatives to implants.

**Results:** Following the meeting, the IDT and the resident agreed that a second opinion was not necessary. However, other options were considered to address the resident's desire for improved dental aesthetics. The AIO emphasized the importance of clear communication, resident inclusion in decision-making, and exploring all viable alternatives to ensure the resident's concerns were heard and addressed.

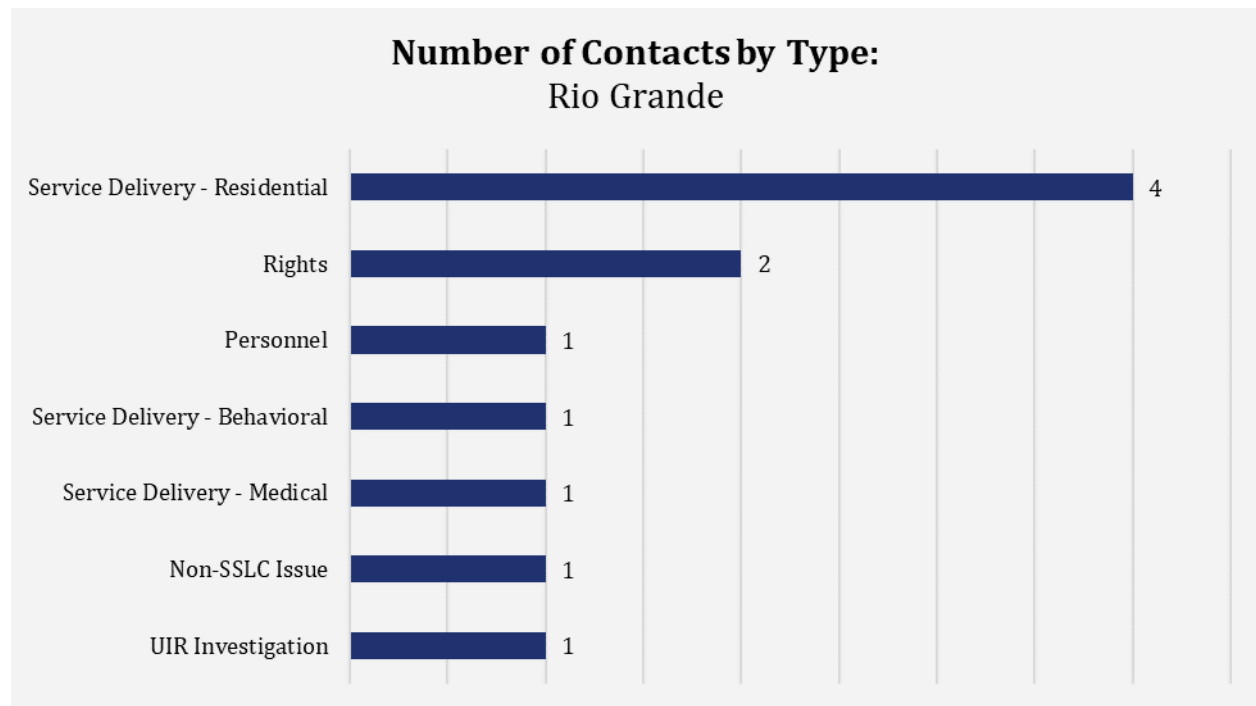


## Rio Grande State Center



*Horacio Flores, Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

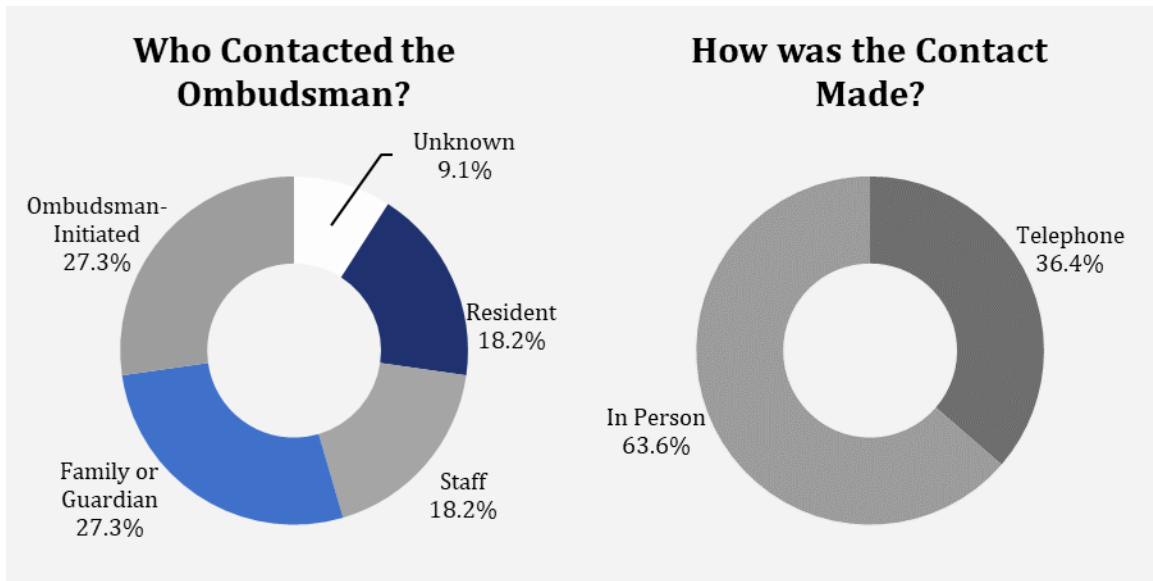
Mr. Flores hails from the Rio Grande Valley and attended Texas A&M Kingsville where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. He began his career with the State of Texas working for the Department of Family and Protective Services as an Investigator for Child Protective Services in Nueces, Kleberg, Duval and Jim Hogg counties. Mr. Flores then accepted the position of Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP) at the Corpus Christi SSLC. Shortly thereafter he was appointed as a Lead QIDP. Mr. Flores then relocated to the Rio Grande Valley and accepted the position of QIDP at the Rio Grande SC in Harlingen. Mr. Flores accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman of the Rio Grande SC in April 2017.



### Cases Opened this Biannual Period: Rio Grande



### Ombudsman Contacts: Rio Grande



## Case Study: Rio Grande

### Identifying Training Gap to Improve Behavioral Support Implementation

**Background:** During a campus home visit, the AIO observed a resident becoming physically aggressive with a nurse. A Direct Support Professional (DSP) intervened using a Ukeru pad to block the resident. While this was happening, the targeted nurse began questioning the resident, asking, “Why are you doing this? I have done nothing to you.” Another nurse joined in, asking, “Why are you attacking my boss?”

The AIO recognized that the nurse’s actions did not align with the resident’s Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP), which states that:

- Only up to two staff should be present in the environment.
- Staff should not scold or attempt to reason with the resident.
- Staff who are the primary target of aggression should remove themselves from the environment.

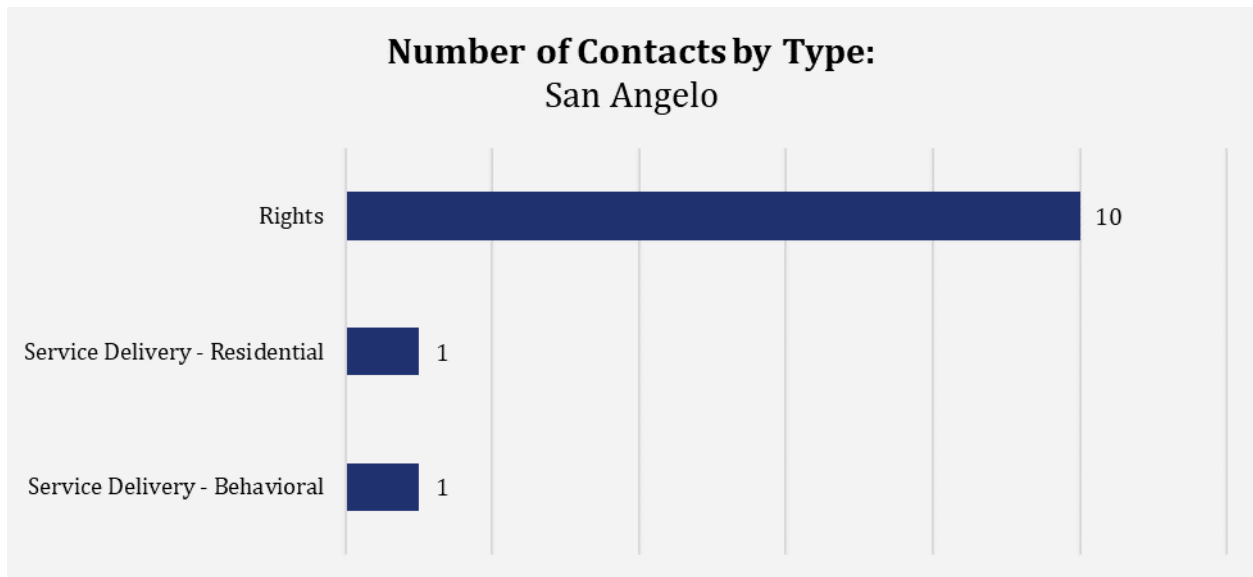
**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO reviewed the resident’s PBSP and confirmed that the nurse did not follow instructions on how to respond to physical aggression. The AIO contacted the Behavioral Health Specialist (BHS) overseeing the resident to discuss the situation. The AIO pointed out that, according to the PBSP, the nurse targeted by the resident should have left the environment. The AIO then inquired whether the nurses had been trained on the resident’s PBSP, but the BHS was unsure. Further investigation by the AIO revealed gaps in training. The BHS assistant informed the AIO that nursing staff had not been trained on PBSPs and confirmed that, in general, nursing staff were not included in PBSP training. The AIO contacted a BHS supervisor and a nurse educator, both of whom corroborated that medication/floor nursing staff were not trained on PBSPs. Finally, the AIO reviewed SSLC policy and found no requirement specifying which staff members should be trained on PBSPs.

**Results:** The AIO brought these findings to the attention of the Director, emphasizing the importance of training all relevant staff, including nurses, on PBSPs to ensure proper implementation and consistency in handling challenging behaviors. The director acknowledged the issue and agreed that nurses should be trained on individuals’ PBSPs. They committed to exploring training options and thanked the AIO for identifying this critical gap. The AIO’s efforts highlighted the need for clear policies and comprehensive training to ensure all staff are equipped to support residents effectively, particularly in challenging situations.

## San Angelo State Supported Living Center

Lashelle Childress, *Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

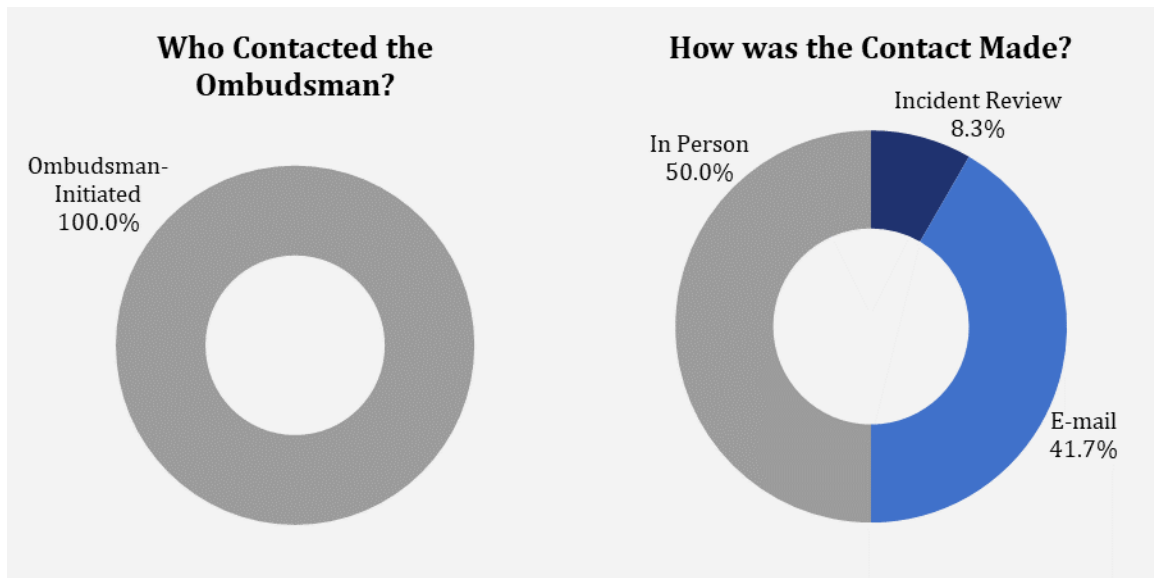
Lashelle Childress attended Angelo State University where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 2012. She has had the opportunity to serve in various roles for both the State of Texas and in the nonprofit sector, beginning as a Direct Support Professional. She has also held positions as a Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional, a Campus Administrator, a Facility Investigator, and as a Guardianship Specialist. These roles have not only provided her with knowledge and experience, but they have fueled her passion to advocate the people served. Ms. Childress joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman at the San Angelo State Supported Living Center in 2024.



**Cases Opened this Biannual Period:**  
San Angelo



**Ombudsman Contacts:**  
San Angelo



## Case Study: San Angelo

### Advocating for Resident Rights and Collaborative Solutions

**Background:** The AIO was informed that a resident had been involved in multiple instances of physical aggression toward other residents after becoming upset that staff were not allowing them to shave. This resident has a disorder that causes them to struggle with issues regarding hair removal.

The AIO spoke with the unit director who stated that the resident's interdisciplinary team (IDT) intended to implement a plan that would limit when the resident could shave and require that the resident be supervised when doing so. The AIO recognized that such a plan was restrictive and would require review by the resident's guardian and the Human Rights Committee (HRC).

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO requested that the San Angelo SSLC Quality Assurance department provide any policies and staff training material regarding hair removal. The AIO also reviewed the resident's records and spoke to the Human Rights Officer (HRO) who stated that they were unaware that this resident had any shaving restrictions. The AIO expressed their concern to the QIDP that the resident's rights were being restricted without due process.

**Results:** The AIO attended a meeting of the resident's IDT. At the meeting, the AIO inquired about the resident's preferences and alternative hair removal methods. It was determined that the resident is unable to shave safely without supervision, so the IDT developed a plan that addressed the resident's preferences while ensuring that they can shave regularly and safely. This plan was approved by the client, their guardian, and the HRC. The AIO followed up with the team after the plan was implemented and found that it had been effective in preventing injury to the resident.

## San Antonio State Supported Living Center

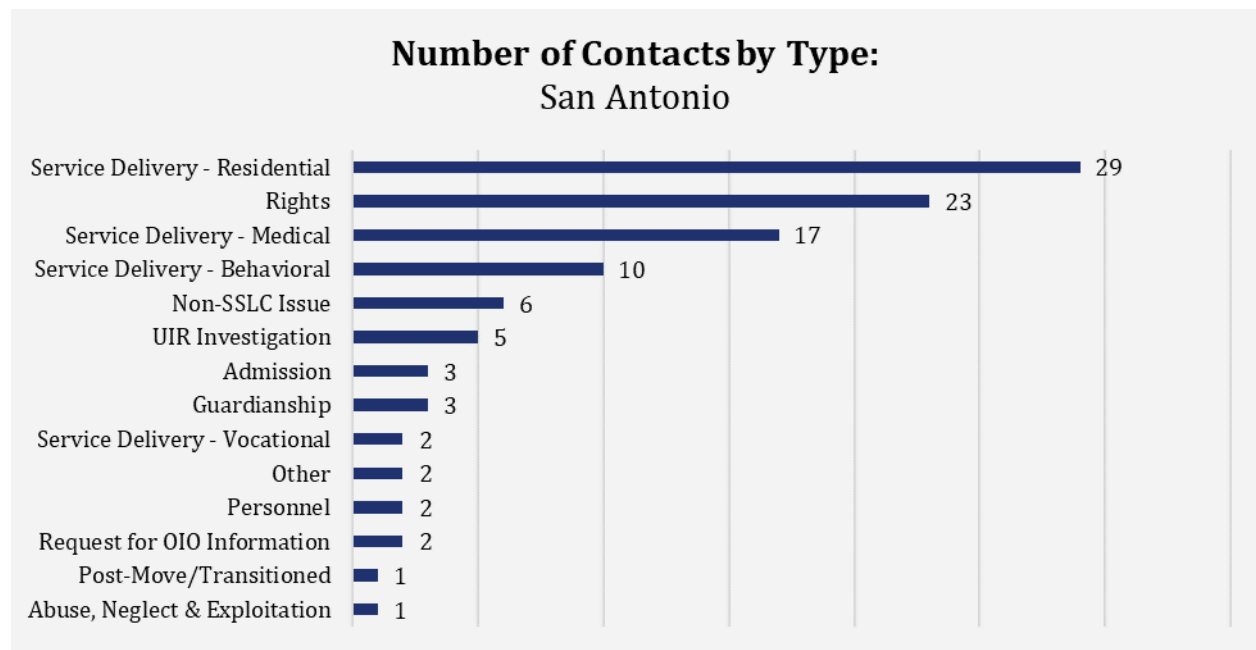


*Gevona Hicks, Ombudsman Educator, Senior Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

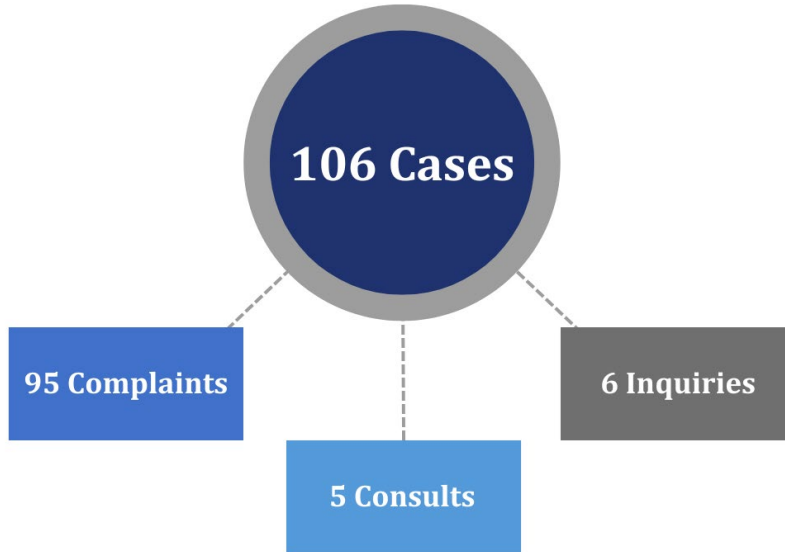
*Interim San Antonio Assistant Independent Ombudsman*

Gevona Hicks' goal is to be a valued resource for Texans with disabilities, their families, and service providers. She has supported people with IDD by coordinating services for home and community-based service providers and state-operated and community intermediate care facilities. She served as the

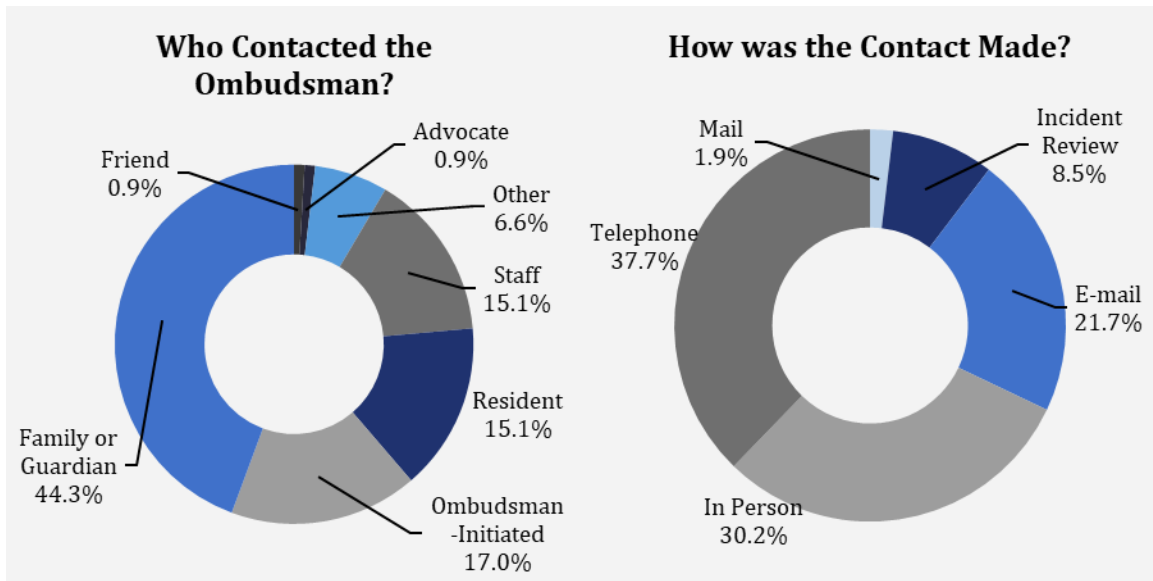
human rights officer at the San Antonio SSLC, advocating for and protecting the rights of residents. Mrs. Hicks joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman in April 2014 as the AIO for the San Antonio SSLC, became part of the systemic investigation team as a Senior AIO in February 2022, and in October 2024, accepted her current role as Ombudsman Educator, where she is responsible for the development and implementation of agency training programs. As a certified person-centered thinking trainer, she supports Texans in living the lives they envision for themselves. Mrs. Hicks is committed to enhancing her knowledge by pursuing a Master of Public Administration, which will equip her with the skills needed to continue to create meaningful impact in public service.



**Cases Opened this Biannual Period:  
San Antonio**



**Ombudsman Contacts:  
San Antonio**





## Case Study: San Antonio

### Managing Precautionary Measures and Resident Right to Community Employment

**Background:** In September 2024, the SSLC medical team placed an entire residential home under quarantine after multiple residents tested positive for COVID-19. During the quarantine, residents were advised not to participate in activities outside the home, including off-campus work. A guardian contacted the AIO to advocate for their family member's ability to continue working at an offsite contract job, emphasizing the resident's pride in their work, the importance of maintaining a structured routine, and the resident's distress caused by the prolonged indoor isolation.

The guardian expressed frustration with the center's communication and declined an offer to meet with the SSLC director, preferring to work through the AIO. They requested COVID testing to provide medical clearance for the resident to return to work, offering to arrange the test and transport the resident themselves if the results were negative.

**Ombudsman Investigation:** The AIO first confirmed that the guardian had the authority to take the resident off-campus but noted that this could create complications for the work trainer and the employer, as the guardian did not have authority at the community site. Acknowledging the potential impact of quarantine on residents' routines, the AIO suggested the guardian explore alternative structured activities if the resident remained unable to work.

The AIO met with the Medical Director (MD) to clarify quarantine protocols and explore possible criteria for lifting restrictions for individual residents or the entire home. The MD explained that testing was only required for symptomatic individuals and that asymptomatic residents were considered to have an "unknown" COVID status. Although quarantine was not strictly necessary in some cases, the center often applied it universally as a precaution.

The AIO also contacted the worksite supervisor to learn about the community site's COVID protocols. The supervisor shared that exposed employees were encouraged to wear masks and maintain physical distance. Recognizing the significance of aligning with community practices, the AIO documented these findings and shared them with the SSLC director and MD. The AIO emphasized that increasing community employment and inclusion is a core goal of the SSLC and suggested taking local worksite practices into account when making decisions about off-campus work during quarantine.

**Results:** To address the guardian's concerns and improve communication, the AIO shared the worksite's COVID procedures and recommendations with the guardian and encouraged them to reconsider the meeting with the center director. After deliberation, the guardian agreed to the meeting. The discussion resulted in approval for the resident to return to their off-campus contract work the next day, provided appropriate precautions were taken.

The AIO's efforts highlighted the importance of balancing precautionary measures with the resident's needs and rights, aligning institutional protocols with community practices, and fostering collaborative communication to achieve positive outcomes.

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