

Fiscal Year 2023
Oklahoma Foster Parent Voices
& Foster Youth Matters

ANNUAL REPORT



OKLAHOMA
State Department
of Health



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since November 2014, the Office of Client Advocacy (OCA) has administered a grievance program to address concerns raised by Oklahoma foster parents regarding employees of Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) or of child-placing agencies.¹ In collaboration with the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO), this program has processed approximately 2,000 complaints from foster parents. In November 2018, OCA expanded its oversight to include a parallel grievance system for children served by OKDHS Child Welfare Services (CWS).² Since then, the program has managed approximately 2,100 complaints filed by or on behalf of children being served by CWS, including children in facilities and home-based placements.

In fiscal year 2023 (FY 2023), the program received 179 foster parent complaints and 444 youth complaints. One hundred forty-three of the foster parent and 351 of the youth complaints could be handled as grievances. Four retaliation investigations were conducted on behalf of foster parents. Most grievances reported issues with staff – CWS staff in the case of foster parents, and facility and CWS staff in the case of youth. Each program was able to resolve most of the grievances it received.

During FY 2024, the program received 197 foster parent complaints and 315 youth complaints. One hundred fifty-five of the foster parent and 252 of the youth complaints could be handled as grievances. Four foster parent retaliation investigations were initiated. Again, grievances were primarily concerned with staff issues, and the programs were able to resolve the majority of the grievances received.

Beyond processing grievances, OCA and OJSO analyze complaint data to identify systemic issues within child welfare. This information is compiled in an annual report for the state legislature.³ Additionally, OCA investigates allegations of retaliation, harassment, or discrimination against foster parents and children being served by CWS, ensuring accountability and protection for those involved in the system.⁴

In November 2024, OCA moved from OKDHS to the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Because the move occurred in FY 2025, data surrounding it is not included in this report.



HISTORY OF THE PROGRAMS

Responding to concerns about fairness and transparency in handling foster parent complaints, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1793 in 2014.⁵ Previously, foster parents had to file complaints with their local OKDHS offices. This meant that their complaint could be handled by the officemates of the people they were complaining about, raising concerns about the fairness and objectivity of the process. Under the new law, effective November 1, 2014, OCA and OJSO worked together to create an independent grievance system, identify trends in the child welfare system, and file annual reports with the legislature.⁶ The Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO), is responsible for administering the foster parent grievance program.⁷ From November 2014 through June 30, 2024, the program received approximately 2,000 complaints.

Inspired by the foster parent grievance program and similar initiatives in other states, the legislature passed House Bill 2552 in 2018 to establish an independent grievance system for children being served by CWS.⁸ Starting November 1, 2018, OCA managed this program, enforcing children's rights as defined by statute.⁹ Complaints could be filed by, or on behalf of, children being served by CWS. From the time the program was founded through June 30, 2024, it received approximately 2,100 complaints.

THE GRIEVANCE PROCESS

The grievance process begins when a complaint is filed through the appropriate online platform. Foster parents file their complaints through the online form located at the Foster Parent Voices website, at okfosterparentvoices.org.¹⁰ Youth complaints can be initiated by the child or by someone acting on their behalf by filling out the online form found on the Foster Youth Matters website, at okfosteryouthmatters.org.¹¹ If a youth is placed in a facility, the local grievance coordinator (LGC) will try to address the grievance informally before entering it into the system. If the LGC cannot resolve the grievance, it is escalated to OCA through the formal grievance process.

When OCA receives a foster parent or youth complaint, the first thing that must be done is to determine whether the complaint is grievable. A complaint is considered grievable if it meets policy criteria for resolution through the grievance process.¹² Policy defines the issues that can and cannot be handled through the grievance process. Complaints that meet policy criteria are handled as grievances. Other complaints are considered non-grievable – meaning they do not meet the policy criteria for the grievance process – and referred to the appropriate resource, whether to the OKDHS Director's Helpline or another OKDHS or external process. If the complaint is about child abuse or neglect, it is referred to the statewide Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

Grievances are resolved collaboratively by OCA, CWS, and providers.¹³ Law requires that grievances start at the lowest level possible, while ensuring that the person complaining is heard by someone impartial.¹⁴ If the person who filed the grievance does not accept the proposed resolution, the issue can be pushed further up the chain of command. A grievance is not considered resolved until the person who filed the complaint accepts a proposed resolution or until all options for elevating the grievance have been exhausted.¹⁵ To be considered timely, grievances must be resolved within 60 days of filing.¹⁶



THE RETALIATION INVESTIGATION PROCESS

State law protects foster parents¹⁷ and children being served by CWS¹⁸ from retaliation when filing grievances, providing information to officials, or testifying in investigations. If a foster parent or child believes they have been subjected to retaliation, harassment, or discrimination, the OCA investigation section investigates. If the allegations are substantiated, OCA notifies CWS leadership and the affected foster parent or child. Like grievances, retaliation investigations must be completed within 60 days to be considered timely.



ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS, FISCAL YEAR 2023

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

In both programs, complaints are reviewed and categorized as either grievances or non-grievable concerns. To be grievable, a foster parent complaint must be related to the provision of foster care services, including complaints against CWS and child-placing agency employees for what they decide, what they do, and what they fail to do. A youth complaint is grievable if it is related to one of the rights in the youth statement of rights. Grievances are processed within the programs. Non-grievable concerns are referred out to other programs as appropriate.

Foster parents filed 179 complaints, 143 (80%) of which were able to be handled as grievances. Four complaints (2%) were the subject of retaliation investigations.

TABLE 1. DISPOSITIONS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY FOSTER PARENT GRIEVANCE PROGRAM IN FY 2023

	1st Quarter			2nd Quarter			3rd Quarter			4th Quarter			FY 23
	Jun. 22	Aug. 22	Sep. 22	Oct. 22	Nov. 22	Dec. 22	Jan. 23	Feb. 23	Mar. 22	Apr. 23	May. 23	Jun. 23	Total
Grievance	17	12	18	12	9	10	8	11	17	3	10	16	143
Investigation	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Director's Helpline	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	14
Refer to Legal or Administrative Process	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	4
Refer to the Office of Civil Rights	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Refer to Youth Grievance Program	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Informal Problem Resolutions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Duplicate	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	7
Other	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Totals by Quarter	56			42			49			32			179

In FY 2023, 444 complaints were filed by or on behalf of children being served by CWS. Three hundred fifty-one (79%) of the complaints were able to be handled as grievances. There were no retaliation investigations in the youth program. Two hundred sixty-three of the grievances (83%) were from youth placed in a facility.

TABLE 2. DISPOSITIONS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE YOUTH GRIEVANCE PROGRAM IN FY 2023

1st Quarter	July 2022		August 2022		September 2022		1st Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	9	20	7	16	9	16	25	52
Not Grieveable	7	2	6	0	6	0	19	2
Referred to Abuse Hotline	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Spam	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total	19	22	13	16	17	16	49	54
Combined Totals	41		29		33		103	
2nd Quarter	October 2022		November 2022		December 2022		2nd Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	8	16	6	33	9	26	23	75
Not Grieveable	5	0	1	0	1	0	7	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to Other DHS Division	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0
Spam	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Total	14	16	8	34	11	26	33	76
Combined Totals	30		42		37		109	
3rd Quarter	January 2023		February 2023		March 2023		3rd Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	10	28	4	11	4	44	18	83
Not Grieveable	7	0	5	1	3	2	15	3
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	0
Spam	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Total	20	30	9	13	9	47	38	90
Combined Totals	50		22		56		128	
4th Quarter	April 2023		May 2023		June 2023		4th Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	7	12	4	23	11	18	22	53
Not Grieveable	3	1	4	0	13	0	20	1
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	1
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	2	0	1	0	4	0
Spam	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Total	12	14	11	23	27	18	50	55
Combined Totals	26		34		45		105	

FY 2023 Grand Total = 445

Total DHS = 170

Total Facilities = 275

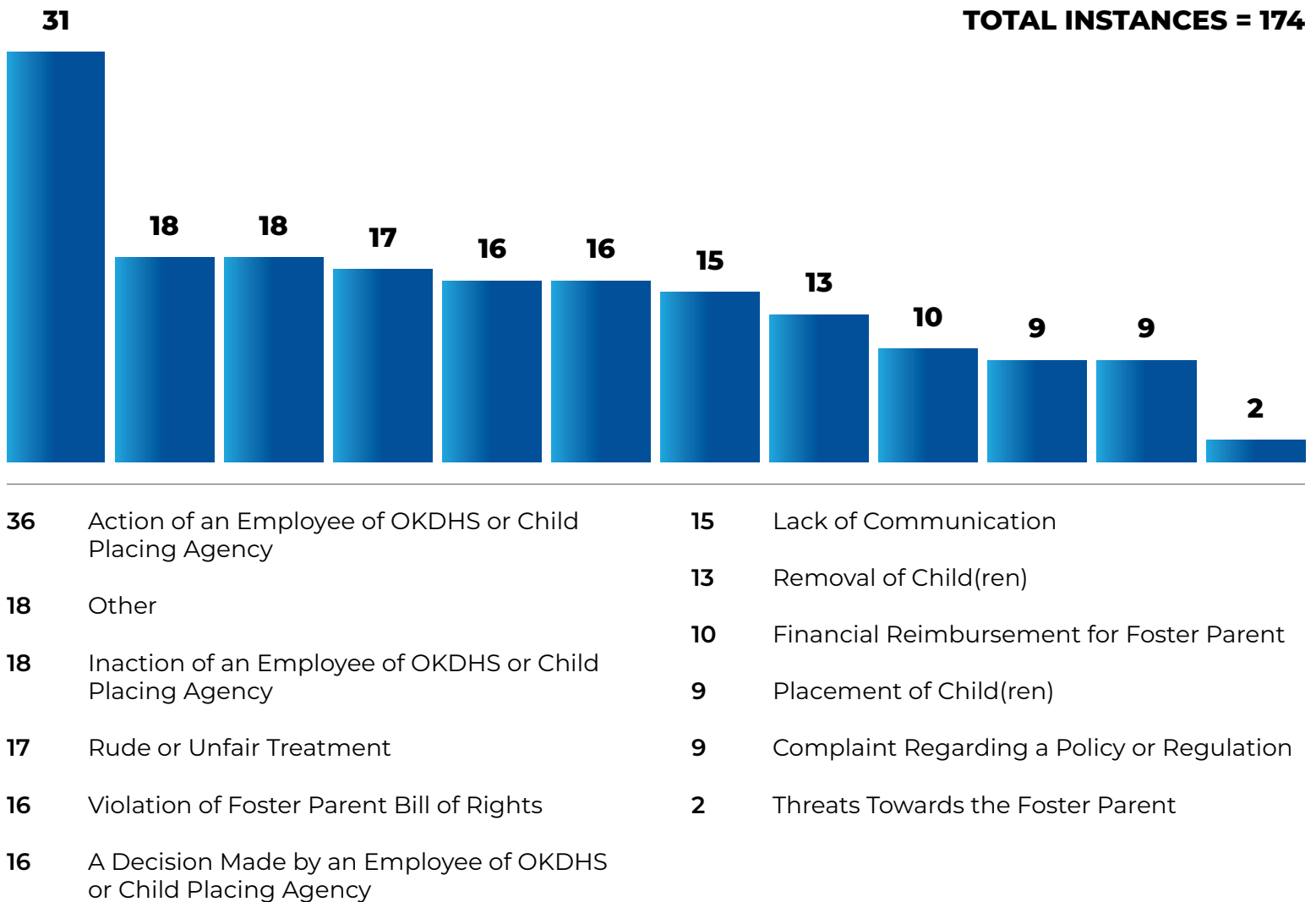
NATURE OF COMPLAINTS

When a complaint is submitted through the Oklahoma Foster Parent Voices website or the Oklahoma Foster Youth Matters website, the person filing the complaint is guided through a selection process to identify the nature of the complaint. Because of the concerns of foster parents and children often differ, the available complaint categories are tailored to their respective experiences. By categorizing complaints according to these specific issues, the foster parent and youth grievance programs can track patterns, address concerns effectively, and work toward systemic improvements within the child welfare system. The youth grievance program categorizes complaints based on the Youth Statement of Rights, with the language adjusted to ensure that it falls within the child's level of understanding.

In FY 2023, the most frequently cited issues among foster parents were:

- Action of an employee of OKDHS or child-placing agency (36 instances)
- Inaction of an employee of OKDHS or a child-placing agency (18 instances)
- Other (18 instances)

TABLE 3. FOSTER PARENT REPORTS OF NATURE OF THE COMPLAINT STATEWIDE TOTALS IN FY 2023



For FY 2023, the most cited issues in youth grievances were:

- Problems with facility staff (167 instances)
- Conflicts with other children (95 instances)
- Not being able to visit parents (24 instances)

**TABLE 4. OFFICE OF CLIENT ADVOCACY YOUTH GRIEVANCE
STATE FISCAL YEAR 2023 • NATURE OF COMPLAINT**

167 I have a problem with facility staff where I live.	95 I have problems with other kids where I live.	24 I don't get to visit my parents.	16 Other	13 My caseworker is not visiting me or calling me back.
13 I don't get to visit friends/other family.	12 I'm not placed with family or a friend.	12 I don't feel safe.	10 Caseworker communication with parties involved.	9 Caseworker integrity.
8 I am being abused or neglected.	8 Food issues (gross, cold, not enough.)	8 I need to see my doctor/dentist/therapist.	7 Spam	7 Biological parent court issues.
4 No one tells me when I have to move or why.	4 I need help, I don't know what happens next when I age out.	4 I am not involved in case decisions that affect my family.	4 I am not placed with my brother(s) and/or sister(s).	3 I moved but I don't have my stuff.
2 I don't get to visit my brother(s)/sister(s).	2 I don't know why I am in custody or what happens next.	2 I'm having an issue with my foster parents.	2 Outcome of investigation.	2 Pictures of child on social media from foster parents.
1 My clothes don't fit me or I don't have clothes for the weather.	1 I am not provided services I need/I am made to do services I don't want.	1 I don't know when I get to visit people.	1 I don't get privacy for my age.	1 I need help with life skills.
1 No one tells me when I have to move or why.	1 I don't get to go to church.	1 I don't like where I live.	1 I don't get to participate in after-school activities.	1 Caseworker did not follow through on tasks.

TOTAL = 448

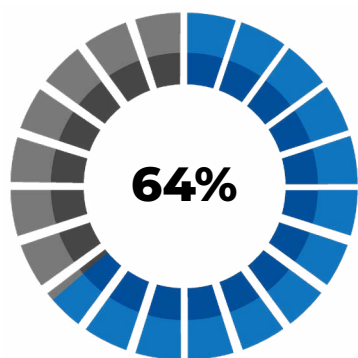
NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RESOLVED

Information about the number and nature of complaints is collected when the complaint is filed. Information about the resolution of complaints is collected when the complaint is closed. For this reason, some data from a complaint (like whether the complaint is grievable) could be recorded in one fiscal year, while other data (like whether the complaint was resolved) could be recorded in the next fiscal year. Complaints can be closed in various ways, but not all closures qualify as a resolution. For example, the person who filed the complaint might decide that, even though it is not resolved, they do not want to pursue the issue further. Or there might be a court order that takes care of the issue that was the subject of the complaint.

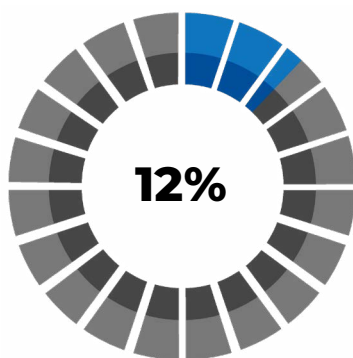
Of the 177 foster parent complaints closed in FY 2023, 73% were resolved. The unresolved complaints are broken down as follows:

- 12% were non-grievable complaints referred to other programs
- 6% were rendered non-grievable by things that happened post-disposition
- 5% were abandoned by foster parents
- 4% closed with no action taken (mainly because they were duplicates of other complaints)

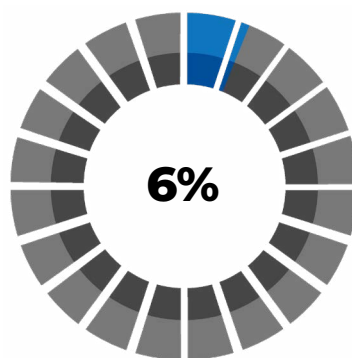
TABLE 5. FOSTER PARENT GRIEVANCE PROGRAM CLOSURES FOR FY 2023



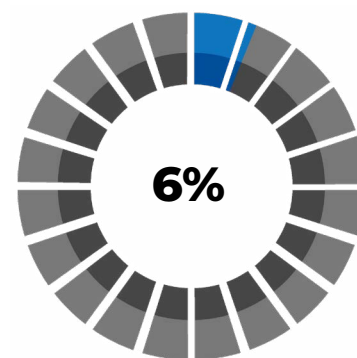
Resolved Per Foster Parent
(113)



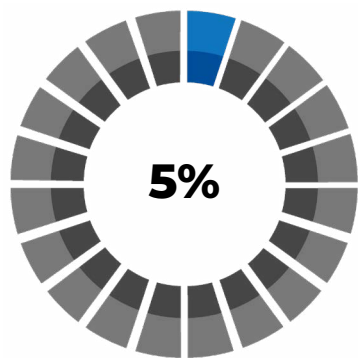
Closed. Referred Out.
(22)



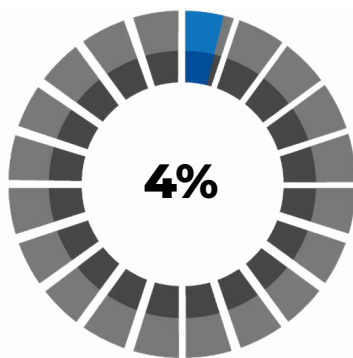
Closed. Complaint
Rendered Non Grievable
(10)



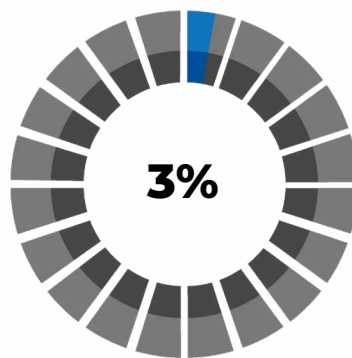
Resolved.
Acceptance Deemed.
(10)



Closed. Abandoned by
Foster Parent.
(9)



Closed. No Action Needed.
(7)



Resolved. Investigation
Completed.
(6)

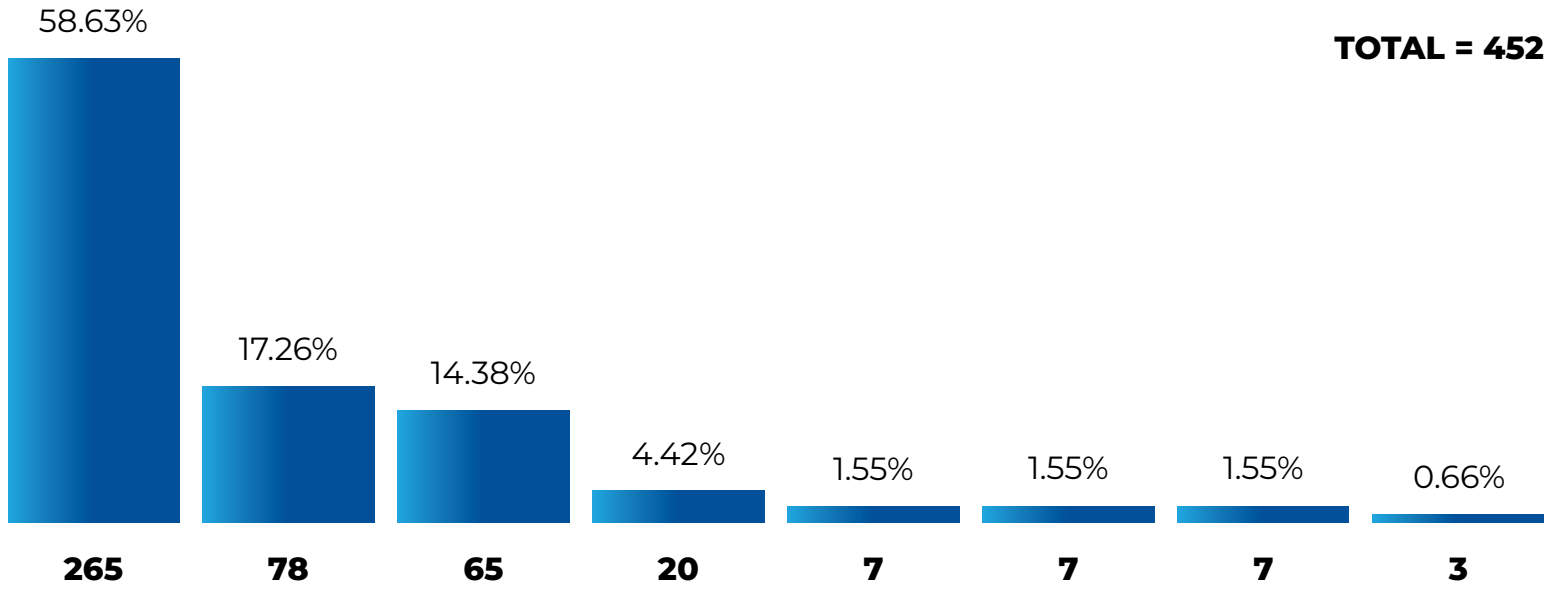
TOTAL = 177

*Raw Numbers Shown in
Parenthesis.*

Of the 452 youth complaints closed in FY 2023, 76% were resolved. The unresolved complaints are broken down as follows:

- 14% were non-grievable
- 4% were referred to other programs
- 2% were abandoned by the filer
- 2% were closed at the youth's request

TABLE 6. YOUTH GRIEVANCE PROGRAM CLOSURES FOR FY 2023



(265)	Resolved - Informal Problem Resolution	(7)	Abandoned
(78)	Resolved - All Other Levels	(7)	Remedies Exhausted
(65)	Non-Grievable	(7)	Child's Decision
(20)	Referred Out	(3)	Spam

Since 2014, thousands of complaints from foster parents and youth have informed the state's approach to improving child welfare services. Each grievance represents a concern addressed through a structured process focused on fairness, accuracy, and accountability.

ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS, FISCAL YEAR 2024

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

Foster parents filed 197 complaints, 155 (79%) of which were able to be handled as grievances. Four complaints (2%) were the subject of retaliation investigations.

TABLE 7. DISPOSITIONS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY FOSTER PARENT GRIEVANCE PROGRAM IN FY 2024

	1st Quarter			2nd Quarter			3rd Quarter			4th Quarter			FY 23
	Jun. 23	Aug. 23	Sep. 23	Oct. 23	Nov. 23	Dec. 23	Jan. 24	Feb. 24	Mar. 24	Apr. 24	May. 24	Jun. 24	
Grievance	14	14	8	13	11	16	19	8	8	15	17	12	155
Investigation	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	4
Director's Helpline	0	1	2	0	2	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	13
Refer to Legal or Administrative Process	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
Refer to the Office of Civil Rights	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Refer to Youth Grievance Program	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Informal Problem Resolutions	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	5
Duplicate	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	7
Other	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Totals by Quarter	52			49			42			54			197

In FY 2024, 315 complaints were filed by or on behalf of youth being served by CWS. Two hundred fifty-two (80%) of the complaints were handled as grievances. There were no retaliation investigations. One hundred ninety (75%) of the grievances were filed by youth who were placed in facilities.

TABLE 8. DISPOSITIONS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE YOUTH GRIEVANCE PROGRAM IN FY 2023

1st Quarter	July 2023		August 2023		September 2023		1st Quarter Totals	
	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Complaint Focus								
Grievance	10	16	4	17	8	3	22	36
Not Grieveable	12	0	1	0	5	0	18	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	23	17	5	17	13	5	41	39
Combined Totals	40		22		18		80	

2nd Quarter	October 2023		November 2023		December 2023		2nd Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	5	12	5	9	7	6	17	27
Not Grieveable	2	0	0	0	3	3	5	3
Referred to Abuse Hotline	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Referred to Other DHS Division	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	8	12	5	9	10	9	23	30
Combined Totals	20		14		19		53	

3rd Quarter	January 2024		February 2024		March 2024		3rd Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	1	16	3	15	1	29	5	60
Not Grieveable	6	0	2	0	4	0	12	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	0
Total	8	17	5	15	7	29	20	61
Combined Totals	25		20		36		81	

4th Quarter	April 2024		May 2024		June 2024		4th Quarter Totals	
Complaint Focus	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility	DHS	Facility
Grievance	6	29	7	20	5	19	18	68
Not Grieveable	3	0	4	0	6	0	13	0
Referred to Abuse Hotline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to Other DHS Division	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0
Total	10	29	12	20	12	19	34	68
Combined Totals	39		32		31		102	

FY 2023 Grand Total = 316 Total DHS = 118 Total Facilities = 198

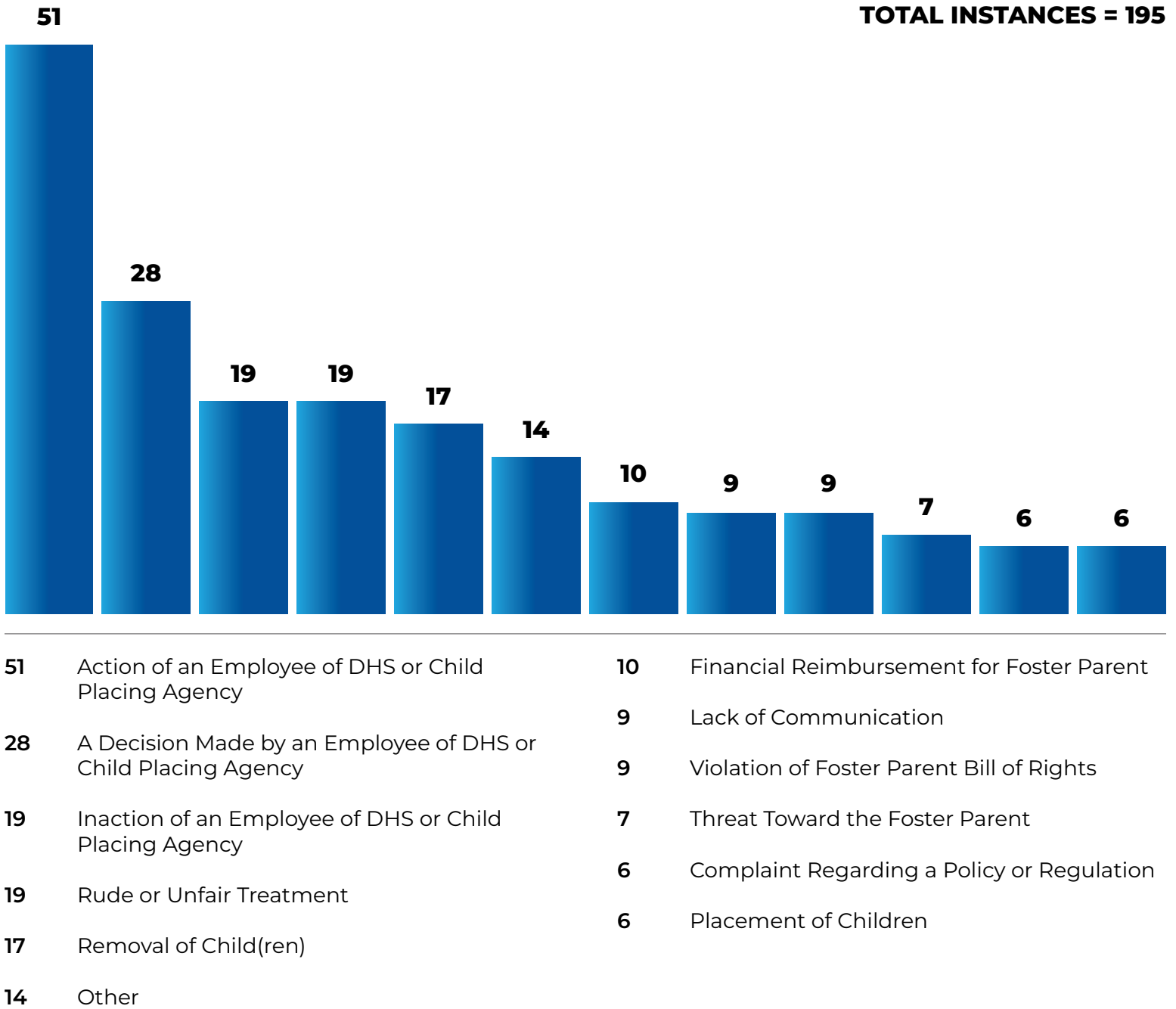
The grievance system exists to ensure transparency in service delivery. With thousands of formal complaints reviewed, the process reflects a long-standing commitment to addressing issues through clear procedures and consistent oversight.

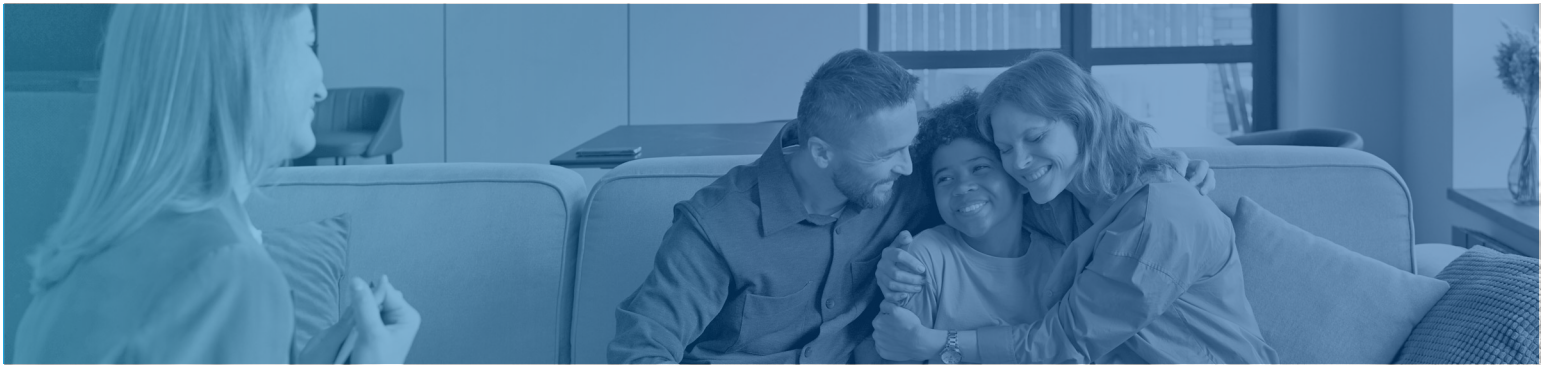
NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

In FY 2024, the most common complaint categories among foster parents were:

- Action of an employee of OKDHS or a child-placing agency (51 instances)
- A decision by an employee of OKDHS or a child-placing agency (28 instances)
- Rude or unfair treatment (19 instances)

TABLE 9. NATURE OF COMPLAINT RECORDED BY FOSTER PARENTS ON COMPLAINTS FROM FY 2024





For FY 2024, youth grievances the top categories for youth grievances were:

- Problems with facility staff (137 instances)
- Conflicts with other children (58 instances)
- Not being placed with family (15 instances)

TABLE 10. NATURE OF COMPLAINT RECORDED ON YOUTH GRIEVANCE PROGRAM COMPLAINTS FOR FY 2024

137 I have a problem with facility staff where I live.	58 I have problems with other kids where I live.	15 I'm not placed with family or a friend.	14 I don't feel safe.	14 I don't get to visit my parents.
13 I don't get to visit friends/other family.	12 Other.	9 Caseworker integrity.	8 Biological parent court issues.	7 No one tells me when I have to move or why.
4 I am being abused or neglected.	4 I need to see my doctor/dentist/therapist.	3 I am not being provided my essential documents (birth certificate, etc.).	2 I am not provided services I need / I am made to do services I don't need.	2 I don't like where I live.
2 I don't get privacy for my age.	1 Caseworker communication with other involved parties.	1 My caseworker is not visiting me or calling me back.	1 I need help, I don't know what happens next when I age out.	1 I don't get to visit my brother(s)/sister(s).
1 Caseworker did not follow through on task.	1 Issues transitioning to new placement.	1 Educational concerns.	1 Foster parent posting pictures on social media.	

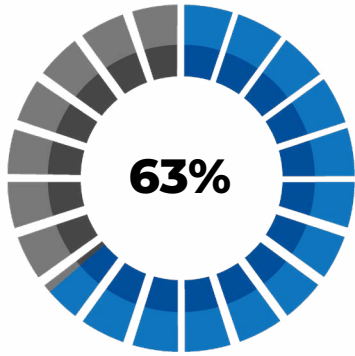
TOTAL = 315

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RESOLVED

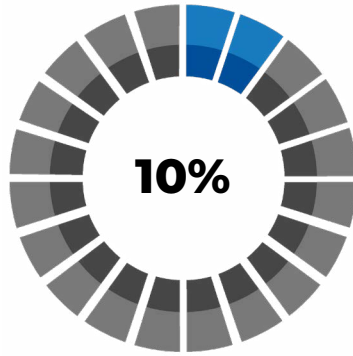
Of the 139 foster parent complaints closed in FY 2024, 76% were resolved. The unresolved complaints are broken down as follows:

- 10% were non-grievable complaints referred to other programs
- 6% were closed with no further action (typically because they were duplicates of other complaints)
- 5% were abandoned by the foster parent
- 3% were rendered non-grievable by things that happened post-disposition

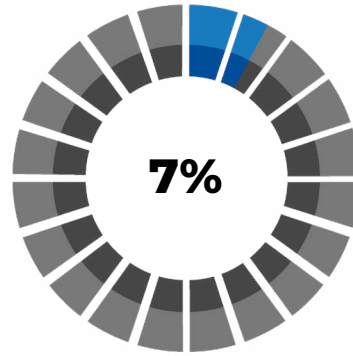
TABLE 11. FOSTER PARENT GRIEVANCE PROGRAM CLOSURES FOR FY 2024



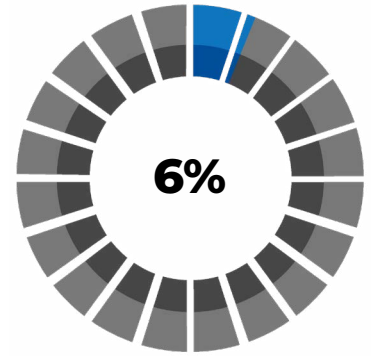
Resolved Per Foster Parent
(121)



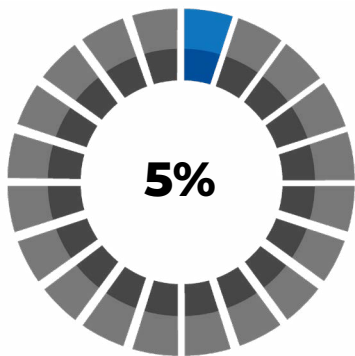
Closed. Referred Out.
(20)



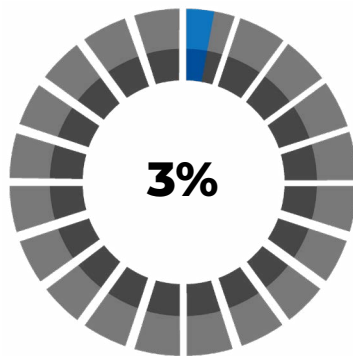
Resolved.
Acceptance Deemed.
(13)



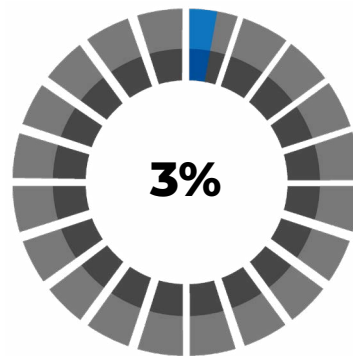
Closed. No Action Needed.
(11)



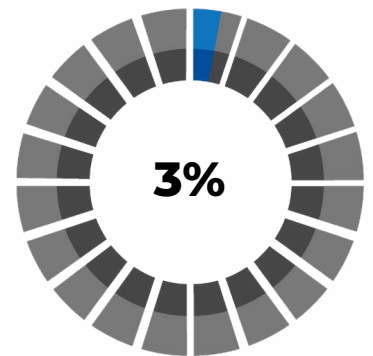
Closed. Abandoned by
Foster Parent.
(10)



Closed. Complaint
Rendered Non-Grievable.
(6)



Closed. Informal Problem
Resolution.
(5)



Resolved. Investigation
Completed.
(5)

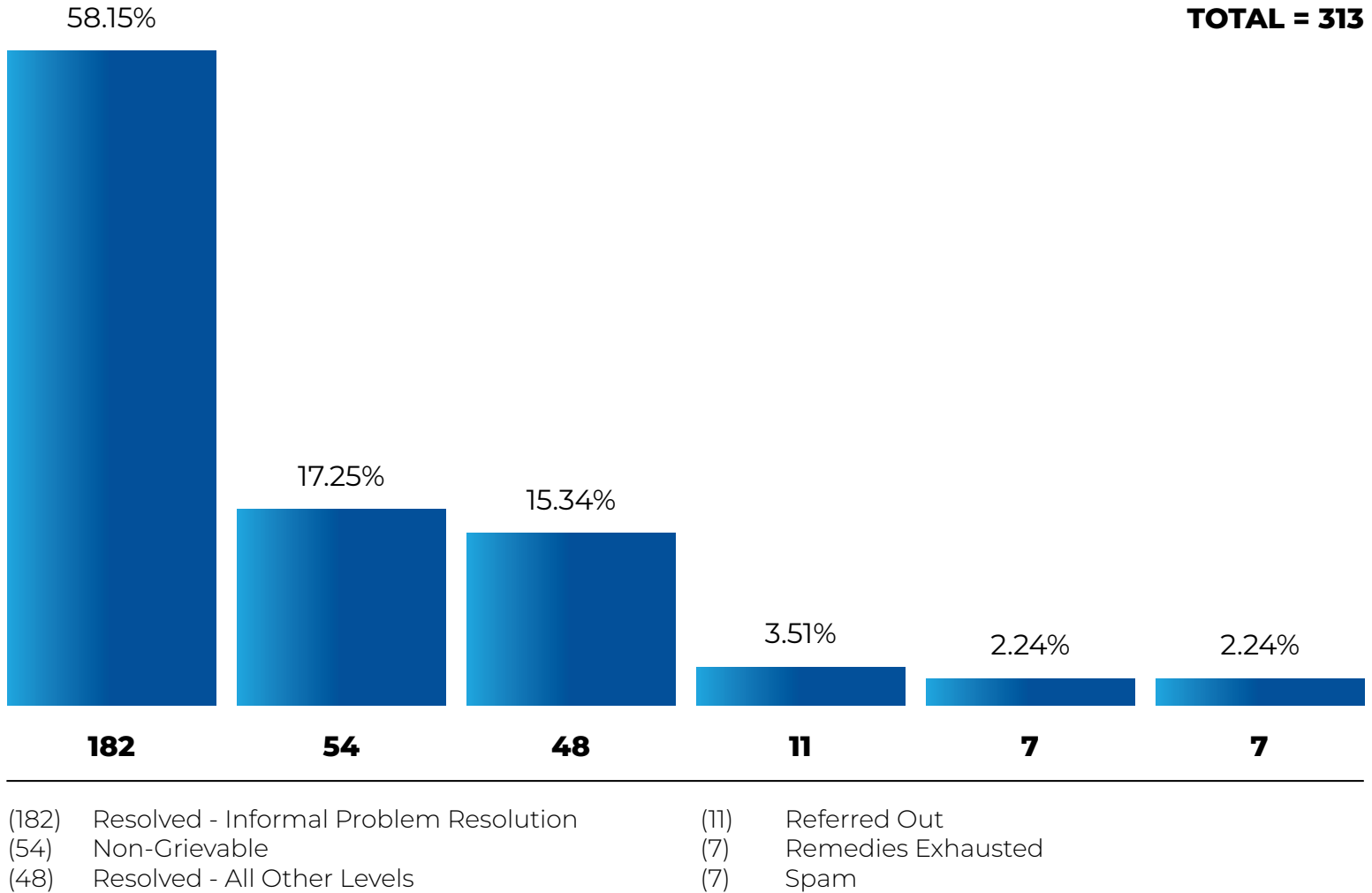
TOTAL = 191

*Raw Numbers Shown in
Parenthesis.*

Of the 313 youth complaints closed in FY 2024, 73% were resolved. The unresolved complaints are broken down as follows:

- 17% were non-grievable
- 4% were referred to other programs
- 2% were closed with remedies exhausted

TABLE 12. YOUTH GRIEVANCE PROGRAM CLOSURES FOR FY 2023



Year over year, grievances are resolved through collaborative efforts between providers. This consistent performance reflects the program's reliability and the state's commitment to managing concerns efficiently and thoroughly.

KEY TRENDS

- While the number of complaints filed from year to year varied, the percentage of grievances remained constant at around 80% for both programs. The changes in the number of complaints are consistent with what has been seen throughout the life of the program.
- Children placed in facilities consistently file the overwhelming majority of complaints in the youth grievance program.
- Foster parent complaints largely revolved around staff actions or inaction, decisions made by child welfare employees, and experiences of unfair treatment.
- Youth grievances primarily focused on challenges with facility staff, conflicts with other children in their placements, and limitations on visitation or family placement.
- Both programs have consistently resolved approximately 75% of the complaints they receive.

ONGOING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

In addition to handling grievances, both programs are responsible for identifying broader trends in the child welfare system. They collect data and identify trends, informing CWS leadership and community stakeholders of their findings. This information informs agency decisions related to training staff and process improvements.

Both programs also engage in significant educational outreach. The youth grievance program conducts training with LGCs, to inform them of grievance program requirements and instruct them on how to aid youth in filing grievances. The FCO conducts online and in-person training on effective advocacy, court processes, and the foster parent bill of rights. Additionally, the FCO has organized online panels on termination of parental rights trials, the Indian Child Welfare Act, post-adjudication review boards, and OKDHS post-adoption services. The foster parent community had enthusiastically embraced the program's educational work. Attendance at the program's online events typically ranges from 75 to 100 foster parents.

CONCLUSION

The grievance programs administered by OCA and OJSO continue to provide critical oversight and advocacy for foster parents and youth in CWS care. They resolve hundreds of individual complaints each year. Through continuous data collection and analysis, they help other program stakeholders to identify and address systemic issues in the child welfare system. Their outreach initiatives improve stakeholder understanding of child welfare cases. The foster parent and youth grievance programs continue to ensure transparency, accountability, and the protection of rights within Oklahoma's child welfare system.



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