



Office of the Public Counsel

Nebraska Ombudsman's Office

2025

Annual Report

About the Ombudsman’s Office

The Office of the Public Counsel, most commonly known as the Ombudsman’s Office, is a division within the Nebraska Legislature. The Ombudsman’s Office mission is to promote accountability in government by independently and impartially investigating issues related to state agencies, boards, commissions, county jails, youth detention facilities, and employees. The office investigates the public’s complaints about state government and works toward resolution of issues. Accountability in public administration is promoted by resolving these problems with state agencies and investigating issues related to the operation of state government, with limited exceptions, and making recommendations for improvement. Because the office is independent of the agencies that it investigates, it is impartial in disputes between administrative agencies and the public they serve, and promotes reasonable and informal resolution of complaints. In addition to handling complaints and conducting investigations, the Ombudsman’s Office is an important resource to the Legislature.

The Ombudsman’s Office also conducts investigations under the State Government Effectiveness Act, also known as the Whistleblower Act. State employees are encouraged to disclose information concerning possible violations of law, fraud, waste, and gross mismanagement in state government. Reprisals for such disclosures are prohibited.

Legislative Oversight Division

On January 15, 2025, Speaker Arch introduced LB 298 that created the Division of Legislative Oversight within the Nebraska Legislature. Part of the bill included moving the Offices of Inspectors General out of the Office of Public Counsel Division (better known as the Ombudsman’s Office). The Governor approved LB 298 on June 4, 2025. The new division consists of the Legislative Audit Office, Office of the Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, and Office of the Inspector General of the Nebraska Correctional System. The Legislative Oversight Committee is responsible for directing the work of the division.

The Ombudsman’s Office remains a stand-alone division within the Nebraska Legislature. LB 298 updated the Ombudsman’s Office statutes to align with the Nebraska Legislature’s framework. The Ombudsman’s Office has worked with all parties to transition both Offices of Inspectors General to the Division of Legislative Oversight. The Ombudsman’s Office looks forward to working with the division on matters related to oversight.

Summary of Ombudsman Intakes in 2025

The Ombudsman’s Office received a total of 2,550 intakes in 2025. The complaints were made by, and information was provided by, a variety of individuals throughout Nebraska. Each case is reviewed to determine the appropriate course of action.

The table below details the types of cases received in 2025.

Types of Cases	
Complaints	2,279
Information	259
Self-Initiated	11
Whistleblower	1
Total	2,550

The Ombudsman’s Office received a wide variety of intakes concerning different areas of government. Generally, most intakes only involved one agency. Some intakes involved two or more agencies. Intake recorded 2,606 total agencies. The table below details the cases by agency or subject matter received in 2025.

Agency	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Department of Administrative Services	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	1	8
Department of Health and Human Services-State Unit on Aging	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Attorney General’s Office	0	2	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	7
Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Claims Board	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Department of Correctional Services	92	80	102	89	110	118	94	113	125	83	56	83	1145
County Administration	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	9
County Detention Facility	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
County Jail	40	36	40	34	35	41	45	44	40	50	41	37	483
Courts	3	2	6	7	7	4	3	5	4	6	3	9	59
Department of Economic Development	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Department of Education	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Department of Environment & Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Equal Opportunity Commission	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	5
Federal	1	0	1	1	5	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	14
Game and Parks	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3

Governmental Subdivision	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	7
Governor's Office	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and of Hard Hearing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Department of Health and Human Services-Medicaid	3	8	1	3	6	3	6	1	3	3	2	3	42
Department of Health and Human Services-Behavioral Health	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Department of Health and Human Services-Economic Assistance	10	4	3	1	3	0	4	4	2	4	7	2	44
Department of Health and Human Services-Beatrice State Development Center	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Department of Health and Human Services-Children and Family Services	22	23	23	15	26	23	19	24	24	19	27	18	263
Department of Health and Human Services-Developmental Disabilities	1	3	2	1	3	2	3	3	2	8	5	7	40
Department of Health and Human Services-YRTC-Kearney	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	7
Department of Health and Human Services	1	2	1	0	2	6	8	3	3	1	2	4	33
Department of Health and Human Services-Regional Centers	6	3	19	5	15	12	10	8	3	12	7	4	104

Department of Health and Human Services-Administration	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	6
Department of Veterans Affairs-Veterans' Homes	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Department of Health and Human Services-YRTC	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	3	1	1	1	0	13
Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Juvenile Services	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Department of Insurance	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Department of Labor	5	3	3	3	2	2	5	1	2	1	1	2	30
Nebraska Legislature	4	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	0	0	0	1	16
Department of Motor Vehicles	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	11
Municipal Administration	0	2	0	0	3	2	1	4	1	2	7	0	22
National Guard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Pardons Board	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Parole Administration	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Parole Board	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	9
State Patrol	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	7
Private Matter	7	8	7	1	3	8	5	6	4	4	9	7	69
Courts-Probation Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Racing and Gaming Commission	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nebraska Employees Retirement Systems	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
Department of Revenue	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	15

Department of Administrative Services-Risk Management	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Secretary of State Office	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Department of Transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
University of Nebraska System	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
Department of Veterans Affairs	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Contacts	208	197	230	173	244	255	241	245	230	218	179	190	2606

Jurisdictional Cases

The Ombudsman's Office has jurisdiction to review and investigate intakes that concern Nebraska state agencies (code and non-code); boards; and commissions. This includes all state-run facilities. The Ombudsman's Office also has jurisdiction to review and investigate intakes about county jails and youth detention facilities.

The table below details the intakes by jurisdictional authority received in 2025.

Jurisdictional Authority	Cases
State Agencies/Boards/Commissions	1,929
County Jails and Detention	485
Total	2,414

Highest Number of Intakes in 2025

A majority of the cases received by the Ombudsman's Office stemmed from correctional issues at the state and county level with a total of 1,628 cases. The second highest number of intakes relates to the Department of Health and Human Services with 560 cases.

County Jail/Detention Facilities

The Ombudsman's Office has jurisdiction to review and investigate issues with county jails and youth detention facilities. Nebraska has 62 county jails and 5 county holding facilities. There are four youth detention facilities spread across Nebraska:

- Douglas County Youth Center
- Lancaster County Youth Services Center
- Madison County Northeast Nebraska Juvenile Services
- Sarpy County Juvenile Justice Center

Douglas County Corrections

Douglas County Corrections is the largest county jail in Nebraska. In early 2025, the Ombudsman's Office stopped receiving phone calls from incarcerated individuals at that facility. According to the facility, the Ombudsman's Office phone number was blocked. The facility maintains they do not know how this occurred. The Ombudsman's Office has attempted to resolve the issue; however, incarcerated individuals still cannot call the Ombudsman's Office. Out of 483 county jail complaints, only 34 came from Douglas County Corrections in 2025. As always, individuals within the Douglas County jail may write letters to make a complaint. The Ombudsman's Office has placed no block on phone calls from Douglas County Corrections, and will continue to work on a resolution to this issue.

Department of Correctional Services

In 2025, the Department of Correctional Services ran 9 facilities throughout Nebraska. The Ombudsman's Office worked on cases dealing with every one of the facilities during the year.

Community Corrections Center – Lincoln
Community Corrections Center – Omaha
Nebraska Correctional Center for Women
Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility
Nebraska State Penitentiary
Omaha Correctional Center
Reception and Treatment Center
Tecumseh State Correctional Institution
Work Ethic Camp

The Ombudsman's Office received 1,145 cases regarding state correctional issues during 2025.

Work Ethic Camp (WEC)

On August 19, 2025, Governor Pillen announced the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) was working with the Department of Homeland Security to repurpose the Work Ethic Camp (WEC) to a detention facility for individuals detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). State incarcerated individuals were transferred to other facilities within NDCS. Under the contract, NDCS runs the facility as an ICE detention facility, operated by NDCS employees. Since its conversion, the Ombudsman's Office has not received any WEC-related complaints from a detained individual at the facility, an employee, or a concerned family member/friend/attorney.

There are multiple federal oversight offices within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that have jurisdiction over detention and immigration issues if they arise:

DHS Ombudsman Offices (Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman & the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman)

<https://www.dhs.gov/ombudsman-offices>

<https://www.dhs.gov/requesting-assistance-oido>

<https://www.dhs.gov/cis-ombudsman>

DHS Civil Rights Division

<https://www.dhs.gov/file-civil-rights-complaint>

ICE-Office of Enforcement and Removal Operations

<https://www.ice.gov/enforcementconcerns#ice-ero-detention-removals-and-information-line-drill>

DHS Office of Inspector General

<https://www.oig.dhs.gov/>

Investigative Report on Restoration of Good Time Process

During 2025, the Ombudsman's Office completed an investigative report on the Nebraska Department of Correctional Service restoration of good time process. Based on the investigative analysis, the Ombudsman's Office proposed four recommendations to NDCS. On December 31, 2025, NDCS modified their policy that included most of the proposed recommendations. The report and NDCS's response to the report can be found on the Ombudsman's website:

https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/public_counsel/restoration_of_good_time.pdf

Department of Health and Human Services

The Ombudsman's Office received 560 cases regarding the Department of Health and Human Services in 2025. The Department of Health and Human Services has six main areas:

- Division of Behavioral Health;
- Division of Children and Family Services;
- Division of Developmental Disabilities;
- Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care;
- Division of Public Health; and
- Office of Economic Assistance

DHHS Facilities (Institutions)

The Department of Health and Human Services also runs four youth facilities and three adult facilities:

Youth Facilities

- Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center - Hastings (female youth)
- Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center - Kearney (male youth)
- Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center - Lincoln (male and female youth)
- Psychiatric Rehabilitation Treatment Facility (Whitehall) - Lincoln (male youth)

Adult Facilities

Public Psychiatric Hospitals:

- Lincoln Regional Center
- Norfolk Regional Center

Residential Treatment Facility:

- Beatrice State Developmental Center

Annual Report on Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' State Institutions

The Ombudsman's Office is required to conduct an annual physical review of the Department of Health and Human Services' institutions listed above. On December 15, 2025 the Ombudsman's Office released a report, "[Annual Report Neb. Rev. Stat. § 83-104 Review of Nebraska Institutions](#)" that covers December 1, 2024 to November 30, 2025.

Joint Investigation with the Office of the Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare

In collaboration with the Office of the Inspector General Child Welfare, the Ombudsman's Office has worked to investigate the circumstances surrounding allegations of staff sexual abuse on youth at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney, following complaints received. The investigation is focused on identifying issues within the system. Through the course of the investigation, both offices have worked to gather related reports, conduct interviews, attend court hearings, and observe video evidence. This investigation is on-going and a formal report will be submitted once the investigation has finalized.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) staff have provided reports and other evidence upon formal request throughout the investigation, utilizing a secure portal. However, the lack of direct access to the department's case management systems, such as N-FOCUS and the system used by the Office of Juvenile Services (OJS), has lengthened the investigatory timeline and resulted in multiple follow-up requests.

Separately, law enforcement investigated the allegations, and formal criminal charges are pending.

Department of Veterans Affairs

The Ombudsman's Office received 2 cases regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2025. Along with the many services they offer, the department runs the state veterans' homes:

- Central Nebraska Veterans' Home - Kearney, NE
- Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home - Bellevue, NE
- Norfolk Veterans' Home - Norfolk, NE
- Western Nebraska Veterans' Home - Scottsbluff

Nebraska State Historical Society

In 2024 the Ombudsman's Office opened a whistleblower investigation regarding the Nebraska State Historical Society's leadership. On February 13, 2025, the Ombudsman's Office announced the investigation was

terminated. After a formal investigation, the Ombudsman’s Office found the actions of leadership at the time did not meet the gross mismanagement standard as contemplated by Nebraska’s State Government Effectiveness Act. A new director was appointed in late 2024. Since then, through all of 2025, the Ombudsman’s Office received no new complaints regarding the Nebraska State Historical Society.

No Jurisdiction Intakes

The Ombudsman’s Office receives intakes that the office does not have jurisdiction to resolve or investigate. Nebraska law does not give the office the ability to look into these issues or concerns. The table below details the case where the Ombudsman’s Office had no jurisdiction in 2025.

Non-Jurisdictional	Cases
Federal	14
Governor’s Office	1
Court	61
Nebraska Legislature	16
County Administration	9
Municipal Administration	22
Private	69
Total	192

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ombudsman’s Office 2025 annual report reflects the office’s work and commitment to governmental oversight and accountability. The staff of the Ombudsman’s Office handled thousands of cases dealing with critical and sensitive issues within areas like corrections and health and human services, which plays a vital role in ensuring fair, just, and competent government administration within Nebraska.