

Repeal Ordinance on Child Welfare Citizen Review Panels in Accordance with State Laws

The Colorado General Assembly has made changes to state statute that make child welfare citizen review panels redundant and inoperable as a process for child welfare grievances. To align and comply with changes to state law and the current grievance process at the state level, **we are seeking to repeal municipal code on the Citizen Review Panel (D.R.M.C. 2-253 through 2-255.6).**

Background:

The child welfare system in Colorado is strengthened by having processes in place for the community to express their concerns and grievances about their experiences with the system. This provides accountability to the community and responsiveness to issues that may exist.

Historically, the grievance process included Citizen Review Panels. These panels were established nearly three decades ago in state statute and in D.R.M.C (2-253 through 2-255.6). Citizen Review Panels were intended to provide a process for grievances pertaining to child welfare. If a grievance was not resolved by a county department, a complainant had the option to refer the grievance to the citizen review panel to provide a recommendation concerning the grievance.

Some **challenges with the Citizen Review Panel** process have included:

- **Privacy concerns** – a person’s recourse, if they felt their grievance wasn’t resolved, was to share their private case information with the citizen review panel, which includes members of the public and possibly members of that person’s own community, with whom they may not want to share private details of their life.
- **Lack of expertise** – child welfare is a highly regulated, state supervised, county administered program. Panels who lacked understanding of the program requirements struggled to make lawful or practical recommendations to resolve a grievance.
- **Infrequent use of the process** – in Denver, and across the state, the process has been rarely utilized by complainants, indicating a need for a different approach to resolving complaints.

In recent years, the state Legislature has passed legislation **replacing the Citizen Review Panel process with state-level structures for grievances**. Due to state legislation, **our department no longer has statutory authority to share child welfare information with Citizen Review Panels**, so we cannot use the panels to review private child welfare case information and grievances related to them. State legislation includes:

- **In 2010**, the Legislature passed [SB10-171](#), **creating the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman**, to receive and investigate any complaints by any individual impacted by the child welfare system.
- **In 2015**, the Legislature passed [SB15-204](#), moving the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman to the **Judicial Department as an independent agency**. This reinforces the **Office’s impartiality and autonomy from human services agencies**.
- **In 2023**, [SB23-210](#) **repealed the statutes that created Citizen Review Panels**. In their place, the statute now refers to the **Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman as the entity responsible for receiving referrals of grievances and investigating the grievance**, at the complainant’s request. Through the Ombudsman process, case information and the complainant’s identity is kept confidential.