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Office of the Correctional Ombudsman

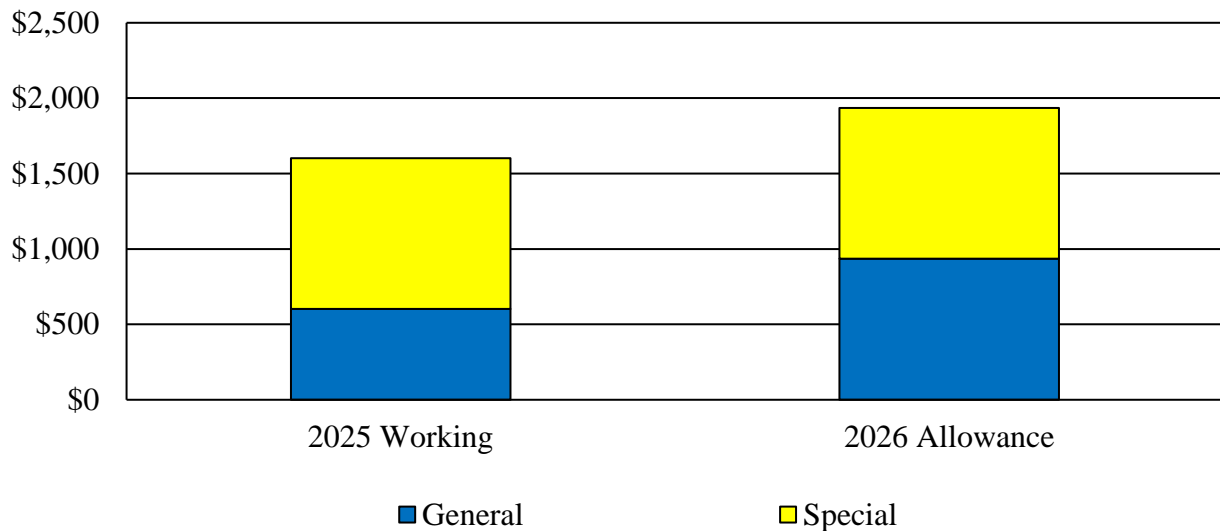
Program Description

The Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) is an independent oversight entity responsible for conducting investigations, assessments, and reviews to ensure the integrity of operations within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). OCO has the authority to refer investigations for criminal charges if it uncovers illegal acts. The ombudsman will implement procedures to help minimize risks to the health, safety, and welfare of incarcerated individuals, in addition to advising incarcerated persons, family members, and others regarding the rights of incarcerated individuals.

OCO oversees the new Adult Oversight Responsibility Unit and the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU), which was previously budgeted under the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and covered in the C81C – OAG analysis. The Adult Oversight Responsibility Unit oversees and investigates the wellbeing of adults under DPSCS jurisdiction and custody, while JJMU does the same for children under DJS supervision.

Operating Budget Summary

Fiscal 2026 Budget Increases \$333,283, or 20.8%, to \$1.9 Million
(\$ in Thousands)



Note: The fiscal 2026 allowance accounts for contingent reductions. The fiscal 2025 impacts of statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and adjustments are not reflected in this agency’s budget. The fiscal 2026 impacts of the fiscal 2025 statewide salary adjustments appear in this agency’s budget. The fiscal 2026 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in DBM and are not included in this agency’s budget.

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Fiscal 2025

Establishment of OCO

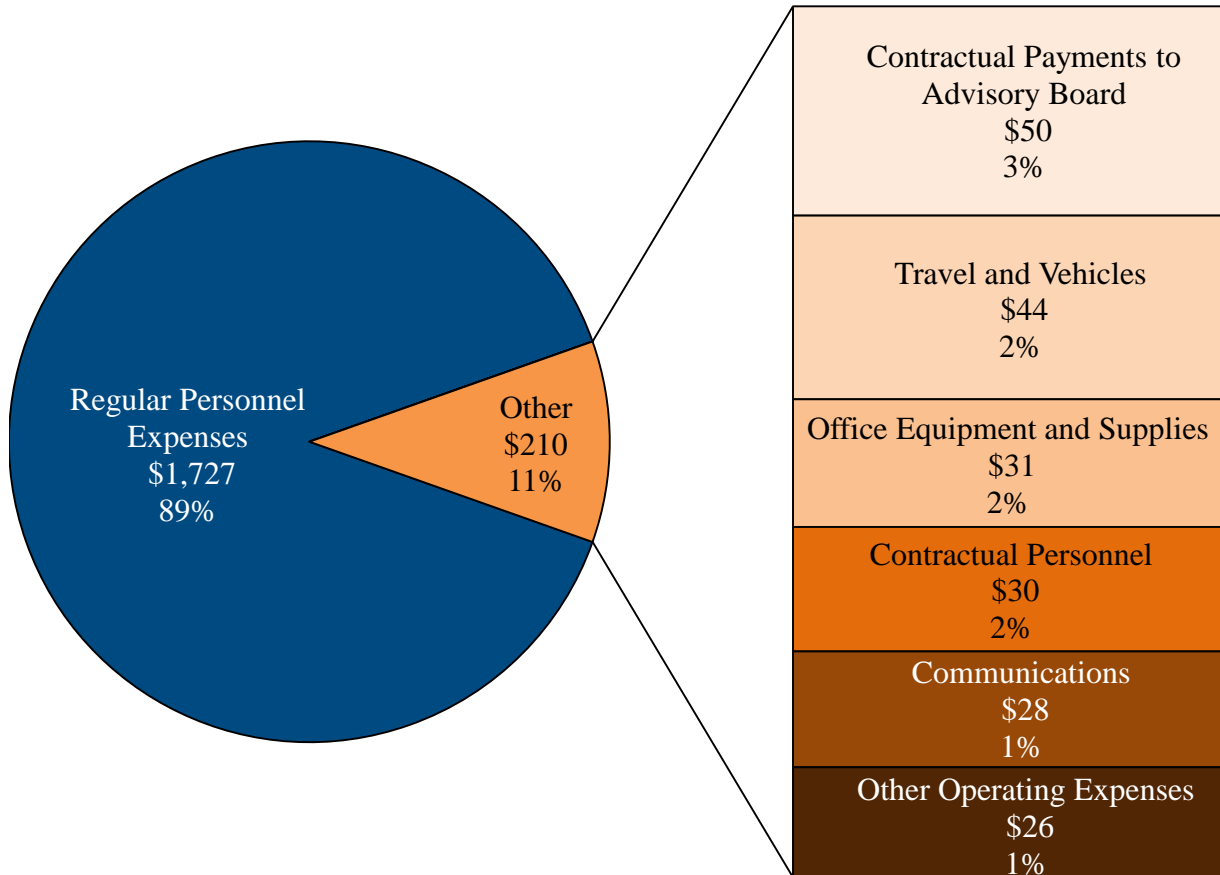
Chapter 836 of 2024 established OCO effective July 1, 2024. The Act required the transfer of 4 JJMU positions and \$603,067 in general funds from OAG. Chapter 836 also expressed the legislature’s intent that the Governor include an appropriation sufficient to fund the Act’s provisions and to provide for at least 2 staff members for OCO in fiscal 2025 and at least 7 staff members in fiscal 2026 and each subsequent year. Furthermore, the Act provided that OCO will be guided by the 12-member Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board.

Section 21 of the fiscal 2025 Budget Bill (Chapter 716 of 2024) appropriated \$1.0 million in special funds from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund in the Department of Budget and Management. The budget language provided the special funds to support startup costs for OCO and the Adult Oversight Responsibility Unit and authorized the funds to be transferred to an independent program. A fiscal 2025 budget amendment transferred the funding to OCO.

Fiscal 2026 Overview of Agency Spending

The fiscal 2026 allowance proposes approximately \$1.9 million in total spending for OCO. The majority of expenditures, 89%, supports personnel costs. The budget also includes \$50,400 for contractual payments for the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board. The advisory board currently has 4 of its 12 members appointed. **Exhibit 1** displays the fiscal 2026 allowance categorized by spending area.

**Exhibit 1
Overview of Agency Spending
Fiscal 2026 Allowance
(\$ in Thousands)**



Note: The fiscal 2026 allowance accounts for contingent reductions. The fiscal 2026 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management and are not included in this agency’s budget.

Source: Department of Budget and Management

Proposed Budget Change

The fiscal 2026 allowance increases by \$333,283, or 20.8%, from the fiscal 2025 working appropriation after accounting for a reduction of \$1.0 million in general funds contingent on a provision in the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) of 2025. Personnel costs make

up a net \$156,862, or 47%, of the increase. Other increases fund additional operating costs of the office. The proposed budget changes are illustrated in **Exhibit 2**.

Exhibit 2
Proposed Budget
Office of the Correctional Ombudsman
(\$ in Thousands)

How Much It Grows:	<u>General Fund</u>	<u>Special Fund</u>	<u>Total</u>
Fiscal 2024 Actual	\$0	\$0	\$0
Fiscal 2025 Working Appropriation	603	1,000	1,603
Fiscal 2026 Allowance	<u>936</u>	<u>1,000</u>	<u>1,936</u>
Fiscal 2025-2026 Amount Change	\$333	\$0	\$333
Fiscal 2025-2026 Percent Change	55.3%	0%	20.8%

Where It Goes:	<u>Change</u>
Personnel Expenses	
Salary increases and related fringe benefits, including the fiscal 2025 COLA and increments.....	\$538
Salaries for 6 new positions reflecting contractual conversions.....	478
Employee and retiree health insurance	131
Turnover decreases from 8.72% to 6.76%.....	11
Workers’ compensation premium assessment.....	-2
End of fiscal 2025 startup costs for the Adult Oversight Responsibility Unit	-1,000
Other Changes	
Contractual payments to the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board	50
Travel and vehicles	31
Other technical and special fees.....	30
Office equipment and supplies	30
Communications	25
Fixed payments	8
DoIT services and statewide personnel system allocations	3
Total	\$333

COLA: cost-of-living adjustment

DoIT: Department of Information Technology

Note: The fiscal 2026 allowance accounts for contingent reductions. The fiscal 2025 impacts of statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and adjustments are not reflected in this agency’s budget. The fiscal 2026 impacts of the fiscal 2025 statewide salary adjustments appear in this agency’s budget. The fiscal 2026 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in DBM and are not included in this agency’s budget.

Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act

The BRFA of 2025 includes a provision that authorizes the use of up to \$1.0 million from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund for OCO operations each year, beginning in fiscal 2026. The fund is administered by the Justice Reinvestment Oversight Board, subject to the authority of the Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. The fiscal 2026 budget as introduced includes a \$1.0 million general fund reduction and a corresponding \$1.0 million special fund appropriation under OCO, both contingent on the enactment of legislation authorizing the use of the Performance Incentive Grant Fund for OCO.

Personnel Data

	<u>FY 24</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>FY 25</u> <u>Working</u>	<u>FY 26</u> <u>Allowance</u>	<u>FY 25-26</u> <u>Change</u>
Regular Positions	0.00	7.00	13.00	6.00
Contractual FTEs	<u>0.00</u>	<u>6.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>-6.00</u>
Total Personnel	0.00	13.00	13.00	0.00

Vacancy Data: Regular Positions

Turnover and Necessary Vacancies, Excluding New Positions	0.88	6.76%
Positions and Percentage Vacant as of 12/31/24	N/A	N/A
Vacancies Below Turnover	N/A	

- In fiscal 2025, 4 positions supporting JJMU were transferred from OAG to OCO, while 3 new positions were created by the Board of Public Works. OCO also received 6 contractual administrative positions. One of the full-time regular positions established in fiscal 2025 is the acting correctional ombudsman, who was appointed in September 2024.
- In fiscal 2026, all contractual positions are converted to full-time regular positions, bringing the total number of regular positions to 13. Personnel mostly includes administrative and program management positions.
- As of December 31, 2024, OCO reported no vacancies among its 7 regular positions in fiscal 2025.

Key Observations

1. Information Technology and Managing for Results Development

OCO has been working to establish its website, as required by Chapter 836 of 2024. The website will feature OCO reports and streamline the process for filing complaints for investigations. The website goes hand-in-hand with OCO's need for a case management system, which would enhance transparency and improve OCO's ability to track trends, identify relevant policies, and respond to inquiries and complaints. OCO has stated that it has been consulting with the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), other State agencies, and ombudsmen in other states to understand best practices and select the most effective case management system. As of January 2025, OCO and DoIT do not have an estimate for the time or cost of either the website or the case management system, but OCO hopes to have them running by the end of fiscal 2026. OCO is currently using an internal process to track complaints and is publishing reports to the Office of the Governor's website.

As a new agency, OCO has not yet specified or reported its key goals, objectives, and performance measures through a Managing for Results (MFR) submission. **OCO should specify what measures that it is able to track with the resources currently available and discuss the goals and performance measures that will be reported in future MFR submissions.**

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

1. Concur with Governor's allowance.

**Appendix 1
Object/Fund Difference Report
Office of the Correctional Ombudsman**

<u>Object/Fund</u>	<u>FY 24 Actual</u>	<u>FY 25 Working Appropriation</u>	<u>FY 26 Allowance</u>	<u>FY 25 - FY 26 Amount Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Positions					
01 Regular	0.00	4.00	13.00	9.00	225.0%
02 Contractual	0.00	6.00	0.00	-6.00	-100.0%
Total Positions	0.00	10.00	13.00	3.00	30.0%
Objects					
01 Salaries and Wages	\$ 0	\$ 1,569,761	\$ 2,726,623	\$ 1,156,862	73.7%
02 Technical and Special Fees	0	0	30,000	30,000	N/A
03 Communication	0	2,996	27,896	24,900	831.1%
04 Travel	0	13,049	28,049	15,000	115.0%
07 Motor Vehicles	0	0	16,200	16,200	N/A
08 Contractual Services	0	915	53,692	52,777	5768.0%
09 Supplies and Materials	0	700	10,700	10,000	1428.6%
10 Equipment – Replacement	0	0	20,000	20,000	N/A
13 Fixed Charges	0	15,646	23,190	7,544	48.2%
Total Objects	\$ 0	\$ 1,603,067	\$ 2,936,350	\$ 1,333,283	83.2%
Funds					
01 General Fund	\$ 0	\$ 603,067	\$ 1,936,350	\$ 1,333,283	221.1%
03 Special Fund	0	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	0%
Total Funds	\$ 0	\$ 1,603,067	\$ 2,936,350	\$ 1,333,283	83.2%

Note: Chapter 836 of 2024 established the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman, and fiscal 2025 is the first year the office received funding. The fiscal 2026 allowance does not include contingent reductions or statewide salary adjustments budgeted within the Department of Budget and Management.