

D74 Office of the Correctional Ombudsman

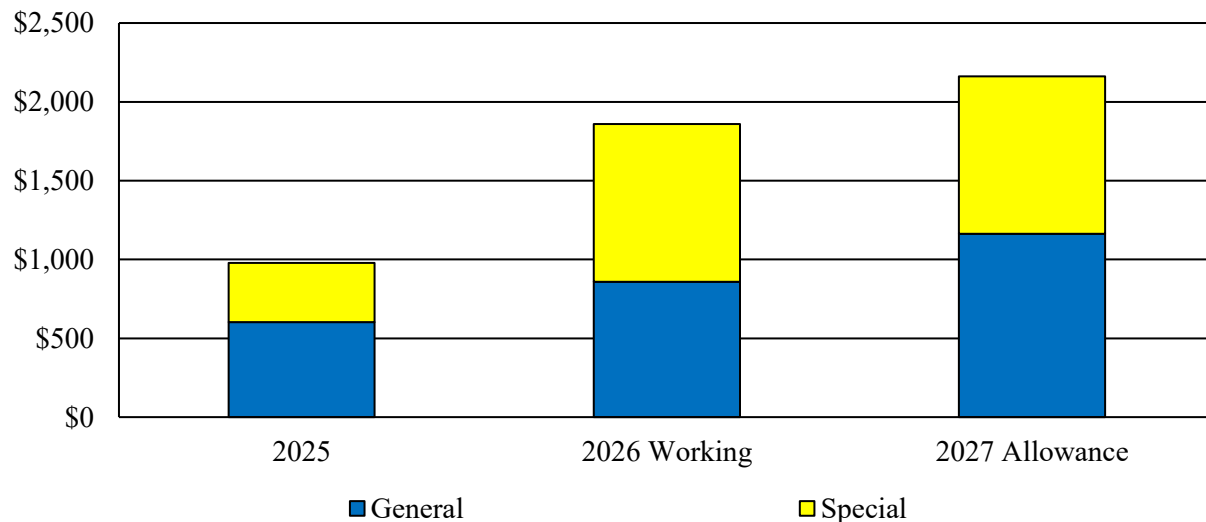
Program Description

Chapter 836 of 2024 established the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) as 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. The Act also established the 12-member Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board to guide the office.

OCO oversees the Adult Oversight Responsibility Unit and the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU). 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 2027 Budget Increases \$302,947, or 16.3%, to \$2.2 Million (\$ in Thousands)



Note: The fiscal 2027 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management and are not included in this agency's budget.

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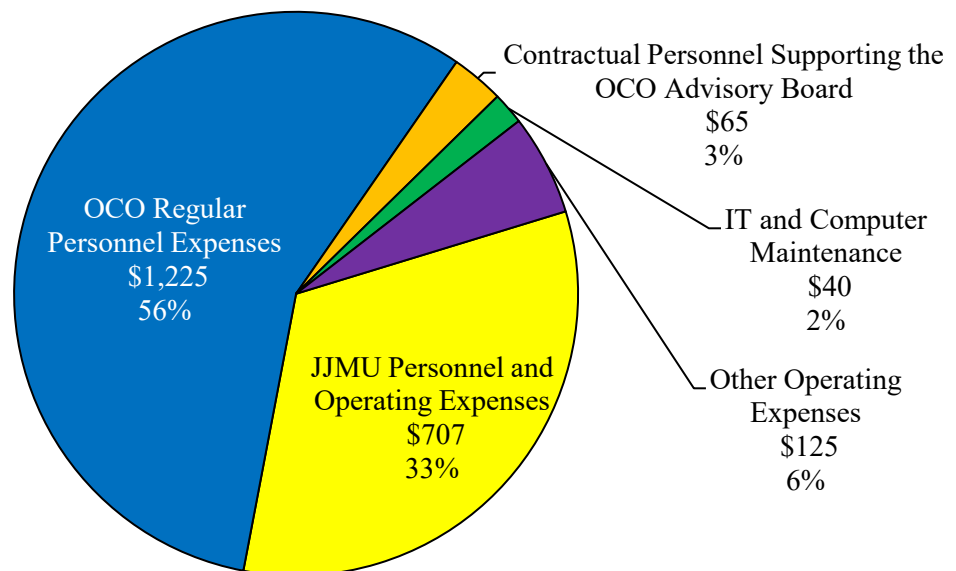
Analysis of the FY 2027 Maryland Executive Budget, 2026

- Special funds from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund (PIGF) support OCO operations. 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 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025 authorizes the use of up to \$1.0 million from the PIGF for OCO operations each year, beginning in fiscal 2026.

Fiscal 2027 Overview of Agency Spending

The fiscal 2027 allowance proposes just under \$2.2 million in total spending for OCO. As shown in **Exhibit 1**, the majority of the expenditures (56%) support regular OCO personnel costs. The budget also includes \$707,407 for JJMU operating costs and \$65,389 for a contractual position to support the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board. The advisory board currently has 11 of its 12 members appointed.

Exhibit 1
Overview of Agency Spending
Fiscal 2027 Allowance
(\$ in Thousands)



IT: information technology
JJMU: Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit

OCO: Office of the Correctional Ombudsman

Note: The fiscal 2027 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 2027 allowance increases by \$302,947, or 16.3%, from the fiscal 2026 working appropriation. Regular personnel costs make up \$225,858, or 74.6%, of the increase. Other increases fund a new contractual position for the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board and statewide cost allocations for information technology and other services. 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 2025 Actual	\$603	\$375	\$978
Fiscal 2026 Working	859	1,000	1,859
Fiscal 2027 Allowance	1,162	1,000	2,162
Fiscal 2026-2027 \$ Change	\$303	\$0	\$303
Fiscal 2026-2027 % Change	35.6%	0.00%	16.3%

Where It Goes	<u>Change</u>
Personnel Expenses	
Reclassification.....	\$90
Department of Budget and Management efficiency reduction.....	71
Turnover decrease from 6.28% to 2.01%	67
Employee and retiree health insurance	63
Deferred compensation match due to statewide change in budgeting.....	2
Salaries and associated fringe benefits	-67
Other Changes	
Contractual position for the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board.....	65
Cost allocations.....	20
Other operating expenses.....	-9
Total	\$303

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding. The fiscal 2027 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management and are not included in this agency's budget.

Personnel Data

	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 26-27
	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Working</u>	<u>Allowance</u>	<u>Change</u>
Regular Positions	7.00	13.00	13.00	0.00
Contractual FTEs	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>1.00</u>	<u>1.00</u>
Total Personnel	7.00	13.00	14.00	1.00

Vacancy Data: Regular Positions

Turnover and Necessary Vacancies, Excluding New Positions	0.26	2.01%
Positions and Percentage Vacant as of 12/31/2025	3.00	23.08%
Vacancies Above Turnover	2.74	

- The fiscal 2027 allowance provides 1 new contractual position to support the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board.
- As of December 31, 2025, OCO reported 3 vacancies among its 13 regular positions. All 3 of the vacant positions are administrative positions that have never been filled since OCO's establishment. The 3 positions are assistant ombudsman positions responsible for investigations of correctional facilities.

Key Observations

1. Information Technology and Managing for Results Development

At the end of calendar 2025, OCO indicated that it is in the final stages of establishing an agency website, as required by Chapter 836. The website will feature OCO reports and allow individuals to submit complaints for investigations. Website development is expected to cost \$21,000, mainly for Department of Information Technology support services.

OCO is also developing a case management system, which would improve OCO's ability to track trends in the number of cases and respond to inquiries and complaints. The system will allow OCO to monitor the submission of complaints, assign cases to investigators, track issues identified by OCO staff, and analyze data to help identify legal or policy violations. As of December 2025, the case management system is in the procurement process. The system is expected to cost around \$120,000 in the first two years.

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Despite reporting in budget testimony during the 2025 session that OCO would finalize performance metrics and publish a Managing for Results (MFR) submission with the fiscal 2027 allowance, the office has not submitted this information as of January 20, 2026. Reporting MFR performance measures, including key goals and objectives, is a primary tool for the Department of Budget and Management and the legislature to monitor how well an agency is achieving its assigned mission. **Therefore, the Department of Legislative Services recommends adopting committee narrative requesting OCO to submit a report with detailed agency objectives and performance measures by July 1, 2026.**

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

1. Adopt the following narrative:

Status of Managing for Results (MFR) Objectives and Measures: The Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) did not submit MFR goals, objectives, or measures with its fiscal 2027 budget. The committees request that, by July 1, 2026, OCO submit proposed MFR goals, objectives, and measures, including actual fiscal 2025 data and estimates for fiscal 2026 and 2027.

Information Request	Author	Due Date
Status report on MFR objectives and measures	OCO	July 1, 2026

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

<u>Object/Fund</u>	<u>FY 25 Actual</u>	<u>FY 26 Working Appropriation</u>	<u>FY 27 Allowance</u>	<u>FY 26 - 27 \$ Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Positions					
01 Regular	7.00	13.00	13.00	0	0.0%
02 Contractual	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	N/A
Total Positions	7.00	13.00	14.00	1.00	7.69%
Objects					
01 Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits	796,722	1,655,347	1,881,205	225,858	13.6%
02 Technical and Special Fees	0	30,000	86,768	56,768	189.2%
03 Communications	3,621	27,896	27,896	0	0.0%
04 Travel	25,002	22,169	22,169	0	0.0%
07 Motor Vehicle Operation and Maintenance	73,531	16,200	16,200	0	0.0%
08 Contractual Services	19,374	53,692	74,013	20,321	37.8%
09 Supplies and Materials	8,495	10,700	10,700	0	0.0%
10 Equipment – Replacement	34,811	20,000	20,000	0	0.0%
13 Fixed Charges	16,335	23,190	23,190	0	0.0%
Total Objects	\$977,891	\$1,859,194	\$2,162,141	\$302,947	16.3%
Funds					
01 General Funds	603,067	859,194	1,162,141	302,947	35.3%
03 Special Funds	374,824	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	0.0%
Total Funds	\$977,891	\$1,859,194	\$2,162,141	\$302,947	16.3%

Note: The fiscal 2027 allowance does not include salary adjustments budgeted within the Department of Budget and Management.