

## The OYCR Ombudsman Division: Fostering Safe, Lawful and Equitable Conditions for System-Involved Youth

Alisa Hartz, JD

### Level

Introductory

### Room

### Track

Juvenile/Policy, Administration & Legislation

### CE

CPA/BBS/CJER

### Bio

**Alisa Hartz, JD** is an experienced civil rights attorney with a decade of experience advocating for the rights of youth. Before assuming the role of Ombudsperson for OYCR, she served as OYCR's first Chief Counsel and Chief of Staff for OYCR since December of 2021. Alisa has experience in both public service and private advocacy. She joined OYCR after serving as a Deputy Legal Affairs Secretary in the Office of Governor Newsom. Prior to entering state service, she was a Senior Staff Attorney for over five years at Public Counsel, a nonprofit law firm in Los Angeles where she litigated impact cases on a range of civil rights issues relating to education, homelessness, immigration, and the criminal justice system. Alisa is an experienced and creative legal advocate committed to helping government serve communities more effectively. Alisa received her JD from the University of California, Irvine, School of Law.

### Narrative

The establishment of the OYCR Ombuds Division marks a new chapter in California's youth justice system. For the first time, California has an impartial state-level agency with the ability to investigate allegations of rights violations and harmful practices relating to the care of incarcerated youth in county-run facilities. Under Welfare and Institutions Code §2200, the Ombudsperson Division is mandated to receive, investigate, and respond to complaints concerning potential violations of youth rights. To fulfill this statutory obligation, the Division operates a confidential helpline, administers a formal complaint resolution process, conducts annual site visits to all juvenile facilities, and issues public reports identifying trends and recommending systemic improvement. Additionally, the Division delivers training on youth rights. It ensures the distribution of the Youth Bill of Rights, which is translated into Spanish and other necessary languages, to juvenile facilities across the state. Through these comprehensive efforts, the Ombudsperson Division elevates youth voices, promotes transparency and accountability, and collaborates with public agencies to foster safe, lawful, and equitable conditions for system-involved youth.

Drawing data and analysis from the Ombudsperson Division's 2024 report to the Legislature, this session will present key trends in youth facilities as they have emerged from the Division's complaints and investigations and engage with impact narratives that highlight the recommendations the Division has made to improve services and address systemic issues. Participants will also engage with data specific to mental health-related complaints from youth and others on behalf of youth in facilities, highlighting opportunities for staff in facilities to work to better support youth mental health needs.

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Identify two primary mechanisms through which the Ombudsperson Division fulfills its statutory mandate
2. Discuss three broad findings and trends from the Ombuds data analysis and impact narratives from the 2024 Legislative Report that provide valuable insight into the experiences of young people in facilities statewide
3. Explain the data and information gathered specific to mental health-related complaints made by youth and/or on behalf of youth in facilities