

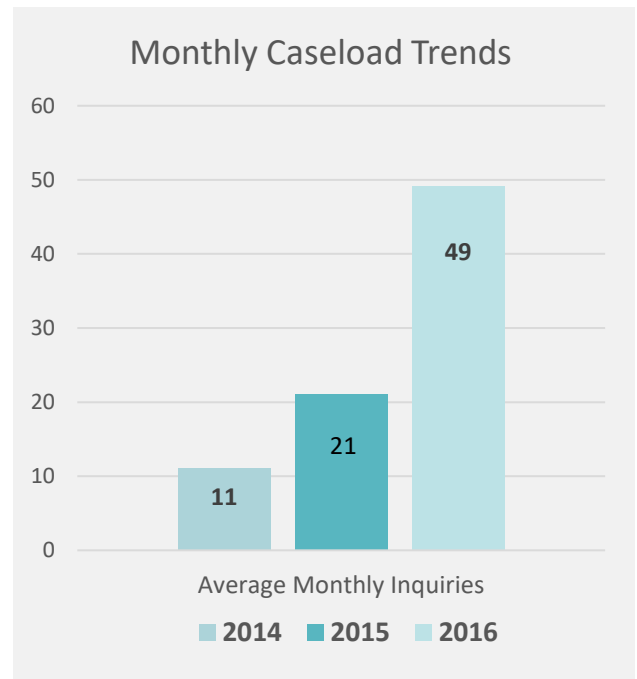
2016 Annual Report

Overview and Scope

The Snohomish County Office of the Ombudsman was created in 2014 to address issues with and throughout the county government. Our objective is to be an independent resource for the citizens of Snohomish County in resolving issues and concerns they have with county government. In accordance with Snohomish County Code, the Ombudsman office cannot investigate the Judicial Branch; the Prosecuting Attorney or his/her staff; the County Executive or his/her personal staff, or County Council or their staff. Additionally, any governmental entity other than Snohomish County; non-profits and private businesses, are beyond the scope of this office, as is any issue actively involved in the legal process.

Annual Progression of Complaints and Inquiries Received

In 2016, the Office of the Ombudsman received 595 complaints and inquiries from county residents or people conducting business with Snohomish County. This number is an increase of 252% over 2015. Inquiries continue to increase, a trend that is anticipated to continue as referrals from previous clientele, as well as county staff continue to rise. The spectrum of complaints, concerns, and questions are widely varied, as are the constituents generating inquiries.



A CLOSER LOOK

A homeowner had rotting trees in the county right of way, adjacent to his property. They needed to find the appropriate county personnel to assess the trees and then take them out if possible. We identified the appropriate staff member and connected the two of them for future resolution.

Average monthly inquiries continue to rise steadily, each year.

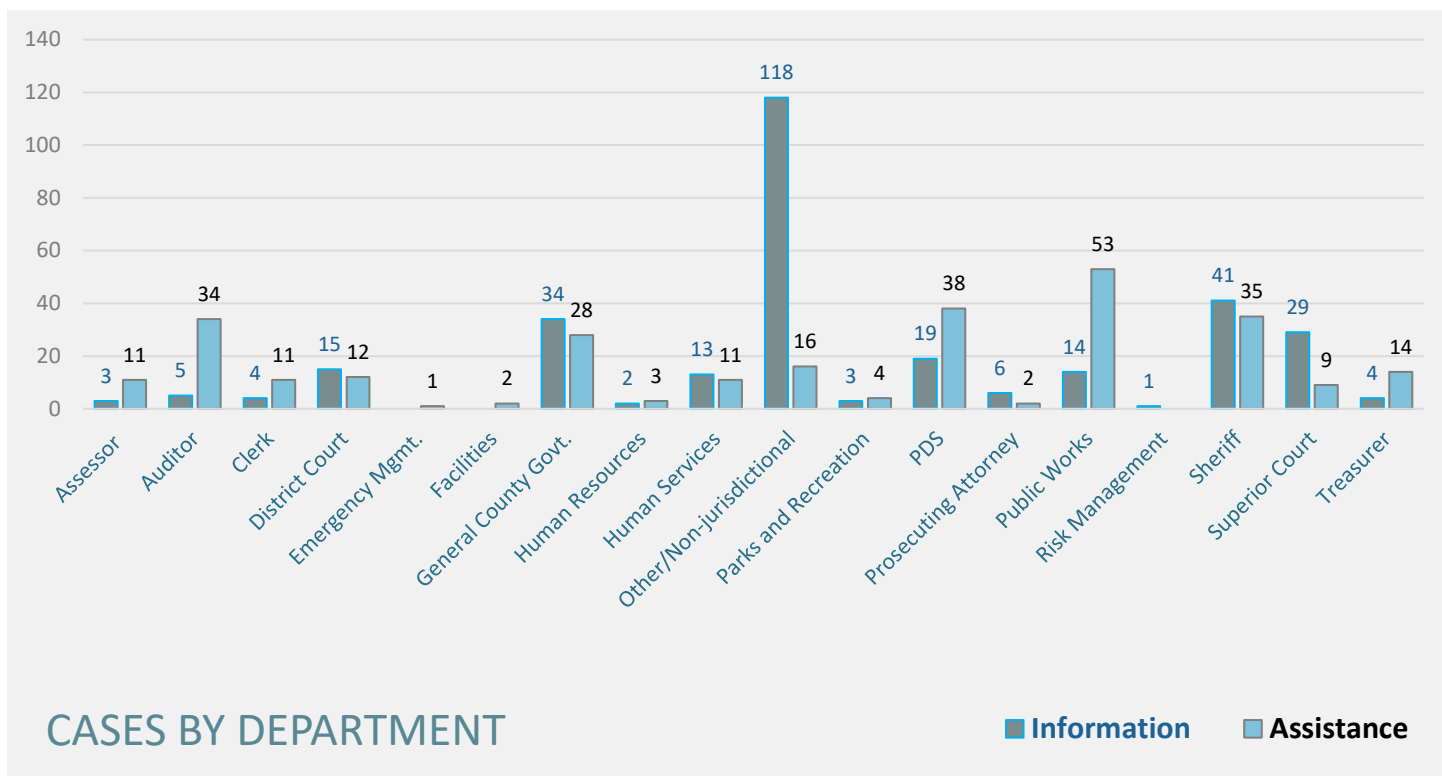
****2015 only reflects inquiries collected from May through December.***

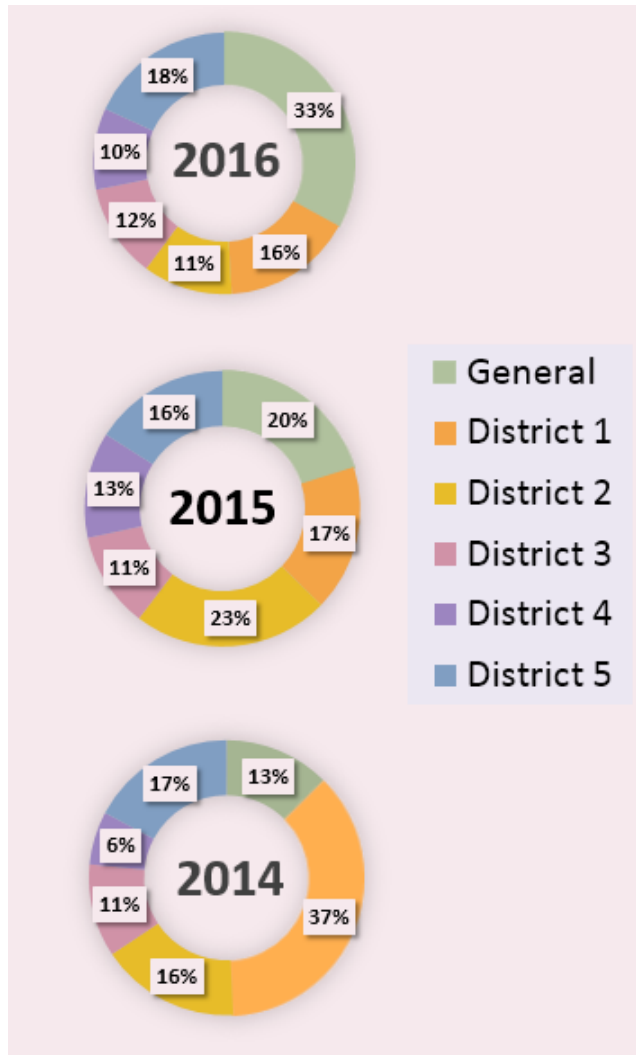
Complaint/Inquiry Classification and Departmental Interfacing

The Ombudsman does not have the authority to overturn the decision of a department, although, it is charged with ensuring that decisions are not contrary to regulation or county code. Quite often, the office acts as an interpreter of government for the citizens, clarifying decisions, or helping them understand the basis on which a decision was made. Occasionally, citizens have issues that transcend a single department and they need guidance in determining the best avenue to obtain the information/assistance they seek. Because each department has different functions, the staff may not have the information needed to satisfy a request, as it is outside of their specialization. The Ombudsman easily reaches across departmental lines to locate the best sources to assist citizens.

A CLOSER LOOK

Over a four month period, a citizen attempted to purchase a piece of property which had an abandoned mobile home on it. He was unable to close because the title company told him they would not issue a clean title without sign off from the County. Though, after talking to several county departments as well as state agencies with no success, he came to the Ombudsman office. We connected him with a specialized unit within Public Works who had the authority to investigate the abandoned mobile and eventually declare it legally abandoned which would then clear up the property for title.





Geographical Origination of Inquiries and Complaints

As previous trends suggest, the most rural districts generated slightly higher numbers of inquiries and complaints.

The *general* category includes contacts from people who did not identify where they reside, as well as those who live outside of the county, but who also engage with Snohomish County government in some aspect.

Forecasting of Inquiries and Complaints

Granted, complaint-driven workloads present accurate forecasting challenges. Given this, if current trends persist, the Office of the Ombudsman may expect to see continued growth as more constituents gain increased awareness of our services and realize their benefits.

A CLOSER LOOK

A resident of a development contacted the office regarding a pending road closure, concerned with its neighborhood impact, particularly in bad weather conditions. We connected him with Public Works, who heard their concerns and made adjustments. The concluding solution ultimately satisfied his community safety concerns.

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