

Montana Department of Justice  
Office of the Child and Family Ombudsman  
Annual Report 2017



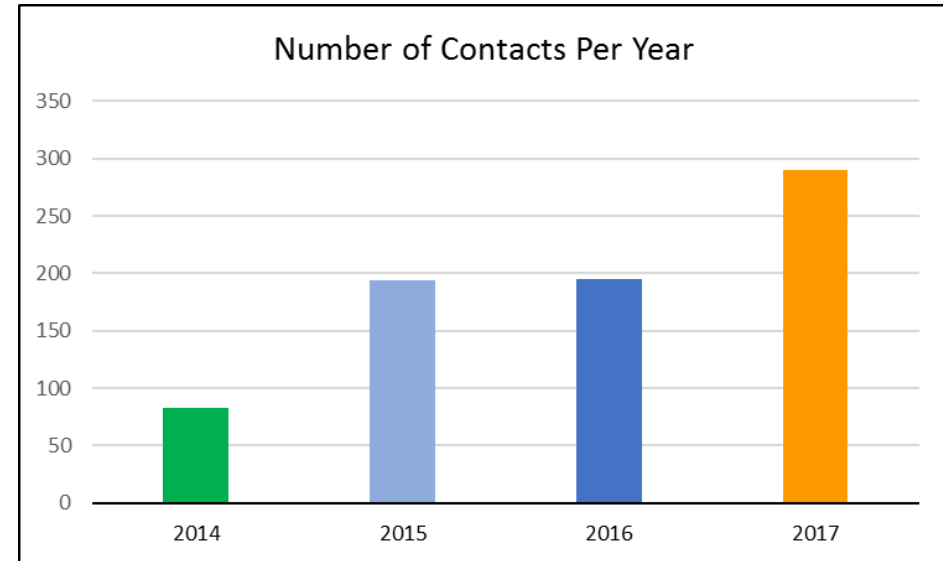
Traci L. Shinabarger, LCSW, MPA, BCBA  
Chief Child and Family Ombudsman

**Office of Child &  
Family Ombudsman**

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

## Contacts

Year	Number of Contacts
2014	83
2015	194
2016	195
2017	290
Total since 4/1/14	762



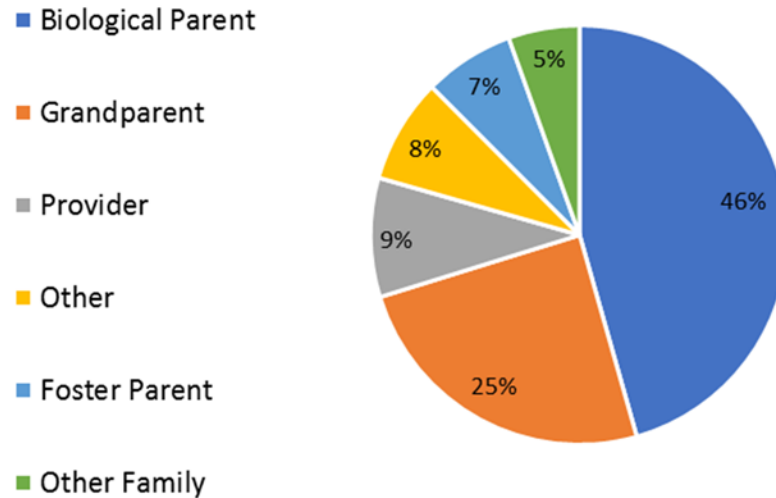
Period of report is December 16, 2016- December 15, 2017.

Contacts to OCFO increased 48.7% in 2017.

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

## Contacts- Relationship

Graph 2: Contact by Relationship to Child  
(Percentage of Total)



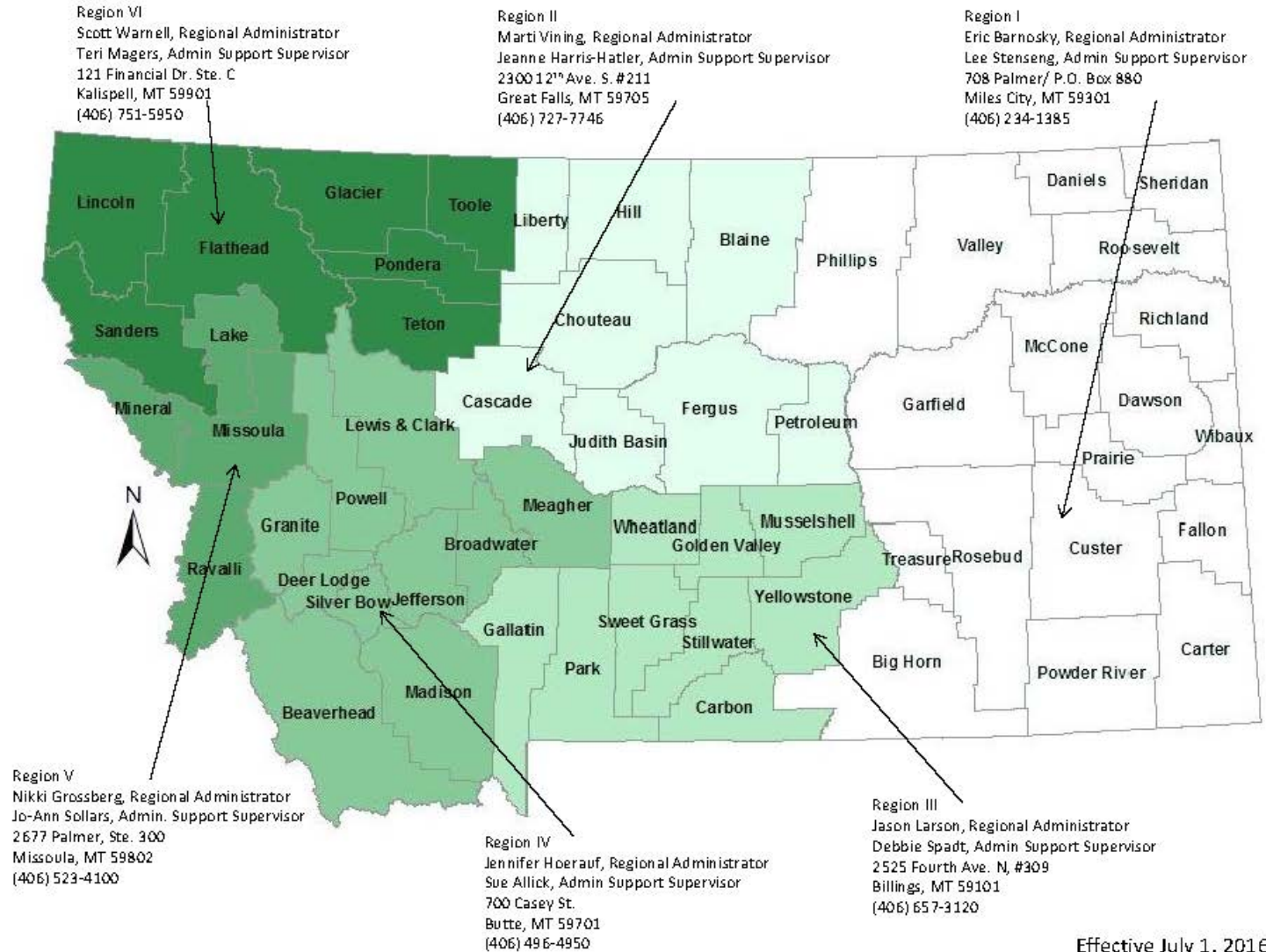
Biological parents were the primary contacts to OCFO.

Biological parents and grandparents make up 71% of contacts.

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

## Contacts- Region

- **Region I** –7%
- **Region II** – 11%
- **Region III** – 25%
- **Region IV** – 23%
- **Region V** – 15%
- **Region VI**– 9%
- **Not applicable**– 3% of contacts did not involve MT CFSD.
- **Information pending**– 7%

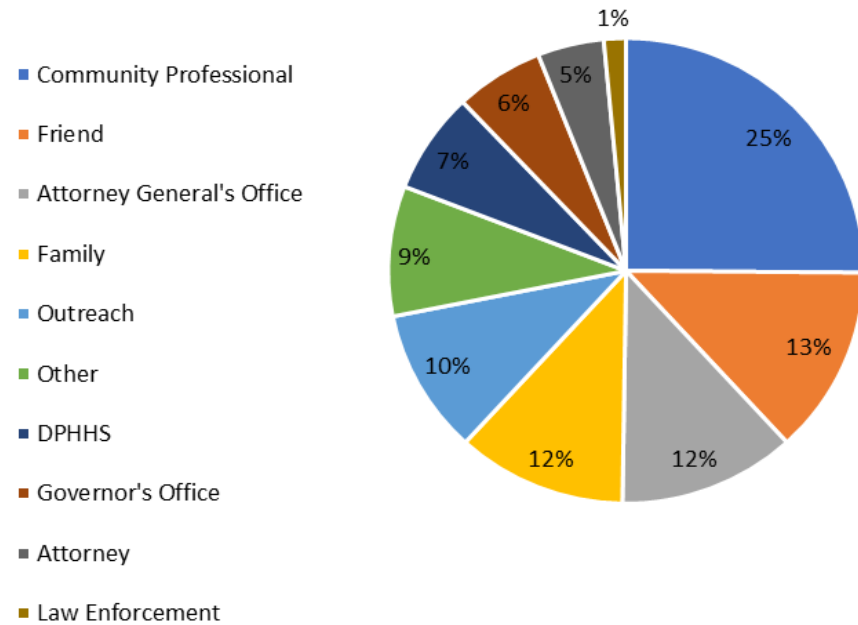


Effective July 1, 2016

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

## Contacts- Source

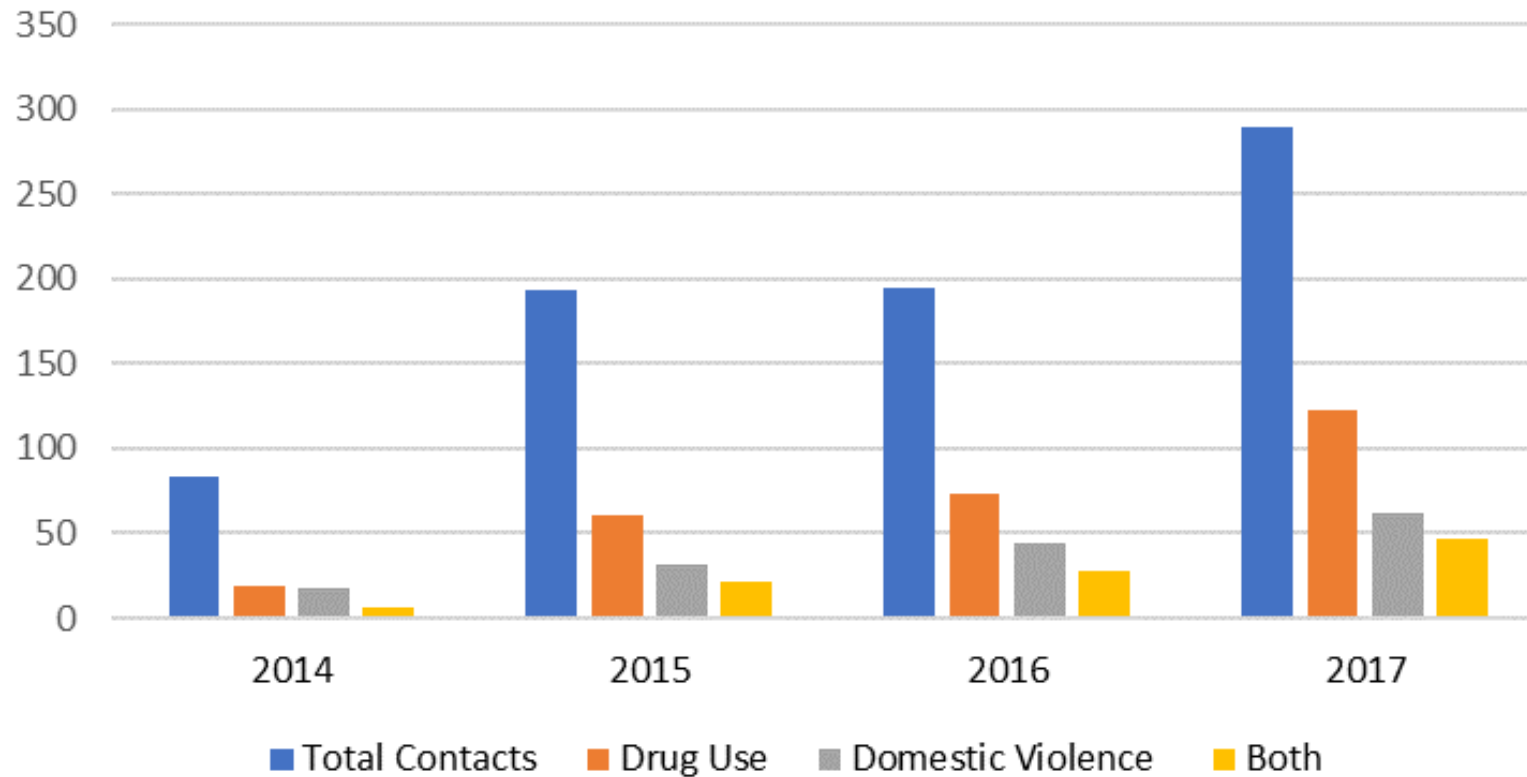
Graph 3: Source of Referrals to OCFO  
(Percentage Reported)



Community Professionals referred the most to OCFO.

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

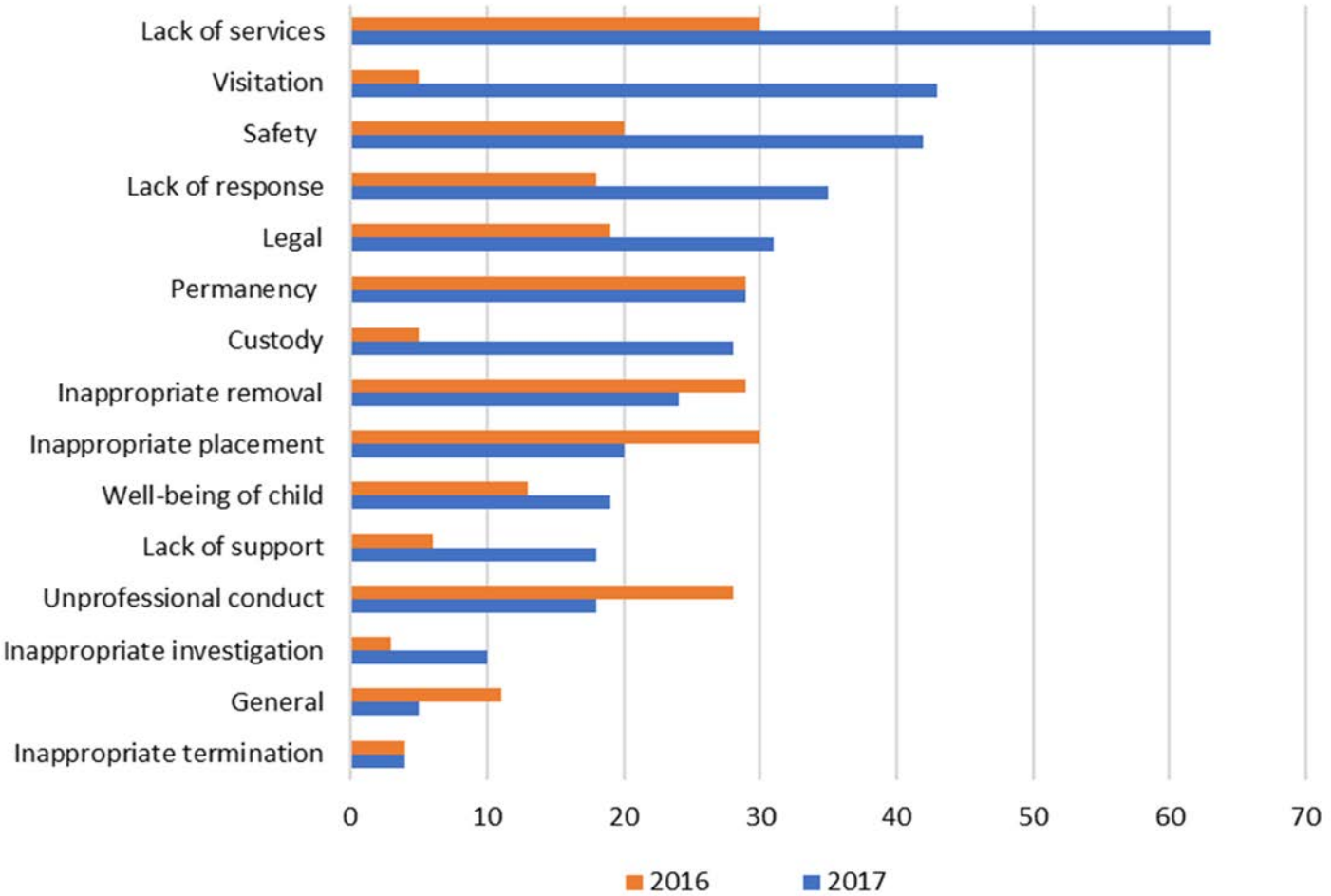
Graph 4: Drug use and Domestic Violence



- Drug use increased 5%.
- The occurrence of drug use and domestic violence together rose 2%.

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

GRAPH 4: Concerns Reported by Contacts



The most prevalent citizen concerns about children and families were:

- **Lack of services.** This included the need for referrals to complete treatment plan tasks and services for children in foster care. This concern rose 5% from 2016.
- **Visitation.** This included complaints of significantly limited in-person contact for parents and other family members with relationships to the children. This concern increased 10% from 2016.
- **Safety.** This included concerns that reports were not being fully investigated. This concern rose 4% .

# Duty: Respond to Citizen Requests

## Notifications

Type of Notification	Number Received 2015	Number Received 2016	Number Received 2017
Child Fatality*	6	8	14
Cross Reports to Law Enforcement	282	1,733	3,007
Runaways	6	46	55
Other critical incidents	1	32	24
Third report to Centralized Intake in 12 months	1,949 (Data collection began September 2015)	9,522	11,775

- 98% of alerts are CPS reports. Of those, 20/55% required a response within 24/72 hours (8831).
- 55% of cross reports are CPS reports. Of those, 14/34% required a response within 24/72 hours.
- 72% of runaway forms were completed.



# Duty: Resolve or Recommend

## Outcomes

<b>Outcome Measures</b>	<b>2017 Outcomes</b>	<b>2016 Outcomes</b>
Closed, no further contact.	61	65
Declined to intervene.	8	6
Mediated– Concerns fully resolved.	5	7
Mediated– Plan established.	2	4
Mediated– Questions answered.	7	2
Referred and closed.	73	43
Investigated and closed during 2017.	6	4
Investigated and open for feedback.	12	NA
Open from 2017 contacts.	74	37
Open from previous years.	21	56
Pending review.	55	27

- Over 150 contacts remain open.
- Six investigations are pending completion.

# Duty: Resolve or Recommend

## Recommendations

OCFO submitted 18 Findings Reports to DPHHS in 2017. Recurrent issues included:

- **Domestic Violence** Adherence to policy and procedure varied.
- **Safety Plans** Policy and procedure on the use of safety plans is unclear. Safety plans can be critical to avoiding removal and supporting reunification.
- **Safety Assessment** OCFO made several recommendations regarding investigation procedures, assessment models, and increasing the number and type of collateral contacts.
- **Diligent Search** CFSD has multiple policies and procedures on finding family, including timelines. OCFO recommended streamlining these and creating ways to assist workers in adhering to best practice.

# Duty: Resolve or Recommend

## Recommendations

OCFO submitted 18 Findings Reports to DPHHS in 2017. Recurrent issues included:

- **Education** OCFO recommended DPHHS create a policy to assist CPSs in requesting evaluations.
- **Trauma Informed Practice** While discussions of a trauma informed practice increased over the last few years, CFSD does not provide guidelines or updated information for staff use in policy.
- **Effective Communication** OCFO provided DPHHS with recommendations on improving communication with citizens, families, legal teams, and OCFO.

# Duty: Procedure Review

## Child Fatality Report

The OCFO Child Fatality Review Team reviewed 14 child fatalities.

The 2017 Child Fatality Review Report was published on January 17<sup>th</sup>.

## Trends

- **Consistency in assessment protocols.** To maintain an approach that encompasses the family as a whole and not per incident, consistent use of the assessment tool and review of history is necessary.
- **Adherence to domestic violence protocols.** The CFSD Policy Manual provides clear protocols for workers who need to work with both the victim and the offender if they are the parents. Use of these protocols and understanding the behavior of victims and offenders varies widely.
- **Information Sharing.** CFSD utilizes different mechanisms for sharing information and this confuses families and often leads to the perception that CFSD is withholding information.

# Duty: Outreach and Education

## Outreach

- Printing and distribution of brochures and notebooks at over 10 outreach events in the state;
- Participating in Child Abuse Prevention Month efforts supported by the Children's Trust Fund;
- "Meet the Ombudsman" presentations for new child protection specialist training classes;
- Presenting at the Montana Child Abuse and Neglect Conference;
- Ongoing brochure mailings and presentations to service providers;
- Attendance at monthly University of Montana Center for Children, Families, and Workforce Development;
- Attendance at the United States Ombudsman Association Annual Conference.

## Feedback

- 88% reported feeling respected by the Ombudsman.
- 79% reported understanding the process of our OCFO.
- 44% reported feeling the Ombudsman was helpful.
- 41% were satisfied with the outcomes.

# Annual Report

## Successes and Challenges

### *2016 Challenges Updates*

- **2016 Challenge #1: Communications with CFSD.** DOJ and DPHHS recently began work on a formal plan again and continue to address this issue.
- **2016 Challenge #2: Response to alerts and critical incidents.** Collection and assessment of data is ongoing.

### *2017 Challenges*

- **2017 Challenge #1: Response to citizens.** Contacts to OCFO rose nearly 50% in 2017. The number of completed request forms also rose. Delays in the VOCA award limited the time of the Deputy Ombudsman. These factors increased the response and review times.
- **2017 Challenge #2: Participation in meetings.** As of August 2017, OCFO was not permitted to attend or participate in CFSD case specific family engagement meetings. The decision frustrated citizens who invited OCFO to attend the meetings and increased the amount of time necessary for OCFO to review requests.

# Annual Report

## Successes and Challenges

### 2017 Successes

- **2017 Success #1: Findings Reports.** OCFO completed 18 Findings Reports in 2017 and made numerous recommendations to improve outcomes for children and families.
- **2017 Success #2: Collaboration with service providers.** OCFO increased contacts with service providers and professionals such as attorneys, therapists, and guardian ad litem. This helped to increase awareness of the office process and to increase real time response to citizen concerns.
- **2017 Success #3: VOCA Grant.** OCFO successfully applied for VOCA funding to maintain the position of Deputy Ombudsman. OCFO will continue to apply for grants where eligible to continue to develop the work of the office in individual cases as well as procedural reviews.

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