

Arizona Citizen Review Panels

FY24 Report

Annual Report submitted by the Citizen Review Panels has been
compiled by the Arizona Department of Child Safety Office of Communications
CSO-3917 Revised 6-2024



ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT
of CHILD SAFETY



ARIZONA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL'S MISSION

To facilitate citizen participation to evaluate and review the practices and policy of the Arizona Department of Child Safety to improve the lives of all children and families throughout the state.

ARIZONA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL'S VISION

Children will be safe, families will be stable, and together they will have an opportunity for continuity of relationships and freedom from child abuse and neglect.

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL

Members of the Successful Transition to Adulthood Citizens Review Panel met throughout SFY2024 which resulted in organizational adjustments to increase effectiveness of STA-CRP and recommendations to improve support and advocate for young people with current or past child welfare involvement.

The meetings had the following topics and guest speakers:

DATE	TOPIC/GUEST SPEAKER
August 25, 2023	DCS CEO David Lujan-Shared vision and Strategic Planning for DCS DCS Young Adult Program updates
September 29, 2023	Review of STA-CRP recommendations and Response from 2023 Presentation on planning efforts for the 2024 Chafee Planning and DCS STA Strategic Plan and program updates.
November 11, 2023	A presentation was provided on the "MyPlan" app, designed to address intimate partner violence by helping survivors make safety decisions tailored to their situation. Discussed how the Department provides advocacy and engagement training for young people to enhance their understanding of CFT/TDM and effective self-advocacy.
December 1, 2023	Reviewed the CRP-STA strategic Plan The STA-CRP met with a new position for DCS the ADA/LEP Coordinator Discussed the establishment or planning of Foster Care Summit
January 5, 2024	Reviewed Strategic Plan and further discussion of the potential of a foster care summit. Determined youth voice was needed to consider topics. STA- CRP members to attend the Department's Youth Empowerment Council meeting to talk to youth about their needs.
February 2, 2024	Reviewed information gained from participation in the Youth Empowerment Council meeting.



March 1, 2024	Presentation is to review and familiarize the CRP with the statewide CFT training initiatives taking place. Arizona Association of Health Plans (AZAHP) joins forces to centralize multiple efforts, including statewide provider training/workforce development. Mechanism for joining provider training and development forces is the AZAHP Provider WFD Alliance.
April 5, 2024	BraveLife contract for peer to peer mentoring was reviewed. The CRP heard how this curriculum and build the Youth Advocate Programming to better served older youth in foster care.
May 3, 2024	The Permanency & Youth Services team provided updates on the new EFC Success Coaching program.

In keeping with the mission of STA-CRP, panel meetings provided designated space and time for community members to raise questions and explore the practices and policies in place that impact the lives and well-being of young people. When requested, the Department brought speakers such as DCS CEO Lujan to share the Department’s strategic planning, new staff to DCS such as the ADA/LEP Coordinator, and Mercy Care presented on the improvements which are being made to better support youth participation and engagement in Child and Family Team meetings. The Department shared updates on young adult program improvements, including the changes to age of majority Team Decision Making (TDM) and Arizona’s new Extended Foster Care Success Coaching program. Panel members were encouraged to raise questions, exchange concerns, share observations and provide anecdotes on individual and systemic issues, and organizational and program changes, affecting young people.

Upon the request of CRP-STA, coordination of this panel is now conducted by Permanency and Youth Services versus Prevention services. As a result, CRP members benefited from greater engagement in DCS programs and policies related to young people. More specifically, this afforded CRP -STA panel members the opportunity to routinely converse with Youth Advocacy Specialists who are young professionals with lived experience employed by the Department.

The STA-CRP active members supporting older youth in their Successful Transition to Adulthood are:

MEMBER NAME	PLACE OF WORK
Ann Carver	Chairperson- Research Analyst & Doctoral Candidate ASU
PK Wood	Youth Advocacy Specialist
Teri Hollaway	Family Involvement Center
Kathleen Downey	College of Humanities and Social Sciences - GCU
Ijeoma Ogbonnaya	ASU School of Social Work
Linda Scott	Jewish Family and Children Services
Jacy Farkas	Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities
Michelle Forbes	Expedited Permanency Director at Maricopa County Superior Court
Berisha Black	Pilgrim Rest Foundation

RECOMMENDATIONS FY 2024:

The Department addresses the mechanisms in place to address the following issues raised by young adults in foster care and involved in the YEC:

- Navigating relationships with birth parents
- Substance abuse
- Incarceration
- Gun violence
- Lack of education
- Reproductive health
- Intimate partner violence/domestic violence and healthy relationships
- Cultural identity
- Early parenting support
- Mental health and gaps in mental health services

The Department creates and initiates plans to reduce substance use issues, including plans to:

- reduce substance use among young people living in group homes; and
- provide opportunities to teach young people in foster care skills for coping with substance use among family and friends.

The Department invests additional efforts toward preventing foster care placement instability. In cases where unable to prevent or multiple moves have already occurred, the Department should work to reduce social and educational barriers associated with placement instability (e.g., loss of connection to friends; loss of school transcripts; lack of motivation to complete school).

The Department collaborates with group home providers to create training opportunities for group home staff around providing trauma-informed care for young people in foster care and building a sense of community.

The Department provides opportunities for the voices of young people in foster care to be heard and accepted/young people to learn self-advocacy, to provide feedback about services, programs and unique needs of young people in foster care.

The Department ensures Mercy Care CHP holds informational CFT sessions for young people in foster care and offers incentive for youth participation in CFT, to increase interest and ongoing engagement.

The Department’s appointed DEIA staff to work to address the needs of transition-age youth.

The Department provides status updates on past recommendations adopted in FY2023, upon request.

“ The CRP recommends that the Department creates and initiates plans to reduce substance use issues... ”

PREVENTION CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

The Prevention Citizen Review Panel (CRP) has largely focused on workforce-related issues since its inception in 2021. However, this fiscal year marked the transition into more community-driven prevention strategies. This transition was inspired by the Department of Child Safety’s Strategic Plan, which outlined increased community awareness of the Department’s Office of Prevention, enhanced collaboration on Family Resource Centers (FRC), and mandatory reporter reform.



As the fiscal year neared its end, several members of the Prevention Citizen Review Panel resigned, leaving a gap in membership and a lack of participation. The two co-chairs, Shannon Gnam and Molly Peterson, attended the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in San Diego in May 2024. Their discussions with other states revealed a need for equitable recruitment and improved structure to elevate the CRP’s work. Thus, many of the recommendations focus on the CRP program as it pertains to support from the department.

Heading into the new fiscal year, the CRP is eager to develop recruitment and orientation processes and by-laws that more equitably and meaningfully engage community participation and voice.

Another area of interest for the CRP is the Dependency Alternative Program (DAP), working effectively in Pima County and other counties. This is a key collaboration between the Department, Attorney General’s Office, Clerk of Court, and regional courts. Maricopa County has not yet adopted such a practice. Instead, it developed its own Dependency Prevention Staffing (DPS) by partnering primarily with Juvenile Probation. The CRP wants to learn more about these two practices and explore whether to bring Maricopa County in line with the DAP model.

Finally, the CRP will leverage the Department’s new strategic plan, expected in July of 2024, to guide content planning for the CRP’s fiscal year 2025 learning. The CRP is committed to building suggestions aligning with the department’s current focus areas to increase relevance and value.

MEMBER NAME	PLACE OF WORK
Ken Dailey	Maricopa County Attorney’s Office
Molly Peterson	Prevent Child Abuse Arizona
Priscilla Salas	Southwest Human Development
Crystal Garduna	Family Involvement Center
Samara Vaught	Family Involvement Center
Tene Marion	DCS
Jessica Wood	DCS
Shannon Gnam	Together for Arizona
Angie Burleson	ACE Consortium
Brandi Saminago	DCS
Lisa Blyth	First Things First

MEETING #1: AUGUST 2023

Topics

- Emerging Prevention Programming, FRCs
- DCS Policies & Programs to learn about over the next year

Insights

- The Next Event Analysis report shows that many families are reported to DCS who do not need a child protection response
- It is promising that DCS is getting behind FRCs

MEETING #2: SEPTEMBER 2023

Topic: Attend the “Next Event Analysis” Presentation hosted by Together for Arizona

MEETING #3: OCTOBER 2023

Topic

- Key Findings from 8 Child Welfare Workforce Interventions
- Job Redesign in Louisiana
- Organizational Change Process in Milwaukee
- Coaching and Supportive Supervision in Ohio

Insights

- DCS EAP program may be underutilized
- If DCS wants families to feel safe with caseworkers, they need to ensure that caseworkers feel safe in their workplace, too.
- How can we prevent burnout?
 - * Build self-care plans and follow up on them.
 - * What are your needs for continuing this work? What is the most challenging part of your role?
 - * What does it feel like when you enter these homes, and what is causing you emotional harm?

MEETING #4: NOVEMBER 2023

Guest Speaker: David Lujan, Chief Executive Office of DCS

Topic: DCS FY24 Strategic Plan

Insights

- Invest in Prevention
- Give TANF dollars back to welfare programs
- Create a culture of safety
- Hiring a DEI Director
- How we can be of value to DCS?

- Incorporate feedback to inform next year’s strategic plan
- DCS needs more robust trauma-informed training
- Biggest focus with legislature
 - * Continue on as an agency (10-year review)
 - * Central Registry Reform
 - * Definition of Neglect
 - * Mandated Reporter Reform
 - * Differential Response

MEETING #5: FEBRUARY 2024

Guest Speaker: Tashira Turner, DCS

Topic: Culturally Grounded Practice

Insights

- 4-Part Training
- Focusing on understanding positionality and racial/ethnic disparities
- Empathetic Engagement
- Trauma-Responsive Practices
- Your role in culturally-grounded practice

MEETING #6: APRIL 2024

Guest Speaker: Claire Louge, M.Ed, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

Topic: Considering Yourself a “Mandated Supporter”

Insights: Can the CRP help research pathways other states are exploring to increase a community supporting response?

MEETING #7: MAY 2024

Topic: Annual Report to DCS, Future Topics

Insights:

- Shannon and Molly are attending the National CRP Conference in San Diego. Both are looking forward to sharing insights to this group!
- Tene’ is going to set up speakers to address progress on our FY23 recommendations.
- State Legislature Review meeting on 4/25/2024 had a much more collaborative tone
- Explore the future of Mandated Supporting in Arizona
- Shannon compiled impressive research of other states’ efforts

MEETING #8: JUNE 2024

Topic: Finalize DCS Report, discuss National Citizen Review Panel Conference Take-Aways

Insights:

- Add structure to member participation and recruitment processes
- Identify a membership goal, including the number of members and specific audiences we need represented
- Create an orientation process to on-board people into CAPTA requirements and expectations of the CRP

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DCS FOR STATE FISCAL YEAR 2023:

Recommendation #1: The CRP recommends that the Department organize an annual meeting for all of its community groups, including the Citizen Review Panels, to increase collaboration and understanding of the priorities between groups.

Recommendation #2: The CRP recommends that the Department engage the CRP in discussions regarding the development of the Strategic Plan and the implementation of strategies to provide insight, recommendations, and/or support.

Recommendation #3: The CRP reaffirms its five recommendations from FY 2023. We recommend that the Department provide a progress report on implementing these recommendations:

FY23 Recommendation #1: Federal Agencies such as the Children’s Bureau have released several requests for grant proposals that align with the challenges the Department of Child Safety faces regarding caseworker retention and well-being. These releases have revealed the nationwide struggles faced by many child protection agencies and an understanding that these significant challenges will require funding and technical assistance to face. Thus, we recommend that DCS keep a close eye on grant funding released by the Children’s Bureau and other federal agencies and request federal funding and technical assistance. Further, this opportunity would provide support through other state CPS agencies facing similar challenges.

FY23 Recommendation #2: The CRP recommends that, as caseworker retention increases and caseloads per worker decreases, the Department emphasizes using additional time for learning and development within the Department. To encourage and incentivize learning amongst caseworker staff, the Department can offer the flexibility to allow employees to train on their own schedule, so as to lessen any stress that may be affiliated with participating in training opportunities while managing the various needs of staff caseloads. Additionally, it is recommended that the Department provide a menu of various development opportunities for employees to be able to choose areas of learning that are tailored to their specific needs and skill levels.

FY23 Recommendation #3: The CRP recommends that the Department make modifications to the supervisor onboarding program. This includes enhancing the supervision coaching program to include reflective supervision, communication skills, psychological safety, and how to improve well-being at work. The emphasis should be on personalized coaching and not training; supervisors need to help their caseworkers develop judgment around cases. Judgment cannot be taught via training, but needs coaching support to build individual capacity to apply principles in unique situations via personal judgment.

FY23 Recommendation #4: The CRP recommends prioritizing the Protective Factors and strengths-based approach to training new DCS specialist employees earlier into the onboarding process and identifying simple and effective ways both new employees and supervisors can reinforce the application of these principles in their interactions with families.

FY23 Recommendation #5: The CRP recommends that the Department of Child Safety provide a job shadowing program for employees to follow internal positions, such as those at Central Office, to see the career mobility they have within the department. Similarly, we recommend that the Department extend this job shadowing experience to external partners, such as court days with a judge and ride-alongs with law enforcement to deepen understanding of partner work to better impact families.

The CRP recommends developing a cohort-style peer support system for new employees, providing a platform that would be monitored to submit questions, get advice, and encourage their fellow newbies to build community, collaboration, and a system of support.

Recommendation #4: The CRP recommends DCS create a landing page on its website specifically for the Citizen Review Panel with content provided by the CRP. This landing page would provide a centralized place for past annual reports from each team, a pathway to apply to participate in the CRP, and CRP resources to create more transparency, equity, and accessibility for the public to learn about the CRP's role/function.

2024

Department of Child Safety Community
Advisory Committee Report of Activities and
Recommendations for State Fiscal Year 2024

CSO-3918 Revised June 2024



BACKGROUND

The Community Advisory Committee was established June 2015 by A.R.S. §8-459, to provide a community forum with the following purpose:

1. to inform the Department, analyze current law and policy and make recommendations to improve the ability of the Department to increase the safety of children, respond to child maltreatment and ensure the well-being of and timely permanency for children who are referred to and involved in the child welfare system;
2. for collaboration among state, local, community, tribal, public and private stakeholders in child welfare programs and services that are administered by the Department; and
3. to improve communication between mandatory reporters and the Department.

Additionally, the Community Advisory Committee serves as one of several Citizen Review Panels for the Department, as required by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The full list of Citizen Review Panels can be found at <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>.

The Community Advisory Committee includes one representative from each of fourteen stakeholder groups. The Committee’s membership includes:

ARIZONA DCS COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	
SECTOR	NAME / AFFILIATION OF REPRESENTATIVE
Child welfare agencies that directly provide contracted services to children and their families	Vacant
Child advocacy organizations that deal with child welfare system policy issues	Candy Espino, MBA President and CEO of the Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Current or former foster or adoptive parent	Jennifer Huber, PhD, former foster parent and adoptive parent
Medical providers, with a preference for pediatricians, who have experience in diagnosing and treating injuries related to abuse and neglect	Cody Conklin-Aguilera, MD., FAAP, Medical Director, Department of Public Health Yavapai County, Pediatric Program Manager, Verde Valley
Volunteers with the foster care review board or Court Appointed Special Advocate program	Victoria Strayer - Co-Founder, Voices for CASA Children
Persons with an academic appointment to a state university who conduct research in child welfare services, child maltreatment or child abuse or neglect	James Herbert Williams, PhD., MSW., MPA Arizona Centennial Professor of Social Welfare, Director, Center for Child Well-Being



The courts, the representative must be involved in child welfare issues	Nicole Roskens, LPC, Clinical Director, Cradle to Crayons Program, Superior Court of Maricopa County Juvenile Division, and Independent Private Practice, Counselor
A rural area in this state who has experience in the child welfare system	Rita Stageman, MSW, Assistant Clinical Professor, Child Welfare Training Project Coordinator, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Northern Arizona University
A Native American tribe or nation who has experience in the child welfare system	Elisia Manuel, President, Three Precious Miracles
A child advocacy organization that advocates for or represents children who are victims of crime.	Molly L. Dunn, JD Director of Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice Policy Children’s Action Alliance
Persons who have experience with children with special needs and the child welfare system	Roy Dawson, Executive Director, Arizona Center for African American Resources
A law enforcement agency. The representative must have experience with the Department on cases that involve criminal conduct allegations	Vacant
Schools. The representative must have experience in the child welfare system	Jennifer Garland, Social worker, Phoenix Union High School District
A faith-based organization. The representative must have experience in the child welfare system	Mark Upton, President/CEO Christian Family Care

As required by A.R.S. §8-459, representatives are appointed by the Director of the Department of Child Safety and did not receive compensation for their service on the Committee. The statutory requirements of the Committee are to meet at least quarterly and produce a report of Committee activities and recommendations each fiscal year. A.R.S. § 8-459(D).

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES, ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee met in SFY 2024 to receive information about a range of topics including the U.S. Supreme Court’s ICWA decision, disparity in child welfare, the DCS strategic plan, legislative updates, and more. The Committee also held calls to public and an option for executive session. An archive of the Committee meetings, including material presented at the meetings can be accessed at the following web page: <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>. The Committee held seven meeting ins SFY 2024. In accordance with A.R.S. §8-459(D), the Committee has summarized several activities and recommendations that came from the meetings held in SFY 2024.

MEETING #1: SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

Activities and Actions

- ICWA and the Supreme Court Decision

DCS Intergovernmental Liaison Timareean Thurston gave a presentation on the U.S. Supreme Court’s ICWA decision which upheld the current law. Thurston said the decision allowed the Department to move ahead with working on memorandums of understanding with Arizona’s tribes to ensure equity for Arizona’s Native

American children. The Committee and Thurston then discussed current state legislation involving ICWA, placement preferences for Native American children, and DCS outreach efforts to Arizona’s tribes. The Committee did not take any action.

- Disparity

A discussion on disparity was tabled for a future meeting date due to a scheduling conflict with the presenter.

- Call for Public Comments -

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There was one comment from the public in regards to the speaker’s appeal against the Department and allegations that the Department violated the speaker’s rights.

MEETING #2: NOVEMBER 3, 2023

- DCS Equity

DCS Contractor Connie Robinson gave a presentation on DCS creating a DEIA position and an equity vision statement for the Department. Robinson said they have been working on a defining the DEIA role as it relates to the agency and drafting the vision statement. Robinson said some of the major questions being asked to formulate the vision is asking DCS employees what qualities and experiences they are looking for in a DEIA position and what training opportunities are necessary to implement an equity-based vision. Robinson said staff and leadership are supportive of the efforts, and she was optimistic that the program will be successful.

The Committee discussed their positions on the DEIA position. They commented that the person should have experience with child welfare, community collaboration, and has demonstrated an ability to lead a team. The Committee did not take any action.

- Strategic Plan

DCS CEO David Lujan presented on the current strategic plan and its six priorities:

1. Strengthening families- Lujan said the core of DCS’s work is to keep children safe. He said the Department’s primary focus is on keeping families together. If a child does need to come into care, the Department needs to ensure they have a loving home, and the services required to help families safely reunify. To accomplish this goal, the Department will focus on increasing kinship care, helping kinship caregivers obtain a license, decrease the number of children in congregate care, and other efforts to help children and families thrive.
2. Culture- Lujan said his goal was to create a supportive culture at DCS for employees and the families we serve. He said the goal was to treat everyone with kindness, respect and fairness. The Department will measure this goal by reducing the number of Ombudsman complaints; increasing responses to record requests; and analyzing data from the Safety Science and partner satisfaction surveys.
3. Professional development- Lujan said DCS cannot accomplish its goals without a strong workforce. Lujan said the goal is to strengthen and expand learning and mentoring opportunities for staff and expand internal opportunities for career development and professional advancement.
4. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility- Lujan said this strategic priority will underscore the Department’s commitment to equity. The goal will be to reduce the racial disparity in calls to the hotline and to the number of children in DCS care.
5. Prevention- Lujan said the Department is dedicated to keeping families safely together. To accomplish this, the Department will focus on connecting families with community resources to meet families’ needs without DCS involvement and to improve prevention services to keep children with their parents and to support reunification for children in DCS care.

6. Technology and data- Lujan said the Department will utilize data and technology to increase transparency, accessibility, and problem solving. The goals will be measured by using reports to track disparity in the child welfare system, implement a network to increase staff's technology skills, and to decrease the reliance on paper forms by creating a modern cloud platform.

After the presentation, the Committee discussed the strategic plan's objectives and offered their opinions. The Committee did not take any action.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There was one comment from a parent with an open dependency case. The individual stated their rights had been violated. The comment was forwarded to the DCS's Ombudsman's Office.

MEETING #3: DECEMBER 1, 2023

Activities and Actions

- Congregate Care

DCS Chief Operations Office Gillian Vanasse presented on the Department's goal of reducing congregate care placements. Vanasse said to accomplish this goal DCS will need to partner with internal and external stakeholders including foster families, foster and adoptive family support agencies, the community, and congregate care providers. Vanasse said the Department will continue to make it easier to place children in care with family members. Vanasse highlighted the change in law regarding fingerprint clearance cards and the Department's attempts to make obtaining a foster license easier as examples of the ways DCS is prioritizing kinship placements. Vanasse also mentioned the Department's expanded efforts to identify and locate relatives for placing children who are currently in congregate care in their homes. The Committee discussed the topic. The Committee did not take any action.

- Subcommittees

The Committee discussed the need to create subcommittees to study individual issues to provide a more in-depth analysis. The Committee agreed to create the following subcommittees: DEIA, Organizational Culture, Professional Development, Congregate Care, Community Outreach and Prevention.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the December meeting.

MEETING #4: FEBRUARY 9, 2024

Activities and Actions

- Legislative Update

DCS Legislative Liaison Chris Gustafson presented bills the Department has been tracking during the legislative session. Gustafson discussed several bills that involved missing children; drug testing of group home employees; jury trials in dependency cases and more. The Committee discussed the presentation. The Committee did not take any action.

- Sunset Review

DCS CEO David Lujan presented on the legislature's DCS Sunset Review hearing. Lujan discussed how every state agency comes up for review every 10 years. He discussed the initial review based on the Auditor

General's report. Lujan said the Auditor General's report was not positive, but it did help provide a path to how DCS can improve. The report included recommendations on how we report to the court, DCS staff attendance at Foster Care Review Board meetings, and other issues with the Department. The Committee discussed the presentation. The Committee did not take any action.

- Subcommittees

The Committee discussed the first subcommittee meetings. The Committee determined that they will continue meeting in the individual subcommittees to discuss topics in depth to provide substantive feedback to overall Committee and the Department. The Committee did not take any action.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the February meeting.

MEETING #5: MARCH 22, 2024

Activities and Actions

- Cultural Brokers Program

Katherine Guffey, Executive Consultant to the CEO, presented on the Department's implementation of the Cultural Brokers Program. Guffey said the program was one of several the Department was undertaking to decrease the number of Black and African-American children in the child welfare system. The program is a partnership between DCS and the community being served. Guffey said the program will have family advocates from the community attending DCS Specialists on investigations. Advocates will support during an investigation; provide connections to resources; and assist families in finding kinship placements if a removal is necessary. Guffey said the program will be implemented in six zip codes in Maricopa County to begin with. It will then be evaluated to determine the programs impact. If successful, the program will be expanded. The Committee discussed the presentation. The Committee did not take any action.

- Strategic Plan

DCS CEO David Lujan presented on the Department's FY25 strategic plan. Lujan discussed that the Department would like to use the Committee's feedback as part of the next strategic plan. Lujan asked that the Committee develop their recommendations with the strategic plan and the annual report in mind. Katherine Guffey, Executive Consultant to the CEO, presented on some of the Department's goals for the next strategic plan, including increased reunification for families; decrease racial disparity in children entering care; decreased congregate care; and increased kinship care. The Committee discussed the presentations. The Committee did not take any action.

- Subcommittees

The Committee discussed the composition and intent of the subcommittees.

While the Committee did not take any formal action, they agreed to continue with the subcommittees.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the March meeting.

MEETING #6: MAY 17, 2024

Activities and Actions

- Subcommittees

The Committee did not have any changes to recommend in regards to the subcommittees. The Committee did not take any action.

- Annual Report

The Committee discussed its recommendations for its FY24 Annual Report. A draft recommendation was completed. The Committee decided to vote on approving the Annual Report during their June meeting.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There was one public comment during the May meeting. The speaker discussed the need for the Department to implement changes in how it investigates and serves children with autism.

MEETING #7: JUNE 14, 2024

Activities and Actions

- Annual Report

The Committee voted to approve its SFY 2024 annual report.

- Community Advisory Committee Chair

The Committee decided to vote on a new chair at its August meeting.

- Call for Public Comment

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the June meeting.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DCS FOR STATE FISCAL YEAR 2024:

1. Regarding the Department's strategic goal for increased community engagement: The Committee recommends the Department implement collaborative community messaging, including campaigns for recruiting designed to increase the number of foster placements, CASA and FCRB volunteers, DCS staff and other key and supportive roles within the overall child welfare community.
2. Regarding the Department's implementation of expanded Kinship Support Services: The Committee applauds these efforts and recommends that outcomes are reviewed regularly and shared with other providers supporting kinship placements.
3. Regarding the Department's primary focus on safe Family Reunification: The Committee recommends that the Department continue to make revisions to collateral, website, etc. to ensure Family Reunification is positively highlighted on par with Adoption and other outcomes. The Department should also continue to collaborate with community groups and service providers working to elevate community understanding of Family Reunification and the social and economic benefits of a family network and kinship success. The Department should connect families to community resources and supports post-reunification.

4. Regarding the high number of youth that transition out of foster care without sufficient preparation and support: The Committee recommends the Department increase targeted services and explore community partnerships that could support case managers, and others involved, to ensure all youth have a successful transition. (For example, birth certificate, social security card and/or other required legal credentials, State ID, etc.)
5. Regarding the Department's focus on missing and runaway youth: The Committee recommends that the Department consistently provide medical and therapeutic services offered to runaway youth who have returned and may have been exposed to unsafe and unhealthy environments, including exposure to sex trafficking.
6. Regarding the structure of the Community Advisory Committee: The Committee recommends the Department continue the sub-committee framework that was implemented this fiscal year to allow focused discussion and more effective feedback to the Department.
7. Regarding prevention: The Committee recommends the Department develops measurable objectives for their prevention programs, including family resource centers and recommends the Department take steps to add strategic measurable objectives for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.
8. Regarding the Department's DEIA initiatives to improve organizational culture, disparities and overrepresentation of Black/African American and Native American families, and workforce training: The Committee recommends that the Department continues to implement the DEIA strategy to create an inclusive organization. Train employees on best culturally responsive practices for working with minority families and communities to decrease the disparities and overrepresentation of Black/African American and Native American families being served by the Department. The Committee additionally recommends that the Department prioritize adding a senior staff to lead the DEIA strategy for the organization.
9. Regarding the Department's focus on the overrepresentation of Black/African American and Native American children and families: We recommend that the Department of Child Safety leads and partners with other state departments/agencies and community-based non-profit child welfare agencies to develop a community-based coordinated plan for implementing programs, promoting policies, and continued advocacy to strengthen and rebuild Black/African American and Native American families and communities to protect community and family stability.