



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY SFY 2024 Arizona Citizen Review Panel Report

Agency Response to Recommendations

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS or the Department) is pleased to receive and respond to the recommendations made by the three Arizona Citizen Review Panels (CRP) in their Annual Reports for SFY 2024.

Citizen participation is vital to achieving successful engagement of children and families by bringing the voice of the community to safeguard and strengthen families to maintain permanency. An engaged citizenry brings vibrant new ideas and fresh perspectives creating an environment that is welcoming of community input for the elimination of child abuse and neglect, and improved child and family well-being. Citizen participation provides for open and honest communication between the citizens and DCS that forge a relationship built on mutual trust and respect.

The Department is committed to the strategic goals and initiatives outlined in the DCS Strategic Plan and demonstrated daily by our shared values:

- **Safety** - We are safety experts.
- **Compassion** - We are Compassioners.
- **Change** - We are all born to grow.
- **Accountability** - We hold ourselves to the highest levels of professionalism.
- **Advocacy** - When children can't speak for themselves, we can.
- **Family** - Family reaches beyond the home.
- **Engagement** - Engagement means listening and being responsive to earn the trust of all we encounter.
- **Teaming** - The best decisions are made together.
- **Equity** – Improve policy and practice to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

We thank each member of the Citizen Review Panels for their commitment and continued partnership.

The Department's response to each panel's recommendation are as follows:

Successful Transition to Adulthood for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care:

Recommendation #1: 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; and
- Lack of education.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #2: 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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #3: 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).

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #4: 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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #5: 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 people in foster care.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #6: The Department ensures Mercy Care CHP holds information CFT sessions for young people in foster care and offers incentives for youth participation in CFTs to increase interest and ongoing engagement.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #7: The Department's appointed DEIA staff to work to address the needs of transition-aged youth.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #6: The Department provides status updates on past recommendations adopted in FY2023 upon request.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

The Arizona DCS Community Advisory Committee Panel

The DCS Community Advisory Committee produces an annual report in August, after the end of each state fiscal year. The annual report is available to the public on the Department's website at: <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation.

Recommendation #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.)

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

The Arizona DCS Citizens Review Panel on Prevention

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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

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.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.