

2024

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

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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.