

2023

Department of Child Safety Community
Advisory Committee Report of Activities and
Recommendations for State Fiscal Year 2023

Revised June 2023

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	Jacob Schmitt, MPA, President/CEO, Arizona’s Children Association
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	Robin Pearson, Executive Director, 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	Vacant

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.	Vacant
Persons who have experience with children with special needs and the child welfare system	Soncerea Swift, foster parent, social worker
A law enforcement agency. The representative must have experience with the Department on cases that involve criminal conduct allegations	Commander Matthew Siekmann Phoenix Police Department, Family Investigations Bureau
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 2023 to receive information about current laws and policies as well as the call 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>. Due to scheduling conflicts and a change in DCS leadership, the Committee held two meeting ins SFY 2023. 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 2023.

MEETING #1: SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

Activities and Actions

- Community Advisory Committee Composition-

The Committee discussed the upcoming November elections and what impact that could have on the Committee. Chairman Peter Gentala announced his resignation from the Committee. The Committee elected Jacob Schmitt as the new chair.

- Legislative review-

DCS Legislative Liaison Melissa Compian discussed bills that increased the foster care daily rate, the monthly kinship stipend and the independent living stipend. Compian also covered the expansion of the Healthy Families Program and a bill that allows the Department to waive the fingerprint requirement for kinship families under certain circumstances.

- 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 were no comments from the public for the August meeting.

MEETING #2: DECEMBER 2, 2022

A meeting could not be held because the committee did not have a quorum.

MEETING #3: JUNE 9, 2023

Activities and Actions

- Legislation/Policy-

DCS Legislative Liaison Melissa Compian presented on the 2023 Legislative session. She highlighted bills that added funds for fleet vehicle replacement, the Positive Parenting Program, the Extended Foster Care Program, and a bill that increased the number of DCS visitation aides.

The Committee discussed the legislative session, but did not take any action.

- Director Introduction-

DCS Director David Lujan introduced himself to the Committee and discussed his background and goals for the Department. Lujan told the Committee that DCS field staff levels have been the highest in years and employee turnover is down. Lujan stated one of his goals is to partner with providers, other state agencies, and the community to help families thrive. Lujan stated that he intends to decrease disparity and rebuild trust with communities across the state. He said he wants to expand DCS’s prevention efforts to strengthen families and mitigate the need for out-of-home care.

- 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 2023:

1. Regarding trauma-informed and responsive training: The Committee recommends that the Department provide training to staff that comprehends the significance of adverse childhood experiences in the lives of children, which promotes positive outcomes for increased resiliency, safety and social-emotional wellbeing while promoting effective non-traumatic methods for reducing negative reactions to trauma. The Committee acknowledges this was recommended last report and reaffirms this recommendation because of the amount of time it takes to implement such a training and because of the increased number of new employees at the Department.
2. Regarding foster home licensure for kinship families: The Committee acknowledges the upcoming departmental contract to provide services and supports for kinship families as a strength in

supporting kin who are caring for children involved with the Department. The Committee continues to recommend the Department do all it can to streamline licensing requirements, increase availability of waivers, and review training requirements for the licensure of kinship families to expedite and increase kinship care placements in all communities, particularly in Native American communities.

3. Regarding support for youth who are dually involved: The Committee recommends that the Department create a workgroup to address the delay in assignment of DCS staff for those youth who are temporarily assigned to a safe environment (i.e. incarcerated, detained, or hospitalized) to improve the timely receipt of services for dually involved youth and families.
4. Regarding meeting the educational needs of children in the care of the Department: The Committee recommends that a workgroup be developed to make policy recommendations for the ongoing educational needs of children in the care of the Department. The Committee recognizes that SB 1205 is a helpful tool in determining initially the best interests for students involved with the Department, but more is needed for a reassessment of those plans later, after there has been a transition between the investigation and ongoing staff at the Department. It is further recommended that the workgroup include members of local school districts, caregivers and foster caregivers, young adults, as well line staff from the Department.
5. Regarding the training of Native American culture for Departmental staff: The Committee recommends that Departmental staff receive additional Native American cultural training as part of their training requirements. With 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona and disparate rates of removal for Arizona's Native American communities, the need for enhanced training and resources for Departmental staff is highly recommended.
6. Regarding contracting for services with DCS: The Committee recommends that the Department do more to work with procurement on the selection criteria of contracted agencies with a higher emphasis on quality of service delivery versus having the lowest rate. Additionally, it is further recommended that the Department revisit its Request for Proposal (RFP) culture to strategically partner to create a collegial culture between the department and the provider community.
7. Regarding the disproportionate number of black and indigenous children who come to the attention of the Department. The Committee recommends that the Department continue to work with those with lived experience and community stakeholders to address issues of disproportionality in Arizona's black and indigenous communities.