

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Department has processes for key responsibilities, such as assessing child safety in response to abuse/neglect reports, but did not consistently provide timely and quality court reports or ensure some license applicants met licensing requirements, and has not fully implemented most recommendations from 6 prior special audits

Audit purpose

To determine whether the Department complied with State requirements for providing reports to the juvenile court for dependency review hearings; State conflict-of-interest law; safeguarding information technology (IT) systems and data; and licensing group homes, foster homes, and adoption agencies within required time frames; and to provide responses to the statutory sunset factors.

Key findings

- The Department has developed processes for assessing child safety in response to reports of abuse and neglect as recommended in our September 2015 special audit and increased the percentage of children placed in kinship care since 2018. However, it has not fully implemented 42 of 58 recommendations from 6 special audit reports we issued between 2016 and 2021, including recommendations related to court report timeliness and quality.
- The Department did not submit 69 percent of 67 juvenile court reports we reviewed at least 15 days prior to hearings as required by court rules, and 17 of 28 judges we interviewed reported issues with report quality, such as outdated or lack of specific information. Inconsistently providing timely court reports with quality information can delay decisions about children's services and placement in a stable, permanent home.
- Of 29 license applications from foster homes and adoption and child welfare agencies we reviewed, the Department did not ensure 9 applicants met requirements prior to issuing a license, such as documenting review of fingerprint clearance cards and required staff education and work history. Additionally, the Department did not approve or deny 6 applications within required time frames.
- Department lacked written procedures for some State IT security requirements intended to protect critical IT infrastructure and access to sensitive and confidential information related to children.
- Department did not comply with some State conflict-of-interest requirements, and its conflict-of-interest process was not fully aligned with recommended practices, increasing risk employees had not disclosed substantial interests that might influence their official conduct.

Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Ensure caseworkers submit court reports 15 days prior to dependency review hearings and work with the juvenile court and stakeholders to determine how the Department can improve court report quality.
- Ensure it licenses only qualified adoption and child welfare agency applicants.
- Implement its revised action plan to address IT security policies and procedures.
- Implement conflict-of-interest disclosure policies and ensure all employees complete a disclosure form.