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July 22, 2016

The Honorable John Allen, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

The Honorable Judy Burges, Vice Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Dear Representative Allen and Senator Burges:

Our Office has recently completed an initial followup of the *Arizona Department of Child Safety—Child Safety, Removal, and Risk Assessment Practices* regarding the implementation status of the nine audit recommendations (including sub-parts of the recommendations) presented in the special report released in September 2015 (Auditor General Report No. 15-118). As the attached grid indicates:

- 5 are in the process of being implemented;
- 2 have not been implemented; and
- 2 are not yet applicable.

Our Office will conduct an 18-month followup with the Department on the status of those recommendations that have not yet been fully implemented.

Sincerely,

Dale Chapman, Director
Performance Audit Division

DC:ka
Attachment

cc: Gregory McKay, Director
Arizona Department of Child Safety

Arizona Department of Child Safety—Child Safety, Removal, and Risk Assessment Practices Auditor General Report No. 15-118 Initial Follow-Up Report

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

Chapter 2: Department has inadequately implemented critical components of its child safety and risk assessment process

2.1 The Department should review the efforts that other child welfare agencies have taken, including those agencies that participated in the BSC and Vermont's revised training program, to improve their child safety and risk assessment practices and determine whether similar actions would improve the Department's child safety and risk assessment practices.

Implementation in process

The Department has reviewed the efforts of other child welfare agencies to improve their child safety and risk assessment practices, and it has identified some approaches that could potentially be adopted in Arizona. For example, the Department reported it could incorporate the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle identified in the BSC, which evaluates the effectiveness of process changes and identifies necessary adjustments. The Department reported that by incorporating the PDSA cycle, it could potentially implement several changes to its safety and risk assessment practices in a brief time frame and evaluate the effectiveness of those changes. However, the Department reported that it has not established a definitive time frame for determining when/if it will implement such an approach.

2.2 The Department should continue its efforts to modify or replace its safety and risk assessment tool and should ensure the new tool effectively facilitates and guides caseworker safety and risk assessments and decision making through the use of a structured approach, standardizes information collected and reported by caseworkers, and results in usable data that the Department can analyze to assess its decision-making system and make informed changes for improvement. In developing a new safety and risk assessment tool, the Department should consider the following:

Implementation in process

As of June 2016, the Department was in the process of drafting and developing a modified tool to assess child safety and risk. The Department's draft tool includes various changes, such as standardized checkboxes and bullets for the specific risk factors, safety threats, and safety criteria within the tool to help guide caseworkers' decision making. In addition, the draft tool provides instructions for when to include a more detailed narrative response for each of the risk factors. However, the Department has not established a definitive time frame for when it plans to implement the modified tool.

- Using automated and standardized checkboxes and/or prompts to ensure the appropriate level of detail, consistency, accuracy, and usefulness of safety and risk assessment data, and supplementing these checkboxes and/or prompts with narrative fields within the tool as necessary for caseworker use;
- Bulleting out the specific risk factors, safety threats, and safety criteria within the tool to help guide caseworkers' decision making by allowing them to go step-by-step through the assessment process and increase consistency in information gathering; and

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

- Including specific instructions and parameters within the tool itself on what type of information and level of detail is needed for areas where a narrative response would provide additional helpful information.

2.3 The Department should develop and implement policies and procedures that would direct and guide an analysis of safety and risk assessment data to identify trends, assess the appropriateness and results of decisions, and then revise any relevant child safety and risk assessment processes and protocols accordingly.

Implementation in process

Although the Department has taken some steps to identify safety and risk assessment trends for certain cases, such as developing an internal unit that evaluates fatality and near fatality cases to identify trends and practice improvements, it has not yet developed policies and procedures that would direct and guide an analysis of safety and risk assessment data system-wide.

2.4 The Department should reduce the waitlists for in-home services in order to improve safety planning by analyzing the availability of funding for in-home services, assessing whether it has contracted with sufficient providers, and conducting a gap assessment to determine the level of services available and the level of services still needed, and identifying available funding and/or resources to address this gap.

Implementation in process

The Department has not yet reduced the overall waitlist for intensive in-home services, but conducted an analysis of referrals for in-home services and determined that it needs existing service providers to increase their capacity, such as hiring additional staff, in order to reduce the waitlist. However, as of June 2016, the Department was still determining what specific steps it needs to take in order to facilitate an increase in capacity among its service providers.

2.5 In addition to its initial staff training, the Department should develop and implement continual training on TDMs for all relevant department staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and TDM facilitators to ensure that department staff are consistently and appropriately using TDMs. The continual training should reemphasize the core purpose of TDMs as a collaborative process to reach critical decisions regarding child safety, placement, and services.

Implementation in process

In February 2016, the Department established an advanced training academy for caseworkers who oversee ongoing cases, which includes advanced training related to TDMs. The Department also provides TDM facilitators with initial training related to their roles in TDMs. In addition, based on a review of department documentation, the Department is in the early stages of developing training for supervisors which will reemphasize the core purpose of TDMs. However, as of June 2016, these trainings were not scheduled or designed to ensure that department staff would receive these trainings on a continual basis.

2.6 The Department should ensure that caseworkers and supervisors receive sufficient training related to assessing child safety and risk by:

- a. Developing and implementing a plan that ensures new staff have access to mentors and are able to complete all of their training requirements, including those mentoring and coaching requirements indicated as part of field training, prior to conducting safety and risk assessments unsupervised;

Not implemented

The Department's training plan for new staff has not been substantively modified since the audit, when auditors found that some staff may not have received the required shadowing and mentoring opportunities. In addition, this plan allows new staff to conduct safety and risk assessments unaccompanied prior to completing all of their initial staff training requirements.

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

- b. Augmenting its training curriculum for supervisors by incorporating a field training component to allow for mentoring and shadowing opportunities for new supervisors regarding child safety and risk assessment;
- c. Developing training on the new safety and risk assessment tool, once it is developed and implemented, to ensure that the tool is used correctly and consistently across the State; and
- d. Ensuring that all relevant staff, such as caseworkers and supervisors, receive the new or revised training.

Not implemented

The Department has not yet augmented its training curriculum for supervisors to allow for mentoring and shadowing opportunities regarding child safety and risk assessment.

Not yet applicable

The Department has not completed the development of a modified child safety and risk assessment tool, and therefore has not yet developed training on the modified tool (see explanation for Recommendation 2.2).

Not yet applicable

See explanation for Recommendation 2.6c