



Supreme Court

STATE OF ARIZONA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Scott Bales
Chief Justice

David K. Byers
Administrative Director
of the Courts

September 2, 2015

Ms. Debbie Davenport, Auditor General
Office of the Auditor General
2910 N. 44th Street, Ste. 410
Phoenix, AZ 85018

Dear Ms. Davenport,

Attached you will find the Foster Care Review Board's response to the Auditor General's Final Report of the Foster Care Review Board's Sunset Audit.

The FCRB acknowledges additional effort is needed to recruit more volunteers to participate in the important foster care review process, to increase DCS caseworker participation in reviews, and to ensure all reports are distributed to the court within the 30-day timeframe prescribed in statute. As you are aware the FCRB, and the entire child welfare system, has faced unprecedented growth in the number of children in out-of-home care over the last few years and unfortunately, we anticipate a continued upward trend in caseload growth. Despite these challenges, we are proud to have continued fulfilling our statutory role with minimal impact on scheduling review hearings and distributing reports to the juvenile court in a timely manner. Of course, it should be noted that such efforts were often quite difficult to achieve with a reduced budget and existing staff resources. The workload demand left little time for other important program activities, such as those mentioned in the audit report (i.e. board member recruitment and tracking and monitoring report distribution timeframes). Nevertheless, we understand the importance of these activities and have already begun several efforts to address the recommendations presented in this report.

We would like to thank the auditors for their thorough job in learning the FCRB process and understanding the complexities and challenges we face in fulfilling our role within the child welfare system.

Sincerely,

Dave Byers
Administrative Director of the Courts

CC: Caroline Lutt-Owens, Director, DCSD

Attachment

**FCRB Response to: *A Performance Audit and Sunset Review
of the Arizona Foster Care Review Board***

Finding 1: FCRB should evaluate and enhance its board member recruitment strategies

Recommendations:

- 1. The FCRB should evaluate the adequacy of its current recruitment strategies and identify and implement new recruitment strategies, as needed, such as continuing to partner with other child welfare stakeholders to recruit board members.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Due to the unprecedented growth in the number of children in the foster care system, the need for more volunteers has increased rapidly and the Foster Care Review Board staff has assigned staff to assist in recruitment efforts when they are not covering boards or preparing reports. The Foster Care Review Board will continue to review strategies to determine the most effective and efficient way of recruiting new board members.

- 2. FCRB staff should better support recruiting efforts by providing more administrative support for the State Board's Outreach Committee.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

The State Board, and its committees, was recently restructured and the role and specific duties of state board members were better defined and outlined. The restructuring has allowed the Outreach Committee to start anew with many new members who have a shared interest in recruiting activities. Staff is an integral part of the committee and their assistance is vital to its functioning. While FCRB staff has been unable to make the administrative support of the Outreach Committee its highest priority due to the number of case reviews, the FCRB will assess the necessary administrative resources to the Outreach Committee in order to meet its goals.

Finding 2: FCRB should ensure that all reports are submitted to the juvenile court in a timely manner

Recommendations:

- 1. The FCRB's Phoenix office should ensure that it distributes its review reports to the court in a timely manner by developing and implementing a method for tracking and monitoring its report distribution timeliness, as is done in the Tucson office.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

The significant growth in the number of children in foster care coupled with staffing changes has made it difficult for the Phoenix office to maintain a tracking system that fully provides management with the necessary information to more proactively monitor the extent to which FCRB reports are being distributed within the 30-day timeframe. The FCRB agrees that the report tracking methods used in the Tucson office should be evaluated further to determine the feasibility of applying those techniques in the Phoenix office. However, due to the higher volume of case reviews handled in the Phoenix office, it may require a different approach than the methods used in the Tucson office.

Finding 3: FCRB should continue working with DCS to improve caseworker attendance at board reviews

Recommendations:

1. **To improve the value of review reports to the juvenile court, the FCRB should continue to collaborate with the DCS to assess the reason that caseworkers do not attend board reviews and develop and implement strategies to improve caseworker attendance.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

2. **If the FCRB's collaboration with the DCS does not produce effective strategies for improving caseworker attendance, the FCRB should consider, in consultation with the DCS, whether to pursue changes in legislation that would require DCS caseworker attendance at board reviews.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

Finding 4: FCRB should resume providing child welfare system recommendations and program metrics to stakeholders.

Recommendations:

1. **The FCRB should develop and implement a process for making recommendations for improving Arizona's child welfare system, and for reporting key program metrics, to provide stakeholders a broad and independent review of the DCS's permanency efforts.**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

Sunset Factor Analysis:

Recommendations:

1. **The FCRB should continue to collaborate with the Arizona Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts' IT department to develop and implement a secure, online system for distributing case information (see Sunset Factor 2, page 21).**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

2. **The FCRB should develop and implement policies and procedures for better tracking and monitoring board members' completed training hours to ensure board members are staying current on child welfare issues and practices (see Sunset Factor 2, pages 21 through 22).**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

3. **FCRB Management should take a more active role in overseeing the work performed by the State Board and its committees, such as following up on previously identified action items, to ensure the State Board and its committees effectively perform their duties (see Sunset Factor 2, page, 23).**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

The State Board, and its committees, was recently restructured and the role and specific duties of state board members were better defined and outlined. The restructuring has allowed the Board and committees to start anew with new goals. Staff is an integral part of the State Board and its committees and their assistance is vital to their functioning. While FCRB staff has been unable to make the administrative support of the Outreach Committee its highest priority due to the number of case reviews, the FCRB will assess the necessary administrative resources to the Outreach Committee in order to meet its goals.

4. **The FCRB should continue to assess the State Board's size and consider pursuing statutory changes to reduce its size, as appropriate (see Sunset Factor 2, page 23).**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented

- 5. The FCRB should ensure that the information on its Website is complete and up-to-date (see Sunset Factor 3, page 23).**

The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented