

# **State of Arizona Office of the Auditor General**

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

**SUPREME COURT'S  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS**

**DIVISION OF  
DEPENDENT CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES**



**Report to the Arizona Legislature  
By Douglas R. Norton  
Auditor General  
February 1997  
Report No. 97-3**



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February 3, 1997

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Fife Symington, Governor

Mr. David K. Byers, Administrative Director  
Administrative Office of the Courts

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, A Performance Audit of the Supreme Court's Administrative Office of the Courts, Division of Dependent Children's Services. This report is in response to a May 29, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. The performance audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) A.R.S. §41-2958.

The report addresses the Court Appointed Special Advocate, Parent Assistance, and Confidential Intermediary Programs. The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program needs to recruit more volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused or neglected children involved in dependency proceedings. Only 18 percent of the dependent children statewide are currently assigned a CASA. In addition, Program funding needs improvement. While CASA volunteers are supervised by county staff, the State pays for county staff salaries as well as travel and equipment. However, funding for county programs is inequitable. Further, the unpredictable nature of the Program's funding source, unclaimed lottery winnings, makes budgeting and planning difficult. Finally, the report notes that the Division could do more to identify the true impact of the CASA Program by establishing specific goals and objectives and collecting the necessary data.

The Parent Assistance Program, which provides a telephone hotline for parents involved with the Child Protective Services' process, is costly and duplicative. The hotline provides general information similar to that given to parents by CPS workers but, unlike CPS workers, cannot provide information about specific cases. Moreover, the cost averages \$99 per call. This service should either be provided by CPS or contracted out to a private provider at a much lower cost. The report also finds the Confidential Intermediary Program, which trains and certifies individuals to serve as intermediaries to help adoptees and their birth parents find each other, could reduce staff.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in the report.

This report will be released to the public on February 4, 1997.

Sincerely,

Douglas R. Norton  
Auditor General

Enclosure

# SUMMARY

The Office of the Auditor General has conducted a performance audit of the Supreme Court's Administrative Office of the Courts, Division of Dependent Children's Services. This audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §41-2958 and in response to a May 29, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

The Division of Dependent Children's Services, established within the Administrative Office of the Courts, administers programs designed to ensure dependent children's best interests are served by providing a system of information, advocacy, and review. The Division is comprised of four separate programs: 1) the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, which uses volunteers to advocate for the best interests of a child involved in dependency proceedings as a result of alleged abuse or neglect; 2) the Parent Assistance Program, which serves as an independent information resource to parents involved in dependency proceedings; 3) the Confidential Intermediary Program, which trains and certifies confidential intermediaries to make the search process between adoptees or adoptive parents and birth parents easier; and 4) the Foster Care Review Board, which uses local volunteer review boards to advise juvenile court judges by reviewing cases where children are placed out of home, and assessing their progress toward achieving permanent placement.

This report addresses three of the Division's four programs (Court Appointed Special Advocate, Parent Assistance, and Confidential Intermediary). The Foster Care Review Board was previously reviewed in 1995 (see Auditor General Report 95-3).

## **CASA Program Needs to Enhance Its Recruitment Efforts** **(See pages 7 through 10)**

Arizona law requires that in all dependency proceedings in which an allegation of abuse or neglect is made, a guardian shall be appointed to represent the best interests of the child(ren) involved. In Arizona, as well as across the nation, this need is most often filled by a volunteer who serves as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). Because these individuals are considered the backbone of the Program, heavy emphasis should be placed on volunteer recruitment.

Currently, only 18 percent of the dependent children statewide are assigned a CASA. Individual county programs vary in level of service provided, ranging from 10 percent to 100 percent of children being assigned a CASA. These individual counties' efforts to recruit

volunteers vary as much as the number of children they serve. Overall, county coordinators report that they

spend up to 50 percent of their time conducting recruiting activities. In addition, most coordinators do not have any type of recruitment plan or strategy in place to increase volunteer numbers.

The Division, recognizing the need to enhance recruitment, has recently established and filled a new position to assist county programs in their recruitment efforts. In addition, the Division has already developed a recruitment plan. As it implements its plan, the Division should focus efforts on recruiting volunteers from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds to represent the children it serves and to increase statewide public awareness of the Program.

### **Administration of CASA Program Funding Needs Improvement (See pages 11 through 16)**

The Division should improve its administration of funding for the CASA Program. Currently, the Division pays for each county's program based on the number of volunteers providing services to dependent children. The amount of money each county's program receives is determined primarily by a formula of one and one-half program staff for every 50 volunteers. However, this formula is inconsistently applied, resulting in varying costs for similar services provided at the county level. For example, 1 county receives funding for 1.5 coordinators to supervise 31 volunteers, while another is funded a half-time coordinator for 32 volunteers. In addition to variations in the number of staff funded, inequities are also evident in coordinators' salaries and travel budgets between programs. By more consistently applying its formula and assessing needs for money at a statewide level, the Division could reallocate program monies to other program needs, such as volunteer recruitment.

A more consistent flow of revenues would also enhance the Division's ability to efficiently administer the Program. Currently, the Division relies on 30 percent of unclaimed lottery winnings to pay for the Program. Although the Legislature appropriates monies based on projected unclaimed lottery prize monies, the actual amount the Division receives is based on receipts from the Lottery and recently has not equaled the initial appropriation. However, the CASA Fund has a \$1 million restricted fund balance. Legislative approval to use this balance to cover unexpected shortfalls in revenue would provide the Program with a more predictable flow of income. This, in turn, would enable the Division to better budget and plan for program expenditures.

## **Impact of the CASA Program Is Unknown (See pages 17 through 21)**

The true impact of Arizona's CASA Program is currently unknown. Many of the Program's activities are performed in conjunction with, and are similar to, the activities of other participants in the dependency process, such as caseworkers, the Foster Care Review Board, and foster parents. Similar to the child protective caseworker, the CASA volunteer attempts to obtain needed services for a child, participate in case plans, and attend court hearings.

Research assessing the CASA volunteers' overall impact has been limited. Although there is a general perception that CASA volunteers have a positive impact, this perception is primarily based on opinion surveys rather than quantifiable data demonstrating program outcomes. Arizona's ability to determine CASA volunteers' impact is limited by unclear program goals. Program staff at both the state and county levels have difficulty agreeing on specific goals for the Program, without which it is difficult to distinguish and measure the CASA volunteers' role apart from others in the dependency process.

## **Parent Assistance Program Services Are Costly and Duplicative (See pages 23 through 26)**

The Legislature should consider closing the Parent Assistance Program, allowing its services to be provided either by the Department of Economic Security (DES), or an outside organization. The Program was initially established within the Administrative Office of the Courts because of the perceived need for an information source independent of DES' Child Protective Services (CPS) Unit. Currently, the Program consists of a telephone hotline, which informs parents and guardians of their legal rights; the court process; and available community resources. However, the hotline provides only generic information and does not provide parents with information about their specific cases. Further, during the 15 hours each day that the hotline operates, the Program's part-time operators currently spend less than 1 hour on parent assistance-related calls, with the remaining time spent on unrelated calls and clerical tasks. Therefore, because the service is rarely used, the resulting cost per call is high, averaging \$99.

The State could continue to provide similar services at a much lower cost by either transferring the hotline's responsibilities to the Department of Economic Security, which already disseminates hotline-related information to parents, or contracting with a private provider. For example, the Community Information and Referral (CIR) provides 24-hour operator referral service for a minimal fee of \$10 to \$25 per call. Based on parent assistance

calls received in fiscal year 1996, the State could save up to \$150,000 per year by contracting for these services.

**Confidential Intermediary Program  
Can Be Administered More Efficiently  
(See pages 27 through 29)**

While the Confidential Intermediary Program provides a useful service, low demand for it suggests the need to reduce staff dedicated to this area. The Legislature created the Program in 1992 to allow confidential intermediaries access to court records, thus making it easier for adoptees and their birth parents to find each other. The Division is responsible for training and certifying individuals to become confidential intermediaries. Although implementing the Program may have required additional staffing, its current workload fails to justify 2.5 FTEs.

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# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Office of the Auditor General has conducted a performance audit of the Supreme Court's Administrative Office of the Courts, Division of Dependent Children's Services. This audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §41-2958 and in response to a May 29, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

## Division Overview

The Division of Dependent Children's Services, established within the Administrative Office of the Courts, administers programs designed to ensure the best interests of dependent children are served by providing a system of information, advocacy, and review. The Division is comprised of four separate programs: the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, the Parent Assistance Program, the Confidential Intermediary Program, and the Foster Care Review Board. As illustrated in Table 1 (see page 3), in fiscal year 1996, the Division received approximately \$3.4 million in state monies to administer these programs and funded approximately 66 state and county FTE positions to perform its various functions.

## Description of Division Programs

*Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program*—CASA was created as a volunteer program in 1987 to assist juvenile court judges in making determinations about dependency cases. Arizona law requires the appointment of a guardian to represent the best interests of children in all dependency cases that include allegations of abuse or neglect. While this guardian may be an attorney, it is most commonly a community volunteer known as a court appointed special advocate (CASA). Once assigned by the juvenile court judge, the CASA develops and maintains a relationship with the child serving as the child's advocate for the court. This advocacy role includes conducting an independent assessment of the case and advocating for needed services for the child(ren) and family, serving as a fact-finder for the court, and providing consistency in the child's life by acting as a trusted adult advocate for the child throughout court proceedings.

By statute, the Administrative Office of the Supreme Court is responsible for establishing a local CASA program in each county. The Division is the statewide program administrator that distributes monies and oversees the local CASA programs. Approximately 5 FTEs at

the state office provide training and monitoring functions, while another 24 FTE positions established in the county programs recruit and supervise qualified volunteers to advocate for children involved in dependency proceedings.<sup>1</sup> The number of children represented in each county is solely dependent on the number of volunteers each county can recruit and retain. Although statute requires that all children in dependency cases in which neglect or abuse are alleged be assigned an advocate, as of March 1996, this occurred in only 18 percent of such cases statewide.

The Program receives its revenues from 30 percent of unclaimed state lottery prize money, which is deposited monthly in the CASA Fund. The Legislature initially appropriates monies from the CASA Fund based on estimated unclaimed lottery prize monies for the entire fiscal year. However, the appropriation is adjusted as necessary to reflect actual receipt of lottery monies. The Division's expenditures cannot exceed the lesser of the Fund's receipts or its legislative appropriation.

***Parent Assistance Program***—The Parent Assistance Program was created in 1990 because of concerns that the Department of Economic Security's Child Protective Services unit was not providing sufficient information to parents involved in the dependency process. In 1991, the Division introduced a 24-hour statewide hotline and an office in Tucson to provide basic information to parents and other individuals. However, since these services were used considerably less than originally expected, within six months of its inception, the Division closed the Tucson office and reduced hotline coverage to 15 hours per day, with the balance of the day covered by a voice mail messaging service. Currently, the Program operates an information and education hotline from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., designed to:

- Inform parents/guardians of their legal rights, including the right to attend court or Foster Care Review Board hearings;

Direct parents/guardians to personnel who can provide information about the well-being of the child who has been removed from the home, and the community resources that are available; and

Advise parents/guardians of the process for requesting an attorney or a temporary custody hearing and the consequences of their failure to make such a request.

***Confidential Intermediary Program***—The Legislature established the Confidential Intermediary Program in 1992 to allow confidential intermediaries access to court records so that adoptees and birth parents could find each other more easily. The Division adopts

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<sup>1</sup> Although the State pays for CASA operations in each of the counties, coordinators are classified as county employees, and are hired and supervised by county personnel. In addition, Cochise, Coconino, Pima, and Pinal counties supplement the state portion of coordinator salaries and employee-related expenses.

rules and procedures necessary to implement the Program, including qualifications, training, standards of conduct for confidential intermediaries, and fees the intermediary may charge. The Division's staff trains and certifies confidential intermediaries, monitors cases, handles consumer inquiries about the Program, and, if necessary, provides assistance to confidential intermediaries.

**Table 1**

**Division of Dependent Children's Services  
Statement of Revenues, Expenditures,  
and Changes in Fund Balances  
Year Ended June 30, 1996  
(Unaudited)**

	<b>Court Appointed Special Advocate CASA Program</b>	<b>Parent Assistance Program</b>	<b>Confidential Intermediary Program</b>	<b>Foster Care Review Board</b>
<b>Revenue <sup>1</sup></b>				
General Fund		\$168,889		\$1,477,511
Lottery	\$1,360,707	35,000		144,200
Fees _____		<u>171,024</u>		
<b>Total</b>	<u>1,360,707</u>	<u>203,889</u>	<u>171,024</u>	<u>1,621,711</u>
<b>Expenditures</b>	<u>1,247,852</u>	<u>171,438</u>	<u>145,949</u>	<u>1,585,412</u>
<b>Excess of revenues over expenditures</b>	112,855	32,451	25,075	36,299
<b>Transfers in (out) <sup>2</sup></b>	16,749	(12,322)		(4,427)
<b>Reversion to General Fund</b>		(20,129)		(31,872)
<b>Restricted fund balance, beginning of year <sup>3</sup></b>	<u>1,010,791</u>		<u>93,348</u>	
<b>Restricted fund balance, end of year <sup>4</sup></b>	<u>\$1,140,395</u>		<u>\$118,423</u>	
<b>FTEs</b>	29	5	2.5	29

<sup>1</sup> The Legislature appropriated \$1,452,900 and \$155,694 for the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Confidential Intermediary Programs, respectively. However, the amounts received are dependent on actual unclaimed lottery winnings and actual revenue from designated fees, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Return of unused automation project monies.

- <sup>3</sup> The CASA Fund's beginning fund balance has been reduced by \$179,200 for a one-time quasi-external transaction of \$35,000 to the Parent Assistance Program and \$144,200 to the Foster Care Review Board for automation projects that provided new databases.
- <sup>4</sup> Although program fund balances are carried forward to the next fiscal year, they cannot be budgeted or used without special legislative action.

Source: The Uniform Statewide Accounting System reports for the year ended June 30, 1996.

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The Program is paid for through monies received from a \$30 surcharge on adoption filing fees and a \$1 surcharge on copies of birth certificates that are deposited into the Confidential Intermediary Fund.

*Foster Care Review Board*—Established in 1978, the Foster Care Review Board's primary role is to advise the juvenile court by reviewing on a semiannual basis cases where children are placed out of home and assessing their progress toward achieving permanent placement. The Board performs this function by using local volunteer boards across the State. As of September 1996, there were 73 local review boards, comprised of 365 members, to review approximately 6,000 dependent children.

The Board's staff assists review boards by preparing cases for review, facilitating review hearings, preparing reports, and developing, coordinating, and facilitating board member training.

## **Audit Scope and Methodology**

This audit focuses on the Court Appointed Special Advocate, the Parent Assistance, and the Confidential Intermediary Programs and their overall effectiveness in fulfilling their respective functions and responsibilities. A review of the Foster Care Review Board was conducted in 1995 and is presented in Auditor General Report 95-3.

Our audit work on the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program sought to evaluate its impact on dependency cases and the Division's program oversight role. Specifically, to assess the Program's impact, we met with individuals in the following seven counties: Coconino, Gila, Maricopa, Pima, Pinal, Yavapai, and Yuma. In each of these counties, interviews were conducted with various individuals who are involved in dependency court proceedings, such as judges, caseworkers, attorneys, court administrators, coordinators and staff, and volunteers. We also reviewed literature and analyzed case materials and court records in an attempt to compare cases that involved CASA volunteers, and those that did not. In addition, to offer recommendations for improving the Program's financial management, statewide budget documents and financial records were analyzed for the past 4 fiscal years. Furthermore, coordinators in all 15 counties were surveyed to

assess the appropriateness of activities performed by both the state office and county programs.

To evaluate the continued need for the Parent Assistance Program, activity reports were reviewed and analyzed for the past three years to determine the amount of time operators spent performing mandated versus nonmandated activities. Additionally, other agencies responsible for providing similar services, such as the Department of Economic Security, Child Protective Services, and other nonprofit community groups, were contacted. Similar agencies in other states were also contacted to determine how comparable information is provided to the public.

Lastly, to provide recommendations for streamlining the Confidential Intermediary Program's administration, financial and program activity reports were reviewed for the past three fiscal years to evaluate the Program's oversight costs. In addition, adoption search literature, including the history, trends, and accessibility of adoption information, was reviewed. We also interviewed individuals who perform adoption searches with and without confidential intermediary certification and talked to agencies who provide similar services in other states.

Our report presents findings and recommendations in the following five areas:

- The need to increase volunteer recruitment efforts;
- The need to improve administration of CASA Program funding;
- The need to clarify CASA Program goals and increase monitoring of case outcomes to determine the Program's impact;
- The need to consider closing the Parent Assistance Program the Supreme Court currently operates; and
- The need to reduce staffing levels for the Confidential Intermediary Program.

The report also contains a section addressing the extent to which improvements and changes have occurred in the Foster Care Review Board's operations since our 1995 performance audit.

This audit was conducted in accordance with government auditing standards.

The Auditor General and staff express appreciation to the Administrative Director of the Courts, the Director and staff of the Dependent Children's Services Division, and the county coordinators for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit.

## **FINDING I**

### **CASA PROGRAM NEEDS TO ENHANCE ITS RECRUITMENT EFFORTS**

Enhanced recruitment efforts are needed at both the state and county level to increase the number of volunteers available to serve dependent children. Currently, there are only enough volunteers to serve 18 percent of all dependent children statewide. The Division of Dependent Children's Services should continue recent efforts to assist individual county programs in volunteer recruitment as well as provide statewide public awareness of the Program.

#### **Background**

Arizona law requires that in all dependency proceedings in which an allegation of abuse or neglect is made a guardian be appointed to represent the best interests of the child(ren) involved. In Arizona, as well as across the nation, this need is most often filled by a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), who volunteers his or her time to advocate for dependent children. The Program's success is dependent on the willingness of community volunteers to donate significant amounts of time to advocate for abused and neglected children on an individual basis. The number of children who receive such advocacy is based solely on the number of volunteers each county can recruit and retain. The National CASA Association (NCASAA) notes that recruiting is one of the Program's most important and visible jobs, and should be performed on an ongoing basis because volunteers are the backbone of the Program.

#### **CASA Program Serves Limited Number of Dependent Children**

Despite its statutory mandate to serve all dependent children, the CASA Program currently serves a limited number of dependent children statewide. As illustrated in Table 2 (see page 8), as of October 1996, county programs served anywhere from 10 to 100 percent of the State's approximately 6,000 dependent children, with a statewide average of 18 percent.

The number of children served to date in 1996 is no greater than the number in previous years. In fact, since fiscal year 1991, the Program has served no more than 20 percent of dependent children statewide. As a result, the statewide CASA Program is far from

meeting its statutory mandate to appoint a guardian to represent the best interests of children in all dependency proceedings alleging abuse or neglect.

**Table 2**

**Division of Dependent Children's Services  
Court Appointed Special Advocate Program  
Eligible Children Served  
at October 31, 1996  
(Unaudited)**

<b>County</b>	<b>Number of Eligible Children</b>	<b>Number of Children Served</b>	<b>Percentage of Children Served</b>
Apache	15	15	100
Cochise	154	75	49
Coconino	68	68	100
Gila	100	60	60
Graham	26	12	46
Greenlee	15	2	13
La Paz	7	7	100
Maricopa	3,538	350	10
Mohave	168	35	21
Navajo	52	52	100
Pima	1,397	249	18
Pinal	185	41	22
Santa Cruz	24	10	42
Yavapai	142	58	41
Yuma	<u>141</u>	<u>70</u>	50
<b>Total</b>	<u><u>6,032</u></u>	<u><u>1,104</u></u>	18

Source: Foster Care Review Board activity reports and data reported by county programs as provided by the Division of Dependent Children's Services.

The percentage of children in Arizona represented by a CASA volunteer is somewhat low compared to other state CASA programs serving children statewide. Arizona is one of only six states that provides statewide CASA coverage. Based on 1994 data NCASAA gathered for its 1995 program survey, the degree of coverage in those five other states ranged from 30 percent to 100 percent, in contrast to Arizona's 18 percent.



## **Enhanced Recruitment Needed to Increase Number of Volunteers**

The low number of CASA volunteers suggests that more emphasis should be placed on recruitment at both the county and state level. Although many of the county programs are involved in a wide variety of recruiting and public relations activities, the extent of the recruitment programs varies. A survey of county coordinators revealed that common recruitment methods include placing advertisements and articles in newspapers; public service announcements on the television and radio; speaking engagements with various groups and organizations; placing brochures and other written materials in local libraries, businesses, and government offices; and word of mouth. However, no county coordinators spend more than 50 percent of their time recruiting for volunteers. In fact, two coordinators indicated that they did not recruit at all. While one of these counties serves 100 percent of its dependency cases, the other county served only 21 percent as of October 31, 1996. Moreover, several of the county coordinators indicated that they had no recruitment plan or strategy in place to increase volunteer numbers. The amount of time coordinators can spend on recruiting is limited because many work only part-time.

The state administrative office recognizes the need for enhanced recruitment and recently established and filled a new position to assist in recruitment efforts and other Division projects. Specifically, this position provides ongoing support, information, and training to state and county staff regarding volunteer recruitment. Additionally, the Division employee has developed and is currently in the process of implementing a public relations plan, assisting county and state staff in carrying out the plan, and providing technical assistance to county coordinators in public relations, volunteer recruitment, and enhancing the Program's visibility in the community. Moreover, as part of its overall recruitment plan, the Division is focusing on recruitment of minority volunteers. This is an important recruitment plan element since the NCASAA recommends that the plan include targeted strategies to attract volunteers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and from a variety of age groups and socioeconomic levels. Currently, Arizona's CASA volunteers are primarily Anglo-American (88 percent) when less than 60 percent of the children in foster care are of this ethnic background. By comparison, while 24 percent of the children in foster care are Latino-American, only 6 percent of the volunteers represent this ethnic group.

In the course of implementing its plan, the Division should ensure that it strives to meet predetermined goals for its volunteer recruitment program. Specifically, the NCASAA recommends that recruitment plans are written and provide a clear outline of recruitment goals, how the Program intends to reach those goals, and a time frame in which the Program can expect to realistically achieve them. As noted earlier, most county programs currently do not have recruitment plans.

In addition, the Division should also focus some of its efforts on a statewide public awareness campaign. Like several of the administrative offices in other states, the Division

should be involved in making the public more aware of the Program by creating public service announcements for television, radio, and newspapers. In addition, to enhance recruitment efforts at the county level, the Division should provide technical assistance and training on effective recruitment methods and other public relations activities.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Division should continue its efforts to assist local programs in their recruitment efforts by:

- implementing a comprehensive recruitment plan;

- developing and conducting statewide public awareness campaigns; and

- providing technical assistance and training to county coordinators on effective recruiting methods.

2. The Division should ensure that its recruitment plan contains:

- A clear outline of its goals, how it intends to accomplish these goals, and a time frame in which it can realistically expect to achieve its goals;

- A strategy to target volunteers from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds; and

- An emphasis on increasing statewide public awareness of the Program.

## **FINDING II**

### **ADMINISTRATION OF CASA PROGRAM FUNDING NEEDS IMPROVEMENT**

The Division of Dependent Children's Services should improve its administration of funding for the CASA Program. By following the established funding formula, the Division could ensure that counties are equitably allocated funds based on the level of service each provides. In addition, a more consistent flow of revenues would enhance the Division's ability to plan for and budget program expenditures more efficiently.

#### **Background**

Each of Arizona's 15 counties maintains a CASA Program through state monies received by the Division of Dependent Children's Services. The Legislature appropriates to the CASA Program 30 percent of unclaimed state lottery prize money based on annual projections of lottery winnings. Actual program revenues are dependent upon actual receipts from unclaimed lottery monies, which are transferred to the CASA Fund on a monthly basis. The Division, in turn, approves the distribution of monies to the counties based on budget requests received prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. These state monies are used to pay for all aspects of the county programs, including program coordinators, secretarial support, office equipment and supplies, and travel. Often, county staff perform more than one function for the county, and are employed part-time for the CASA Program and part-time in some other capacity. Thus, only the portion of their time devoted to the CASA Program is funded by the State.

#### **Division Should Ensure That Monies Are Distributed Equitably and Consistently**

The Division should ensure that it distributes monies to county programs on an equitable and consistent basis. The Division generally does not follow its established formula when allocating program monies to counties. In addition, it inequitably allocates funding for coordinator salaries and in-state travel. As a result, the State's cost to provide CASA services varies significantly by county. A more uniform distribution of funds would ensure equitable funding of county programs and possibly save program dollars.

***Funding formula not followed***—Although the Division has established a formula to determine county funding needs, it generally does not follow the formula when allocating program monies. The current formula used by the Division is based on the number of volunteers providing services in each county. Specifically, the State pays for 1 program coordinator and 1 half-time support staff for every 50 volunteers. For example, based on the formula, if a county program has 13 volunteers, the Division should pay for a .25 FTE program coordinator position. However, the Division tends to allocate funds to county programs based on the amount requested in their annual budgets, rather than adhering to its established formula. Therefore, as illustrated in Table 3 (see page 13), in fiscal year 1996, positions are funded inequitably among counties. For example, Coconino County, with 32 volunteers, received funding for .5 FTE for its coordinator position, while Yuma County, with 31 volunteers, received funding for 1.5 FTE coordinator positions.

When compared to other states, the Division's formula for funding program staff is somewhat high. Several states contacted indicated that an acceptable ratio of volunteers to staff is 30 to 1. NCASAA also recommends that CASA programs maintain a volunteer/coordinator ratio of 30 to 1 as well. However, in some of the states with 30 to 1 ratios, program staff are required to perform activities that are not required of Arizona program staff, such as fund-raising, or are performed by Division staff, such as volunteer training. Therefore, the Division may want to take those factors into account if it reconsiders what ratio of volunteers to program staff it is willing to fund. However, whatever formula the Division decides on, it needs to ensure that it is consistently applied to all counties.

***Other funding inequities exist***—In addition to variations in program staff funding, other funding inequities were identified. For example, the classification of coordinator positions differs as well as the salaries they are paid. According to a Division official, the Division generally follows each county's salary scale when allocating funds for program personnel. Therefore, county staffs' annual salaries can vary significantly. For fiscal year 1996, coordinator salaries ranged from \$22,383 to \$36,984, based on full-time salary levels.

Similarly, monies distributed to county programs for in-state travel are not necessarily based on the level of service each county provides. The Division provides training monies to county programs so that county coordinators and newly recruited volunteers can attend a two-day orientation in Phoenix. The amount of travel money counties receive is intended to be directly related to the number of volunteers expected to attend training each fiscal year. However, county travel budgets do not necessarily correspond with the number of volunteers. For example, in fiscal year 1996, 1 small county that sent only 1 volunteer received \$10,338 for travel, while another county that sent 31 volunteers received \$7,908. Overall, travel budgets ranged from \$2,784 to \$10,338.

***Cost for CASA services varies***—Due to the inconsistent method by which county programs are funded, the cost to the State for CASA services varies significantly. As Table 3 (see page 13), illustrates, based on individual counties' overall budgets, the cost per child served in fiscal year 1996 ranged from approximately \$600 to nearly \$3,500.

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**Table 3**

**Division of Dependent Children's Services  
Court Appointed Special Advocate Program  
Comparison of County Staffing and Program Budgets  
Year Ended June 30, 1996  
(Unaudited)**

<b>County</b>	<b>Active Volunteers</b>	<b>Formula Coordinator Positions</b>	<b>Actual Coordinator Positions</b>	<b>State Appropri- ation</b>	<b>Cost Per Child <sup>1</sup></b>
Maricopa	120	2.40	4.00	\$227,954	\$ 674
Pima	77	1.54	3.00	151,714	646
Yavapai	36	.72	1.50	73,332	917
Coconino	42	.84	0.50	42,652	618
Yuma	29	.58	1.50	90,792	1,316
Cochise <sup>2</sup>	38	.76	1.00	41,829	615
Pinal <sup>2</sup>	29	.58	2.00	61,519	1,119
Gila	26	.52	1.00	41,991	763
Navajo	21	.42	1.00	47,538	767
Mohave	13	.26	0.50	38,803	1,141
Santa Cruz	5	.10	0.25	12,747	1,159
Apache	6	.12	0.25	31,843	2,654
Graham	7	.14	0.50	21,325	1,254
La Paz	6	.12	0.20	9,991	1,249
Greenlee	<u>2</u>	<u>.04</u>	<u>0.25</u>	<u>10,418</u>	3,473
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>457</u></b>	<b><u>9.14</u></b>	<b><u>17.45</u></b>	<b><u>\$904,448</u></b>	

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<sup>1</sup> Cost per child excludes the Division's administrative budget and county contributions.

<sup>2</sup> County pays for one full-time position.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of fiscal year 1996 data as reported in the fiscal year 1997 county programs' budget request forms and information provided by the Division of Dependent Children's Services.

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While the Division is made aware of county expenditures and volunteer numbers through quarterly reports, to date, it has not reduced funding levels to more appropriately match

the actual number of volunteers providing services. Although a minimum number or portion of a coordinator position may be needed in each county, several counties receive funding for coordinator positions that exceed the amount allowed by the formula. Additionally, while the Division realizes there are funding inequities in some areas, it has not invoked its authority to standardize budgets. For example, it has been reluctant to standardize funding for county staff because it is concerned that some counties might discontinue their programs if they do not receive the requested amounts.

*Uniform distribution of funds could allow reallocation of program dollars*—By adhering to an established funding formula, the Division would not only eliminate inequitable treatment of county programs, but could also allow some program dollars to be redirected to better achieve its goals. We estimate that if the Division were to fund county program staff based on its established formula, as much as \$314,000 in additional resources could be reallocated to program needs such as volunteer recruitment.<sup>1</sup> Even if the Division were to lower its formula to the 30-to-1 ratio, an additional \$91,000 in program dollars could be reallocated.

Additionally, beyond ensuring that it equitably funds coordinator positions, the Division should also reevaluate the salaries it pays county personnel, and possibly implement standard funding for these positions. Although the Division has concerns about the ramifications of standardizing salaries, it appears that counties may be willing to contribute toward salary costs to meet their desired staffing level for CASA services. Although it is not generally practiced statewide, some counties currently pay for coordinator salaries, and other counties pay for portions of coordinators' salaries above what the State funds.

### **More Consistent Flow of Revenues Would Enhance Efficient Program Administration**

In addition to ensuring more consistent distribution of available program dollars, a more consistent flow of revenues would enhance the Division's ability to efficiently administer the Program. Currently, it is difficult for both the Division and counties to effectively administer the Program because they do not know from one month to the next how much revenue they will receive. With proper controls, the CASA Fund balance could be used to provide a more consistent flow of revenues that would make it easier to plan and budget program expenditures.

*Inconsistent flow of revenues*—The Program's inconsistent revenue flow makes it difficult for the Division and the counties to effectively plan and budget program expenditures.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated savings include both coordinator positions and secretarial support.

While the Program was originally paid for through general fund appropriations, Department of Economic Security (DES) grants, and private contributions, the Division sought a funding source that would potentially increase revenues for the Program. In 1991, the CASA Program began receiving 30 percent of unclaimed lottery winnings as its primary source of revenue. As a result, revenues for the Program have increased from \$218,323 in 1988 to \$387,036 in 1990, and ultimately, to its \$1.4 million appropriation for fiscal year 1997.

While this revenue source substantially increased monies for the Program, its unpredictable nature creates budgeting difficulties at both the state and county level. Monies are appropriated at the beginning of each fiscal year based on estimated unclaimed lottery prize monies. However, the actual amount received may not equal the initial appropriation. According to a footnote to the Division's appropriation bill, the appropriation shall be adjusted as necessary to reflect actual final receipts credited to the CASA Fund. Actual revenues are received in monthly allotments, dependent on actual receipts from unclaimed lottery winnings. As a result, Division officials are often uncertain whether the money they have already approved for county programs and state administration will be sufficient to cover expenses. When such uncertainty occurs, budget adjustments late in the year are common, often resulting in program expenditures for items not originally included in the budget. For example, early in fiscal year 1996, the Division estimated a \$200,000 shortfall in lottery monies, and notified counties not to hire additional staff. Later in the year, when the Division learned the shortfall was not as high as originally expected, it instructed the counties to proceed with hiring. However, because the counties had accumulated significant savings from these staff vacancies, they were able to submit budget modification requests to purchase additional office furniture and equipment that had not originally been included in their budget.

In addition, to allow room for potential lottery shortfalls, the CASA Program administrator indicated that she feels compelled to retain additional program money within the Division's budget rather than allocating it to the counties. As a result, actual expenditures for the services provided by the Division can differ considerably from the original budgeted amounts. For example, while the administrative office budgeted over \$220,000 for various administrative costs (not including personnel), in fiscal year 1996, actual costs to administer the Program were only \$84,000.

*CASA Fund balance could stabilize revenue source*—More stabilized revenues would allow the Division to better manage its resource allocation to county programs. Because the Program is paid for based on the number of individuals who do not claim their lottery prize money, there is no guarantee that program revenues will remain constant from year to year. However, the CASA Fund currently has a \$1 million restricted fund balance that could cover unexpected shortfalls in revenues. This balance is the result of either unclaimed lottery receipts being greater than allocated amounts, or unused monies reverted to the Fund at fiscal year-end. However, the Program's appropriation does not take into account the existence of this Fund balance. Instead, as noted previously, the appropriation is automatically reduced if actual revenues are lower than appropriations.

According to Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) staff, with legislative approval, it would be possible for the Division to use its fund balance to cover budget shortages. The Legislature could appropriate a specific sum to be allocated on a monthly basis for program operations. If actual receipts from unclaimed lottery winnings are greater than allocated amounts, the excess monies would carry over into the Fund balance. However, if actual receipts are less than the allocated amounts, the difference could be made up by monies in the Fund balance. While JLBC staff have voiced concerns that allowing full access to the balance could deplete the Fund, partial access with legislative approval could be allowed.

In fact, monies from the Fund have been used on occasion to pay for certain other Division programs or projects. For example, in fiscal year 1995, a total of \$86,900 was used for the Foster Care Review Board's administration and training, as well as training for the Parent Assistance Hotline. Similarly, \$231,700 was transferred from the CASA Fund to the Foster Care Review Board in fiscal year 1996 to cover needs for additional automation. The ability to use the Fund in this manner would provide the Program with a more predictable flow of income, which, in turn, would enable the Division to better ensure that program dollars are expended in the manner for which they were originally intended.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Division should consistently adhere to its established funding formula to more equitably pay for county CASA programs.
2. The Division should consider establishing standard funding for county program staff to eliminate the wide disparity in funding levels.
3. The Division should use the additional monies from county and administrative savings to implement measures to increase volunteer numbers statewide.
4. The Division should work in conjunction with the Joint Legislative Budget Committee to devise a method to use the CASA Fund's restricted fund balance to provide a more consistent flow of revenues for the Program.



## **FINDING III**

### **IMPACT OF THE CASA PROGRAM IS UNKNOWN**

The true impact of Arizona's CASA Program is currently unknown. Nationally, CASA programs are perceived to have a positive impact; however, most research in this area is unable to provide any empirical evidence regarding the Program's effectiveness. Arizona's ability to determine the Program's impact is limited by unclear program goals and a lack of data. Therefore, the Division needs to establish specific program goals and objectives, and perform ongoing monitoring to effectively evaluate the Program's impact.

#### **Background**

The CASA program was established as a volunteer program to assist juvenile court judges in making determinations about dependency cases. Once assigned by the juvenile court judge, the CASA develops and maintains a relationship with the child serving as the eyes and ears of the court. For the most part, volunteers perform their activities in conjunction with other components of the dependency process. They meet with foster parents and family members, attend foster care review board and court hearings, participate in and evaluate case management plans, and submit written court reports containing assessments and recommendations. Although the volunteer is considered to be the only individual advocating strictly for the child, many similar activities are performed by other participants in the dependency process. For example, child protective caseworkers also attempt to obtain needed services for the child, participate in case plans, attend court hearings, etc.

While volunteers provide their services for free, the Program's annual statewide appropriation is over \$1.4 million. In Arizona, statute requires that all dependency cases that include allegations of abuse or neglect be assigned an advocate; however, as previously mentioned, only 18 percent of the State's dependent children are currently represented by a CASA volunteer. Based on the fiscal year 1996 statewide program expenditures, the average annual cost to provide a volunteer advocate for each child is approximately \$1,100. Therefore, determining program effectiveness is important to ensure these costs are warranted.

## **Perceived Positive Impact Not Based on Empirical Evidence**

Research assessing the overall impact and effectiveness of CASA volunteers has been limited. Although there is a general perception that they have a positive impact, this perception is not grounded in empirical evidence. Studies that attempted to measure program outcomes that did not have flawed methodologies could not be located. Most studies reporting positive impact rely heavily upon anecdotes and opinion surveys of those most closely involved in dependency cases, such as judges, court officers, and caseworkers. Overall, these individuals support CASA programs and approve of the volunteers' various roles and overall performances. Specifically, their perceptions suggest that CASA volunteers:

- Increase the information available to judges, thus helping the court make difficult placement decisions;
- Perform greater and more intense case monitoring activities because they have more time available than social workers;
- Enable CASA cases to proceed more quickly through the dependency system than non-CASA cases; and
- Request an increased number of quality services for their cases and facilitate permanent placements more quickly than happens in non-CASA cases.

Although most of these studies acknowledge that such outcomes were not demonstrated empirically, conclusions are based on a consensus among those questioned. Additionally, our own preliminary review of Arizona's Program revealed a positive perception of its effectiveness. We interviewed numerous individuals involved in the Program, including judges, DES caseworkers, lawyers, program coordinators, and volunteers. The comments these individuals provided mirrored many of the conclusions cited in previous studies. Although participants perceive that CASA volunteers add value to dependency proceedings, there is no data to evaluate or confirm this.

However, there is one study currently underway that is considered the most comprehensive and quantifiable to date. Researchers at the University of Kansas have been collecting data over a two-year period comparing the types of services received by children assigned a CASA and children that do not have CASA representation. The study, expected to be completed by December 1996, will examine such CASA impact issues as length of the dependency process, number and type of services recommended and received, and permanency outcomes.

## **Lack of Clear Goals Inhibit Determination of Impact**

Arizona's ability to determine the CASA Program's impact is limited by unclear program goals. Specifically, neither the Program's short- nor long-term goals are clear. Therefore, the Division needs to take steps to specify program goals and objectives at both the state and county program level.

*Program's goals unclear at both state and county levels*— The Program's overall desired goals are unclear in its statutes as well as among the state and county staff responsible for implementation. According to statute, a CASA is required to gather and provide independent information for the court, provide advocacy to ensure appropriate case planning and services are provided, and perform other duties as prescribed by the Supreme Court. Beyond these general responsibilities, the statutes do not explicitly provide guidance to either the state administrative office or the county programs as to what the Program's overall intent is. In fact, while the Program's mission is designed to advocate for the best interest of children, there are varying opinions of favorable outcomes or measures of success. For example, though some agree that shortening the length of time children are in foster care is desirable, nowhere is it indicated that it is the CASA volunteer's responsibility to expedite the dependency court process. Furthermore, program staff were generally reluctant to consider the length of time in care as a measure of the Program's effectiveness, since shortening the process could be detrimental when additional services for the child are needed and can be more readily attained by keeping the child under the State's custody. Without specific goals and objectives, it is difficult to distinguish the CASA volunteer's role from others in the dependency process.

*Division needs to establish specific program goals and objectives*—To help distinguish the CASA volunteer's short- and long-term role from others in the dependency process, the Division needs to establish more specific program goals and objectives. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASAA) strongly encourages programs to have written goals and objectives. While the Division has established goals as part of the State's strategic planning process, they are more focused on its administrative role in the Program. For example, the Division's goals are:

- To provide financial and technical assistance to local programs;
- To monitor program activities to ensure compliance with established Arizona statutes, Administrative Orders, and Juvenile Court Rules; and
- To recruit, train, and maintain an adequate number of volunteers to advocate for children involved in Juvenile Court proceedings.

While these goals may assist the Division in its administrative duties, they do not assist local programs in clarifying the role or activities expected of volunteers once they have

been recruited. Therefore, since the Division's goals may differ somewhat from county program goals, it is important that goals be established at each level. In addition, goals should be focused on the desired outcomes for children assigned to a volunteer. Specifically, while the Program might strive to serve a larger number of children, its goals should focus on outcome behaviors (i.e., the impact a CASA volunteer has on providing permanent placement for a child) rather than outputs (the number of dependency cases with an assigned volunteer).

## **More Information Needed to Assess Impact**

Once goals have been established, the Division should take steps to increase data collection and program monitoring to determine CASA volunteers' impact. Currently, there is minimal available data that can be used to assess a CASA volunteer's impact. Therefore, the Division needs to begin collecting necessary evaluation data and perform ongoing monitoring of case outcomes to determine the Program's impact.

*Minimal outcome data collected*—Currently, little outcome measure data is collected at either the state or county levels. Although the Division performs some limited monitoring, these efforts emphasize outputs rather than outcomes. For example, the Division tabulates the number of hours volunteered and miles driven by volunteers, as well as the number and type of contacts they make. While this information may describe the volunteers' activities in part, it does not provide information on what, if any, impact these activities ultimately have on the child now or in the future. Furthermore, only a few basic data elements are collected about the children, such as dates when volunteers are assigned and withdrawn; child's age, race, and gender; and original reason for placement.

Overall, the data that is necessary to determine CASA volunteers' impact is not readily available. The Program does not currently gather or tabulate information regarding length of time children are in foster care, number or type of foster care placements, number or type of services recommended or received, or the nature or change of case plans. While case plans, CASA reports, and foster care reviews contain much of this information, there is no consistent reporting format among them. The lack of data collection and reporting requirements made it difficult to reach definitive conclusions about the CASA Program's impact.

*Division needs to identify and begin gathering outcome data*—After it establishes overall program goals, the Division should identify and begin gathering data necessary to monitor progress toward meeting goals. According to the NCASAA, in addition to having written goals and objectives, a program should have measures for obtaining those goals and objectives, and a methodology for monitoring and evaluating progress. Therefore, Arizona's Program needs to increase data collection at both the state and county levels regarding outcome measures, such as information on the number of open cases, time in foster care, number or type of foster placements, or changes in case plans. As the

population served by the Program is a subgroup of those served by the Foster Care Review Board, the CASA Program could build upon the Board's newly created database to capture critical data needed to evaluate the Program's outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Division should identify any additional information needed to monitor and evaluate CASA volunteers that can be captured by the Board's database.

Once the data elements are in place, the Division may want to consider contracting for a study to evaluate the effects that volunteers have on both the process and outcome of dependency cases. However, before embarking on its own study, the Division should evaluate the research conducted at the University of Kansas to determine if it is applicable to Arizona's Program. Specifically, the Division should determine whether the structure and services provided by Kansas' CASA program are similar to Arizona's Program. If there are significant enough differences between the two programs, the Division could, at a minimum, use the Kansas study as a basis for designing a research methodology to assess the impact and cost-effectiveness of the Arizona Program. Results from a properly designed evaluation can help determine the appropriate program structure and necessary funding levels.

We estimate that such a study would require two to three years to complete and cost a minimum of \$120,000. To pay for the study, the Division could seek legislative approval to access the CASA Fund's \$1 million reserve balance. The Division has previously used these reserve monies to pay for various automation and training needs.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Division should implement an effective ongoing monitoring process to ensure the effective and efficient operation of its Program by:
  - Establishing specific goals and objectives;
  - Identifying necessary data to quantify the CASA's ability to meet the predetermined goals; and
  - Performing an analysis of its Board-automated system and determining what additional management information is important to capture so ongoing monitoring can be conducted.
2. The Division should consider seeking legislative approval to contract for a study that will determine the Program's impact. However, before doing this, the Division should review and evaluate the study conducted by the University of Kansas to determine its applicability to Arizona's program.

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<sup>1</sup> In late June 1996, using CASA reserve monies, the Division implemented a new automated system that captures primarily Foster Care Review Board information.

## FINDING IV

### PARENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SERVICES ARE COSTLY AND DUPLICATIVE

The Legislature should consider closing the Parent Assistance Program currently operated within the Supreme Court. Although intended to serve as an independent information resource to parents involved in the Child Protective Services (CPS) process, the Program's low use and high cost do not justify its continued existence. The State could continue to provide such services at a much lower cost by either transferring responsibilities to the Department of Economic Security or by contracting the services to an outside organization.

#### Background

The Legislature established the Parent Assistance Program in 1990 after special advocacy groups and other individuals voiced concerns to a joint legislative committee about the way CPS was removing children from their parents' homes. The Program was placed within the Administrative Office of the Supreme Court because of the perceived need for an informational source independent of CPS.

Initially, the Program was to provide information and assistance to parents through the establishment of a 24-hour telephone hotline and walk-in assistance offices. Within six months of the Program's inception, the assistance offices were closed due to budget reductions and low use. However, hotline operators continue to provide information and assist parents and guardians in understanding the judicial and CPS process. Specifically, statute requires the Program to provide parents or guardians with basic information about the child dependency process, such as:

- Their legal rights, including the right to attend court or Foster Care Review Board hearings;
- Personnel who can provide information on the well-being of the child removed from the home, and community resources that are available; and
- The process for requesting an attorney or a temporary custody hearing and the consequences of failing to make the request.

Although parents can call the hotline to obtain general information about the process, they cannot obtain information specific to their case, such as the location and well-being of their children.

## **Hotline Not Used and Costly**

Despite its intent to provide useful information to parents involved in the child dependency process, the hotline is not justified as an independent information and referral service. Originally established as a 24-hour service, the hotline has been reduced to 15 hours a day because it is used so little. Moreover, the cost to provide such services is high, averaging approximately \$99 per call.

*Hotline services not being used*—Since its inception, hotline use has been limited. Due to low use, the hotline operator availability to parents was reduced after just six months of operation from a 24-hour service to 15 hours a day.<sup>1</sup> Even with these reduced hours, only a small portion of the operators' time is actually spent answering calls related to the Program's original intent. During fiscal year 1996, hotline operators spent, on average, 7 percent (approximately 1 hour in a 15-hour workday) of their time on parent assistance-related calls. The remaining 14 hours, or 93 percent of the operators' time, was spent on activities other than answering parent assistance-related calls. Specifically, hotline operators fielded calls for the Confidential Intermediary and Court Appointed Special Advocate Programs; however, even when combining the calls received for other programs within the Division, the amount of time that hotline operators answer calls still takes up only about 11 percent of their time. Therefore, they are also given various other tasks to perform for the Division, such as stuffing envelopes and preparing mailings; editing articles for the CASA newsletter; compiling information for new Foster Care Review Board cases; and performing other general office tasks as assigned.

*Program services costly*—Due to the small portion of time hotline operators spend on parent assistance calls, the cost to provide these services is high. In fiscal year 1996, the Parent Assistance Program expended \$171,438. During that period, hotline operators answered 1,736 parent assistance-related calls, averaging 13 minutes per call. This translates into a cost to the State of approximately \$99 per call. This cost is similar to the fiscal year 1995 cost of \$101 per call, when 1,671 parent assistance calls were received, with both years representing a significant cost for information and referral services.

## **Services Available through Other Sources**

The State can continue to provide similar parent assistance services at a much lower cost. CPS already disseminates hotline-related information to parents and, as is done in other states, could become the primary source for this information. Alternatively, if the Legislature determines that a separate information source is needed, it could consider

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<sup>1</sup> The hotline currently operates between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., seven days a week.

contracting with an outside organization to provide the same service for a substantially lower cost.

*Child Protective Services (CPS) already informs parents*—The Department of Economic Security's CPS unit can and does provide information identical to what the hotline operators give to parents. When a child is initially removed from a home, CPS caseworkers provide parents with brochures containing the same information disseminated by hotline operators. Furthermore, parents are provided with a temporary custody notice that lists both the caseworker's and supervisor's phone numbers. As a result, these CPS representatives are able to provide case-specific information that is not currently available through hotline operators. In fact, if parents want to obtain information about their child's well-being, hotline operators refer them back to the CPS case worker or supervisor. In addition to the information parents can receive from CPS caseworkers, the Department of Economic Security's Client Advocate's Office is also available to provide information or assistance to parents. This Office provides a statewide toll-free number to explain procedures to parents, assess client needs, and initiate the problem-solving process.

Because the hotline provides only generic procedural information and duplicates information CPS has already provided, little harm would result if its services were discontinued. CPS is statutorily required to provide most of this information on the temporary custody notice, such as the reasons for temporary custody of the child, the parent's rights to a hearing and legal services, and other vital information. In addition, CPS appears to be providing parents with all of the mandated hotline information through brochures, even though it is not a statutory requirement. Furthermore, CPS' information dissemination procedures are comparable to those used in other states. We contacted 10 states to find out how they provide parents with hotline-related information and found that in all states surveyed, a CPS-equivalent entity is responsible for disseminating information to parents.

*Outside organizations could serve as independent resource at a lower cost*—If there is a continued desire for hotline services to be independent of CPS, outside organizations could meet this requirement at a much lower cost. For example, the Parent Support Center, a nonprofit organization primarily funded by a grant from Maricopa County, has a 24-hour hotline where volunteers provide similar parent assistance, such as information on available community and legal services. While this service is free to the general public, callers outside Maricopa County must pay a long-distance fee.

Alternatively, to ensure statewide access, the State could contract with an outside organization to provide hotline services and still save a significant amount of money. For example, Community Information and Referral (CIR), an organization operating since 1964, helps the public identify and contact appropriate state agencies or programs, and provides other 24-hour operator services for a minimal fee. These operators are trained in crisis intervention and are qualified to talk with highly emotional callers. In addition, the majority of operators are able to provide bilingual services. Despite the similarities in



services between CIR and the Parent Assistance Program, the cost per call through CIR is much lower. According to the executive director, the rate ranges from \$10 to \$25 per call. Therefore, based on the number of hotline-related calls received in fiscal year 1996, and a \$10 to \$25 per-call rate, the State could save approximately \$150,000 per year (nearly the entire cost of the Parent Assistance Program) if the hotline service was contracted out. Moreover, since the CIR is a 24-hour service, the State could again provide information services to parents 24 hours a day, rather than the current 15-hour-a-day service.

If the Legislature does choose to transfer parent assistance services to an outside organization, the Division could oversee the contract negotiations and provide program oversight.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Legislature should consider amending A.R.S. §8-546.09 to remove the Parent Assistance Program from the Administrative Office of the Supreme Court, and consider options to continue to provide information to parents by either:

Clarifying CPS' statutory mandate, requiring CPS to continue distributing information pamphlets to clients; or

Transferring assistance responsibilities to an outside information resource and referral service.

## FINDING V

### CONFIDENTIAL INTERMEDIARY PROGRAM CAN BE ADMINISTERED MORE EFFICIENTLY

The Division of Dependent Children's Services should reduce the number of staff assigned to the Confidential Intermediary Program. While the Program provides a useful service, low demand indicates that fewer staff are needed for this area. By eliminating staff positions, the Division could reduce costs to consumers while still meeting the Program's mandate.

#### **Role of the Confidential Intermediary**

Prior to 1991, Arizona law prohibited the release of confidential adoption information without a court order, even in those instances where adoptees and birth parents wanted to find each other. In 1992, following the recommendations of a Joint Legislative Study Committee on Confidential Adoption Information, the Legislature established the Confidential Intermediary Program within the Arizona Supreme Court. The Program's purpose is to train and certify individuals to access confidential court records to facilitate contact between adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents who consent to the release of their identity. In Arizona, while no laws prohibit individuals from conducting their own adoption searches, confidentiality laws prevent direct access to identifying information contained in sealed adoption records. Therefore, individuals desiring to make contact with a birth parent or receive current information about their case require the services of someone who can legally access records and search for and contact the party being sought.<sup>1</sup> As a result, confidential intermediaries provide an important search alternative to those who may have limited information, skills, or time to conduct an adoption search on their own.

To date, certified confidential intermediaries have resolved 471 search cases. On average, adoption searches are completed in approximately four months, and cost clients approximately \$190 for search fees and associated costs. However, due to the Program's large administrative budget and the low number of cases handled, the State has spent an average of \$978 to oversee each case resolved.

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<sup>1</sup> A confidential intermediary cannot share information with an individual requesting a search until written permission is given by the party being sought.

## **Limited Work for Current Program Staff**

Initial interest in the Confidential Intermediary Program has not been maintained over its existence. When the Division originally began its training program in fiscal year 1994, it certified 113 individuals as confidential intermediaries. However, since that time, the number has dropped to 61. According to Division officials, the decrease in the number of individuals maintaining certification is partly due to the difficulty of work involved in conducting searches. Some of those initially certified overestimated the demand for adoption searches, while others only wanted to search information, not to actively practice as intermediaries. Additionally, the confidential intermediary's limited role may have decreased use of the Program. Although new legislation now enables siblings separated by adoption to conduct searches through confidential intermediaries, those certified still cannot help more distant family members separated by adoption, or persons separated by other circumstances, such as foster care. Further, in most cases, confidential intermediaries can access court records only in Arizona, which limits their services.

At this time, it does not appear that significant numbers of new confidential intermediaries will be certified in the near future. According to Division officials, the current level of intermediaries fulfills the current need for services. In fact, ten of those currently certified have not yet handled a case. Furthermore, a poll of Superior Court clerks indicates that the overall number of requests for information from county adoption files has not increased and may have decreased since the Program was implemented. Therefore, the Program does not actively recruit new confidential intermediaries.

## **Program Reduction Warranted**

Due to its current workload size, the Division should reduce the Confidential Intermediary Program's staff by 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) position. Although program implementation may have required extra employees, as demonstrated earlier, the Program's current workload fails to justify current staff levels. The number of staff assigned to the Program has remained constant since 1993, when the Division initiated its training and certification program. Currently, the Division allocates 2.5 FTE to administer the Program. Staff positions include a program supervisor (1.0 FTE), a secretary (1.0 FTE), and a program specialist (0.5 FTE).

By reducing program staffing, fees currently charged to support the Program could be lowered. Currently, a \$1 surcharge on certified copies of birth certificates comprises approximately 70 percent of program revenues, supplemented by a \$30 surcharge on adoption filings.<sup>1</sup> The Program also receives revenues from confidential intermediaries in

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Health Services' Office of Vital Records collects \$9 for certified copies of birth certificates and \$6 for certified computer-generated birth records. Of each of those fees, \$1 is used to pay for the

the form of training and certification fees, plus a fee for opening a search case. While these fees help offset program costs, surcharges charged to the public primarily pay for administrative expenditures. However, fees and surcharges assessed to support the Program have generated over \$118,000 in excess revenues, further suggesting the need for reduced fees. Therefore, to more closely align program revenues and expenditures, the birth certificate surcharge fees should be reduced. Alternatively, the adoption surcharge could be reduced or eliminated. However, this would impact far fewer consumers than a decrease in the birth certificate surcharge. For example, in fiscal year 1995, 1,536 individuals filed adoption petitions, while over 100,000 individuals requested copies of birth certificates.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Legislature should consider reducing the fees charged to the public to support the Confidential Intermediary Program by either:
  - Reducing the birth certificate surcharge; or
  - Reducing or eliminating the adoption surcharge.
2. The Division should reduce the Confidential Intermediary Program's staff by one FTE position.

## OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION

During the course of the audit, we compiled information on the extent of improvements and/or changes that have occurred in the Foster Care Review Board's (FCRB) operations since our 1995 performance audit (Auditor General Report 95-3).

### Update on 1995 Performance Audit Recommendations

Our audit of the FCRB in 1995 provided findings and recommendations in three areas: 1) the need for foster care reviews to more directly address specific details as outlined in federal law, 2) the need to encourage increased board member attendance at case reviews, and 3) the need to improve workflow processes in order to eliminate costly inefficiencies and concentrate resources in the area of improving review quality and effectiveness. Since the audit, the FCRB has made several improvements to its operations that appear to address many of the concerns raised in the report. Specifically, it has:

- **Developed more structured case reviews** Our first finding suggested the FCRB can have a greater impact in facilitating permanent placement for foster children by restructuring its case review and reporting processes. We concluded that FCRB reports had little impact because they did not convey firm positions on the cases reviewed. According to federal law, review boards are required to determine in each review: 1) necessity and appropriateness of placement, 2) case plan compliance, 3) progress toward mitigating the need for foster care, and 4) a likely date by which the child may be returned home or placed for adoption. However, FCRB reports did not specifically conclude on these four key aspects of a case's progress.

Therefore, several recommendations were made to ensure that each review received these considerations. First, it was recommended that FCRB further develop its case review procedures to specifically address the four determinations outlined in federal law. In addition, FCRB was recommended to revise its case review report to ensure that all information central to each child's case is included so that courts can make the most appropriate decisions for the child. Moreover, an increased role for program staff was recommended to ensure that questions central to case progress are addressed, as well as additional training for board members on what constitutes a complete and appropriate review.

**Update** FCRB has developed a new report format with a new section to address and make determinations in specific areas pursuant to federal and state law. During its

development, program staff reviewed both federal and state law as well as surveyed juvenile court judges to obtain feedback on what they wanted included in FCRB reports. The resulting report format contains 11 yes/no findings that boards must analyze and answer during each review. This report format is similar to those used by other states contacted during the audit.

In addition, FCRB has provided extensive training to existing board members across the State regarding the new report format. Additionally, it revised its guidebook for board members and staff to use as a tool in preparing for and conducting case reviews. The guidebook provides board members with a listing of specific elements that should be considered when making each of the 11 findings and determinations. In addition, aspects of the federal law have been incorporated into orientation training for new volunteers as well as ongoing training sessions for current board members.

Further, program staff have received some training in the areas of facilitation, mediation, and conflict resolution in response to our recommendation to increase the program specialist's role as a facilitator in foster care reviews.

- **Authority to appoint alternate members** Our second finding addressed the need to ensure that each review is attended by enough board members to provide for a productive review. FCRB statutes and rules require that each local review board consist of 3 or 5 members and that a majority of those members must be in attendance for a review to occur. However, we identified instances of reviews that were held with less than a quorum. Specifically, 12 boards conducted reviews in 1994 with fewer than 3 members. This translated to over 130 cases (out of a total of 5,790 cases reviewed that year) that were reviewed with only 2 members present. Without a quorum of members in attendance, the FCRB cannot ensure quality reviews with credible recommendations based on a full board's decision, rather than just the opinions of 1 or 2 members. Therefore, to increase or encourage greater attendance, it was recommended that the Legislature amend FCRB's statutes to allow the use of alternate board members.

**Update** The Legislature passed a bill in the 1996 legislative session that allows presiding juvenile court judges the opportunity to appoint one alternate to a local review board if deemed necessary. Therefore, alternate board members can fill in for absent board members on short notice, thus allowing the local board to complete its reviews with a full quorum of members in attendance.

- **Streamlined Case Processing** Our third finding reported that due to the increasing number and complexity of foster care cases, the FCRB needed to develop a comprehensive case processing strategy to prepare for future growth. At the time of the audit, the Program was experiencing a substantial increase in caseload size and as a result was having difficulty meeting its mandates. Specifically, some reports were not

being sent to judges within the mandated 30 days prior to review and some cases were in jeopardy of not being reviewed within the six-month time frame required by both federal and state law. While the Legislature had approved two additional positions, it was questionable whether such additions would have a long-term impact on the Program's caseload, since there was an apparent upward trend in caseload growth.

To prepare for the expected continued growth, it was recommended that FCRB update its work processes by providing its program specialists with laptop computers. While the Division was in the process of developing a computer automation project, much of the case processing at that time relied heavily on the use of clerical staff to perform word processing activities for the program specialists. Therefore, the introduction of laptop computers was considered an important interim measure to enable program specialists to do their own word processing. Additionally, since streamlined work processes may not have been enough to address caseload growth, it was recommended that FCRB consider alternative review methods, such as paper or expedited reviews. It was also suggested that FCRB may possibly need to consider eliminating certain reviews from its calendar.

**Update** The Division has purchased laptop computers for its program staff and upgraded computer equipment for its clerical staff. According to its officials, this additional equipment has streamlined the process and report processing backlogs are no longer a problem. Moreover, it hired four additional program specialists to assist in handling the current caseload as well as focus on board member training and recruitment, and two temporary support staff to help eliminate report processing backlogs.

In addition, the Division was working on an automated system that was estimated to be operating by June 1996. According to Division officials, the system went on line in late June 1996, but it will take about six months to a year before the system's full benefits are realized. Specifically, additional data elements have been incorporated into the database that will enable the program to track findings and assessments made during foster care reviews. This type of information will, in the long term, assist the Board in identifying trends in foster care cases and make recommendations for improving the foster care system as a whole.

## **Agency Response**





# Supreme Court

STATE OF ARIZONA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Thomas A. Zlaket  
Chief Justice

David K. Byers  
Administrative Director  
of the Courts

January 27, 1997

Douglas R. Norton  
Auditor General  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44th Street Suite 410  
Phoenix, AZ 85018


Dear Mr. Norton:

Enclosed you will find our response to your second draft of the performance audit completed on the Dependent Children's Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

We understand that these comments will be included in the text of the published report.

Again, we thank your staff for the professionalism demonstrated throughout the course of this audit and appreciate some of the helpful suggestions made in this audit report.

Sincerely,

  
David K. Byers  
Administrative Director  
Administrative Office of the Courts

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Enc.

cc: Mary Lou Quintana, Director, Dependent Children's Services Division  
Linda Castañeda, Program Manager, Court Appointed Special Advocate and Parent Assistance Programs

# **Dependent Children's Services Division Response to Auditor's Report**

## **FINDING I**

### **CASA PROGRAM NEEDS TO ENHANCE ITS RECRUITMENT EFFORTS**

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Division should continue its efforts to assist local programs in their recruitments by:
  - developing a comprehensive recruitment plan;
  - developing and conducting statewide public awareness campaigns; and
  - providing technical assistance and training to county coordinators on effective recruiting methods.
2. The Division should ensure that its recruitment plan contains:
  - A clear outline of its goals, how it intends to accomplish these goals, and a time frame in which it can realistically expect to achieve its goals;
  - A strategy to target volunteers from diverse cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds; and
  - An emphasis on increasing statewide public awareness of the Program.

#### **CASA RESPONSE**

1. The Arizona CASA Program agrees with this recommendation. The Program filled the volunteer recruiter position on 8/5/96. The recruiter is assisting local programs with their recruitment efforts.

A recruitment plan was developed and is currently being implemented.

Since 8/96, the recruiter has visited ten counties and has conducted individual recruitment

training with county coordinators. Additional county visits are scheduled in the near future. Feature stories on CASA and public service announcements have been pitched to several statewide publications. Efforts are being made to increase the airing of statewide radio public service announcements. Research into the cost and subsequent cost-effectiveness of producing a television public service announcement will be completed by FY 98.

All counties have been provided a county-specific, volunteers needed press release. Flyers, adapted from the National CASA Association's (NCASAA) Safe Permanent Home and Go to Bat for a Child recruitment campaigns, were redesigned to meet county-specific needs and were disseminated to county coordinators. A recruitment kit was distributed to all counties. Public relations materials, aimed at generating new volunteers, will be produced and distributed on an ongoing basis.

2. Since successful recruitment directly results in program growth, it is imperative that a competent system, designed to handle evolving development, is concurrently planned. Our goal of recruitment is intrinsically linked to developing a service system capable of handling the demands of a growing program. Anticipating a successful recruitment effort, the Arizona CASA program will require an increase in FTE coordinator and support staff positions. Our program growth will require a budget increase in order to successfully meet the volunteer/staff ratio of thirty-to-one and to fund additional administrative resources needed for growth.

The CASA Program has established a goal of increasing our volunteer base by 12% in FY1998, 13% in FY1999 and 14% in FY2000. The ability to reach this goal is contingent on increased funding. Additionally we will make efforts to improve our retention rate, with a goal of no more than 29% attrition in FY1998, reducing to 28% attrition in FY1999, and 26% in FY2000. In addition to recruitment, efforts to improve retention will steadily and successfully increase volunteer involvement and help us serve more children in need.

**CASA VOLUNTEER PROJECTION FY97 FY2000**

	<b>FY97</b>	<b>FY98</b>	<b>FY99</b>	<b>FY2000</b>
Volunteers growth rate %	452 12%	505 12%	572 13%	651 14%
Newly trained	270	300	333	360
Total volunteers who served during year	722	805	905	1,011
Attrition # Attrition %	(217) 30%	(234) 29%	(253) 28%	(263) 26%
Projected year end # of Volunteers	505	572	651	748
FTE Coordinator Ratio 1 to 40	13	15	16	19
FTE Support Staff	6.5	7.5	8	9.5
Projected year end total children served*	1,869	2,116	2,409	2,768

Culturally diverse materials are being developed for all counties. A strong minority recruitment campaign has recently been implemented in Pima County and a plan for additional minority recruitment in Maricopa County is currently in development. Minority publications have been targeted. Flyers aimed at generating male volunteers were provided to county coordinators. Area newcomers in Yavapai, Maricopa, and Pima counties have been targeted with the help of Welcome Wagon International.

An emphasis on increasing statewide public awareness of the program is addressed in the second bullet of response to recommendation #1.

\* Based on 2.5 children served per volunteer plus an additional estimated 48% increase to account for

children served in cases that were closed during fiscal year.

## **FINDING II**

### **ADMINISTRATION OF CASA PROGRAM FUNDING NEEDS IMPROVEMENT**

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Division should consistently adhere to its established funding formula to more equitably pay for county CASA programs.
2. The Division should consider establishing standard funding for county program staff to eliminate the wide disparity in funding levels.
3. The Division should use the additional monies from county and administrative savings to implement measures to increase volunteer numbers statewide.
4. The Division should work in conjunction with the Joint Legislative Budget Committee to devise a method to use CASA reserve funds to provide a more consistent flow of revenues for the Program.

#### **CASA RESPONSE**

1. We support this recommendation and will more consistently adhere to an established funding formula. We are in the process of establishing a formula which would include a change, as discussed with the Auditor General's staff. During those discussions, it was agreed that a compromise, considering all variables, would be to change the current formula of 50 volunteers to 1 coordinator to 40 volunteers to 1 coordinator.

However, there will always be unique situations which will warrant special consideration in counties. Additionally, there are geographic considerations in counties such as Gila and Mohave that have distinctly different cities with populations that require additional staff and resources to meet the needs of the volunteers and the children they serve. The CASA program has a commitment to serve children from across the state of Arizona, and a child in Maricopa County, for example, does not have a greater need to be served than a child from Santa Cruz or La Paz counties. With this in mind, it is necessary to have a presence in all communities in realistic proportions which could be no less than .25 coordinator FTE.

We will more clearly define through policy the factors to be considered in the funding formula. This formula will be implemented by April 1997.

2. While we can, and will, put into place a mechanism that might promote parity, we believe that we will never completely eliminate the disparity in program staff salaries. The standardization of the program staff job description and classification will be achieved by April 1997. However, we will not be able to standardize the funding of the staff's salaries as counties each have their own hiring and compensation plans over which we have no control.
3. We support this recommendation and the program's budget will be modified.
4. The Division agrees with the recommendation to work with the Joint Legislative Budget Committee to utilize the CASA reserve funds to stabilize the flow of revenues to allow for more effective management of the program fund.

### **FINDING III**

#### **IMPACT OF THE CASA PROGRAM IS UNKNOWN**

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Division should implement an effective ongoing monitoring process to ensure the effective and efficient operation of its Program by:
  - Establishing specific goals and objectives;
  - Identifying necessary data to quantify the CASA's ability to meet the predetermined goals;  
and
  - Performing an analysis of its Board-automated system and determining what additional management information to capture so ongoing monitoring can be conducted.
2. The Division should consider seeking legislative approval to contract for a study that will determine the Program's impact. However, before doing this, the Division should review and evaluate the study conducted by the University of Kansas to determine its applicability to Arizona's program.

#### **CASA RESPONSE**

1. It has been the desire of the CASA program to measure outcomes for the children served by the volunteers. With the assistance of the National CASA Association (NCASAA) and the recently released draft of the Kansas study, we believe that we will be able to collect outcome and process information.

We plan to identify four to five goals that measure the impact the volunteer has on the case outcome.

We will utilize information from NCASAA, the Kansas study, and the Arizona Court Improvement Project<sup>1</sup> findings to assist in the quantification of data.

We will evaluate our automated database system and determine what information presently collected could be beneficial to the process of evaluating and quantifying data to assist in establishing goals and monitoring local programs.

2. We agree with the recommendation for a program study. We have already received a draft of the Kansas study in order to commence the implementation of this recommendation. Division staff will assess the Kansas study to determine its applicability to the Arizona CASA Program. If it is determined to be sufficiently applicable, we will develop program goals and outcome measures based on that study. If it is determined not to be applicable to the Arizona CASA Program, we will seek legislative approval for funds to conduct our own study in Arizona.

## **FINDING IV**

### **PARENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SERVICES ARE COSTLY AND DUPLICATIVE**

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Legislature should consider amending A.R.S. 8-546.09 to remove the Parent Assistance Program from the Administrative Office of the Supreme Court, and consider options to continue to provide information to parents by either:

Clarifying CPS' statutory mandate, requiring CPS to continue options to continue distributing information pamphlets to clients; or

Transferring assistance responsibilities to an outside information resource and referral service.

#### **PAPH RESPONSE**

1. The Parent Assistance Program hotline (PAPH) was established following joint legislative committee hearings about CPS in Arizona. Testimony was provided by community leaders, professionals, and parents about the strengths and weaknesses of CPS. This program was not established at the request of the courts.

<sup>1</sup>National Center for Juvenile Justice, *Arizona Court Improvement Project Report*, December 1996.

Since few clients actually visited the office in Tucson or called between the hours of 11:00 P.M. to 8:00 A.M. during the initial six months of the program, the program closed the Tucson office and reduced staff coverage. This was done in response to the request of the legislature for exappropriations. In the subsequent five years, the program has been consistent in providing mandated services to parents and families throughout Arizona.

The program has served as an information source, independent of the Arizona Department of Economic Security, in order to provide information about juvenile court procedures, CPS, and related issues. The legislative intent was to help parents and guardians understand the process of removal of a child from the home.

Since its inception in 1990, the program has made some significant changes in an effort to utilize this resource while not sacrificing the mandated function of providing unbiased and impartial assistance to those most affected by the actions of the state's child protective services agency.

We don't disagree that the volume of calls to the hotline for the statutorily-mandated purpose is low. In considering the termination of this program, we call your attention to the following:

The legislature wanted an independent, neutral source of information; not from the same source responsible for the removal of children.

In order to maximize the utilization of the hotline, additional court responsibilities have been assigned to it, benefitting numerous other programs. The following functions are currently undertaken by the hotline:

- serves as the recruitment number provided for volunteer recruitment for the CASA and Foster Care Review Board programs;
- serves as the recruitment and informational hotline for the Confidential Intermediary Program (CIP);
- serves as the line to manage questions on the forms and usage of the QuickCourt<sup>2</sup> kiosks;
- serves as the intake service in the Arizona Courts Building for TDD calls for the hearing impaired.

We have begun to explore options recommended by the Auditor General to subcontract with an organization such as Community Information and Referral (CIR). At such time as issues on this report are heard we will be prepared to provide cost comparison information on the use of CIR as an option. Because the functions assigned to the hotline go beyond the scope of responding to phone calls, we believe additional research is required in order to assure a more comprehensive comparison.

<sup>2</sup>QuickCourt is an interactive multimedia computer system that uses text, graphics, and an on-screen narrator to provide information and legal documents for use in court cases.



The auditor's recommendations contained in this report affecting the reduction of funds for the CIP and the improvement of the efficient administration of the CASA program are in direct conflict with the recommendation to terminate the Parent Assistance hotline. If the hotline is terminated, additional staff may be required by each of these two programs to compensate for the loss of this resource.

Perhaps a better avenue would be to allow the courts to utilize the hotline for the dissemination of a broader spectrum of information.

Once a program is established it is often more cost effective to build on the existing model rather than creating a new program. The costs of the program have remained relatively constant since the second year of its existence. Maximizing its availability to any person in Arizona who is in need of such assistance should continue to decrease the per call cost while fulfilling the requirements established in the original legislation and its subsequent modifications.

We would suggest that the legislature expand the hotline's duties to provide information about other program activities and to process inquiries about the courts' domestic violence proceedings and services.

We encourage the legislature to carefully consider the termination of this service.

## **FINDING V**

### **CONFIDENTIAL INTERMEDIARY PROGRAM CAN BE ADMINISTERED MORE EFFICIENTLY**

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Legislature should consider reducing the fees charged to the public to support the Confidential Intermediary Program by either:
  - Reducing the birth certificate surcharge; or
  - Reducing or eliminating the adoption surcharge.
2. The Division should reduce the Confidential Intermediary Program's staff by one FTE position.

#### **CIP RESPONSE**

1. We are not in support of the fee reduction being suggested by the Auditor General. The AOC is in support of HB 2023 which has been introduced this legislative session which requests that funds derived from these two surcharges be allowed to be used to fund a portion of the Private Fiduciary Program. Requirements for a program to register individuals serving as private fiduciaries were established pursuant to A.R.S. Section 14-5651 in 1994. However, funding for this function has never been provided.
2. Based on the current program activity, the AOC would support a reduction in program staff. We do note, however, that while the numbers of CI's may have decreased, the number of cases (search requests) have increased 12% from 1994 to 1996.

The Maricopa County CI's have undertaken a project to better inform the public of the availability of this search service. Different methods of disseminating information will be explored, including national newspaper ads and the Internet. These efforts may result in an increase in search activity. Two local television stations aired a reunion story on January 23, 1997 on the 10 o'clock news and resulted in 11 phone calls immediately following the story and 25 calls within three hours the morning of January 24.

If these public awareness efforts result in increased requests for CI services, we can not support efforts to reduce staff.