

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Information Provided to Local Foster Care Review Boards and State Ombudsman

30-Month Followup of Performance Audit Report 23-102

The July 2023 Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) performance audit was the first of 3 audits we published as part of the Department's sunset review.¹ This performance audit found that the Department did not provide some documents for local board case reviews because of Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and Department issues, and some caseworkers did not attend case reviews, impacting boards' ability to review children's cases; and Department provided State Ombudsman access to Guardian, with some exceptions. We made **9** recommendations to the Department.

Department's status in implementing **9** recommendations

Implementation status	Number of recommendations
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implemented in a different manner	2 recommendations
<input type="checkbox"/> In process	7 recommendations

¹ The second performance audit found that Department problems related to investigating, taking enforcement action against, and monitoring licensed out-of-home care providers could result in risky or unhealthy environments for children in out-of-home care. The third audit found that the Department has processes for key responsibilities, such as assessing child safety in response to abuse/neglect reports but did not consistently provide timely and quality court reports or ensure some licensed applicants met licensing requirements and has not fully implemented most recommendations from 6 prior special audits. For more information on these 2 performance audits we issued as part of the Department's sunset review, including any applicable followup reports, see [Report 23-113](#) and [Report 23-115](#).

This performance audit includes various recommendations for the Department to improve its provision of complete and accurate child case records to AOC in a timely manner. As noted in our July 2023 performance audit report, Laws 2023, Ch. 106, §§2 through 4, require the Department to provide AOC direct, remote access to the Department's case-management system, Guardian, in addition to any Department information that is necessary for the performance of the local boards' duties. Our review found that the Department has provided this access to AOC, which has improved AOC's access to child case records. For example, as discussed in recommendation 5, AOC reported that as of October 2025, all necessary AOC staff have access to Guardian, which has contributed to an improved and more streamlined process for obtaining documentation for local board reviews. We will conduct another followup with the Department in calendar year 2026 on the status of the recommendations that are in process and have not yet been fully implemented.

Recommendations to the Department

Finding 1: Department's automated information exchange did not provide some case documents to AOC because of various issues including Department and AOC actions, impacting local board's ability to review children's cases

1. The Department should ensure it provides court reports, case plans, Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting summaries, and other case documents, as applicable, to AOC on behalf of local boards, consistent with statute.
 - Status: **Implementation in process.**

As reported in our initial followup, the Department revised its policies and procedures to require Department staff to ensure case documents, such as court reports, case plans, and TDM meeting summaries, as applicable, are provided and available to AOC and local boards' members at least 2 weeks prior to scheduled local board hearings. Our review of a stratified random sample of 8 of 1,682 cases reviewed in July and August 2025 found that a court report and completed case plan, or other case documents as applicable, were provided and/or available at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled local board hearings for all 8 cases we reviewed.² However, 2 of the 8 court reports we reviewed were incomplete, impacting the local boards' ability to thoroughly review the case (see explanation for recommendation 3 for more information about incomplete court reports). We will further assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation during our next followup.

² Only 1 of 8 cases we reviewed included a TDM summary. For the remaining 7 cases, the Department reported that a TDM was not necessary and did not occur prior to the local board case review.

2. The Department should ensure Department supervisors hold and document monthly supervision meetings with caseworkers as required by Department policy.

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

Our review of Department scorecards and supervisory case reviews found that Department supervisors hold monthly supervision meetings with caseworkers in each region throughout the State, and the Department has established a goal of holding monthly supervision meetings for at least 95% of children's cases. Specifically, our review found that in fiscal year 2025, the Department met its goal of holding monthly supervision meetings with caseworkers for 95% of children's cases. However, as of September 2025, for fiscal year 2026, the Department has conducted monthly supervision meetings for only 90% of cases, and no region had yet achieved the 95% goal.³ According to the Department, it will continue to monitor the monthly supervision meetings to identify reasons why the meetings do not occur and believes it is on target to meet the 95% goal for the remainder of fiscal year 2026. To ensure that the Department continues to hold and document monthly supervision meetings with caseworkers, we will further assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation during our next followup.

3. The Department should revise and implement policies and procedures to require caseworkers to store court reports in Guardian and supervisors to verify that caseworkers have completed court reports in Guardian, when applicable.

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

As reported in our initial followup, the Department revised its policies in March 2024 to require caseworkers to complete, sign, and store all court reports in Guardian, as well as for supervisors to review and sign all completed court reports in Guardian. Our review of a stratified random sample of 8 local board cases reviewed in July and August 2025 found that all 8 cases had an associated court report in Guardian. However, as explained in recommendation 1, 2 of 8 court reports were incomplete and missing information on child and adult functioning as well as Department recommendations. Additionally, contrary to Department policy, 6 of 8 court reports did not indicate that a supervisor reviewed and signed the reports, including the 2 incomplete court reports. We will further assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation during our next followup.

4. The Department should develop and implement guidance for what corrective actions supervisors should take in response to caseworkers' noncompliance with Department policies, such as failing to maintain case documents in Guardian as required by Department policy or not complying with the local board case review attendance policy.

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

The Department has developed and implemented guidance for corrective actions supervisors should take in response to caseworkers' noncompliance with Department

³ For purposes of providing and managing child welfare services in the State, the Department has created 5 regions that each include various Arizona counties.

policies, such as failing to maintain case documents in Guardian or noncompliance with the local board case review attendance policy. According to its guidance, supervisors may take informal actions, such as verbal counseling or written communication to address minor misconduct or performance deficiencies. Conversely, supervisors may take more formal action to address major or repetitive misconduct or performance deficiencies, such as a letter of reprimand, suspension, involuntary demotion, or dismissal from employment.

The Department reported recording 23 instances between February 2024 and September 2025 of caseworkers receiving some form of corrective action for Guardian case documentation concerns. Our review of a random sample of 2 of these incidents found that the Department followed its guidance in these 2 incidents. Specifically, consistent with the guidelines, a supervisor escalated an issue to the Department's Employee Relations unit after the staff member failed to meet the requirements of their performance improvement plan to correct issues with the sufficiency of documentation in Guardian. This staff member received a letter of reprimand and was later dismissed from employment for repetitive misconduct, consistent with the Department's guidance for formal actions. The second incident involved a staff member not completing case documents in a timely manner. A supervisor verbally counseled the staff member and followed up with an email outlining the discussion and expectations, consistent with the Department's guidance.

However, we could not assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation for instances of noncompliance with local board case review attendance policies. Specifically, the Department reported that as of October 2025, it had not recorded any corrective actions related to noncompliance with its local board case review attendance policy (see recommendation 7 for additional information about local board case review attendance). We will assess the Department's further implementation of its guidance for instances of staff failing to comply with local board case review attendance policy during our next followup.

5. The Department should continue to develop and implement its process to solicit feedback from AOC about automated information exchange issues, including by developing written procedures governing this process.

- Status: **Implemented in a different manner at 30 months.**

Based on our review of meeting invitations and as confirmed by both Department and AOC staff, the Department has continued to hold recurring, monthly meetings with AOC to solicit their feedback and provide updates related to processes for ensuring AOC staff are obtaining case documents for local board hearings. Both the Department and AOC reported that AOC has not communicated any issues regarding the automated information exchange, including any concerns regarding the availability of case documents through Guardian.

Additionally, as discussed in recommendation 1, the Department revised its policies and procedures to specify which documents caseworkers should provide to the local boards, including requiring caseworkers to store all case documents in Guardian.

Further, as discussed in recommendations 2 and 4, the Department established expectations for supervisors to meet with staff monthly to discuss compliance with Department policies and procedures for completing and storing court documents in Guardian and guidance for corrective actions supervisors should take to address noncompliance with Department policies. According to the Department, it does not plan to develop separate written procedures governing its process to solicit feedback from AOC but has scheduled a recurring monthly meeting with AOC to discuss any issues.

Finally, beginning in January 2024, in addition to the automated information exchange mentioned above, AOC staff received direct remote access to Guardian to obtain documentation related to local board case reviews, and AOC reported that as of October 2025, all necessary AOC staff have access to Guardian. According to AOC staff, direct remote access to Guardian along with the monthly meetings with the Department have contributed to an improved and more streamlined process for obtaining court reports, case plans, TDM meeting summaries, and other case documents, as applicable, for local board case reviews.

6. The Department should, based on feedback the Department receives from AOC, take steps to address any continuing or newly identified issues that result in documents not being provided through the automated information exchange, including but not limited to:
 - Developing and implementing additional policies and procedures.
 - Providing staff training.
 - Holding caseworkers accountable for following policy requirements for storing case documents in Guardian.
 - Developing processes for communicating to AOC why certain case documents are not provided through the automated information exchange.

► Status: **Implemented in a different manner at 30 months.**

See explanation for recommendation 5.

Finding 2: Some caseworkers did not comply with Department's local board case review attendance policy, preventing some local boards from conducting complete case reviews for children in out-of-home care

7. The Department should ensure caseworkers comply with Department policy requirements for local board case review attendance, including by developing and implementing policies and procedures for tracking caseworker attendance at local board case reviews.

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

As reported in our initial followup, the Department revised its policy in March 2024 requiring assigned Department staff to attend case reviews or notify the program

manager if they are unable to attend.⁴ Our review of local board case review attendance trackers provided by AOC for August 2025 found that caseworkers attended 84% of assigned case review meetings or submitted case updates prior to the case review meeting. This represents a 2% increase from what we found and reported in our July 2023 performance audit.

Specifically:

- 630 of 814 caseworkers attended local board case reviews, consistent with Department policies.
- 57 of 814 caseworkers did not attend local board case reviews but submitted written statements, consistent with Department policies.⁵
- 127 of 814 caseworkers did not attend local board case reviews and did not submit a written statement inconsistent with Department policies. According to the Department, caseworkers may not attend local board case reviews or submit written statements for various reasons, such as the need to respond to child safety issues related to a new report or an active case.

Finally, although the Department reported updating its process to allow caseworkers to input their attendance at local board case reviews directly into Guardian as of July 2025, it has not developed policies and procedures for this process. Despite lacking policies and procedures requiring caseworkers to document their attendance at local board case reviews in Guardian, the Department reported that it utilizes the attendance information in Guardian to compare and verify attendance with reports submitted by local boards. Our review of a stratified random sample of 6 of 1,682 local board reviews held in July and August 2025 found that caseworkers did not document attending 5 of 6 local case board reviews in Guardian. Without policies and procedures requiring caseworkers to document their attendance at local board case reviews in Guardian and for verifying this attendance, the Department may lack accurate and complete data regarding attendance, which can make it more difficult for the Department to hold its caseworkers accountable for doing so. We will further assess the Department's efforts to develop written policies for their established process in our next followup.

8. The Department should revise and implement its policy to require Department staff to provide case updates when they or their supervisor are unable to attend a case review, including time frames for doing so.

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

As reported in our initial followup, the Department revised its policy in March 2024 requiring assigned Department staff to attend case reviews or notify the program

⁴ The Department reported that it has not established any goals related to caseworker attendance at local board reviews but expects all caseworkers to comply with its local board review attendance policies. Specifically, Department policy requires case workers to attend local board meetings or arrange for their supervisor to attend in their place. If the case worker cannot attend, they may provide a written statement to the board regarding case updates.

⁵ Department policy requires staff to submit the statement to AOC at least 5 days prior to the scheduled hearing date; however, we were unable to assess staff compliance with this requirement because Department documentation did not include the date statements were submitted.

manager if they are unable to attend. In place of an assigned staff member's attendance, the program manager can approve the submission of a written statement or assign another staff member to attend the case review. If a written statement is approved for submission, Department staff are required to submit the statement to AOC at least 5 days prior to the scheduled hearing date.

However, Department staff are not fully complying with this policy. According to AOC's August 2025 attendance tracker, Department staff provided a statement prior to the local board case review for only 57 of 184 reviews, or approximately 31%, that AOC's attendance tracker showed Department staff did not attend. Additionally, we were unable to assess Department staff's compliance with the 5-day requirement for statements that were submitted because, as explained in footnote 5 on page 6, the Department does not document the date staff submit the statements to AOC. We will further assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation during our next followup.

- 9.** The Department should work with AOC to determine the information that should be included in updates caseworkers provide to AOC when caseworkers cannot attend case reviews and develop and implement written guidance for caseworkers to prepare these case updates

► Status: **Implementation in process.**

The Department has worked with AOC to identify the information that should be included in case updates caseworkers provide to AOC when they cannot attend case reviews. Specifically, in October 2025, the Department worked with AOC to finalize a written statement template with guidance to assist caseworkers in preparing case updates that include detailed responses addressing the child's placement history, behavior, and education and development; parental compliance with the child's case plan; and the child's permanency goals. According to the Department, it began requiring its caseworkers to implement the template starting in calendar year 2026. We will further assess the Department's implementation of this recommendation during our next followup.