

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Special Audit—Investigations of Reports Involving Child Welfare Agency (Group Home) Staff

Department's reported process for determining to remove group home staff's access to children while under investigation for child abuse does not fully address potential safety threats to children, and its lack of explicit statutory authority to place group home staff on the central registry for neglect risks that some neglect perpetrators continue working with children

Audit purpose

To review the Department's processes for initiating and conducting investigations of child abuse involving Department-licensed and contracted group home staff.¹

Key findings

- ▶ Effective September 2024, Laws 2024, Chapter 47, revised statute to authorize and require the Department to investigate reports of child abuse that include allegations of child abuse committed by staff who work in Department-licensed and contracted group homes, but it did not revise the statutory definition of neglect to include group home staff actions.
- ▶ Department's reported process of assessing child safety prior to determining to remove group home staff's access to children while under investigation for alleged child abuse did not fully address potential safety threats to children and risks to the investigative process for between 1.5 hours to up to 5 days for reports we reviewed.
- ▶ Because Laws 2024, Chapter 47, did not revise the statutory definition of neglect to include group home staff actions, the Department lacks explicit statutory authority to place group home staff on the central registry for child neglect, risking that some child neglect perpetrators could continue working with children.

Key recommendations to the Department

- ▶ Develop policies and procedures for making and documenting decisions to remove group home staff's access to children while under investigation for alleged child abuse.
- ▶ Consider pursuing statutory changes to clarify its authority to investigate reports of alleged child neglect by group home staff.

¹ The Arizona Auditor General conducted this special audit of the Department pursuant to a September 18, 2024, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.