

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Special Audit—Investigations of Reports of Criminal Conduct

Seven county attorney's offices had not updated criminal child abuse and neglect joint investigation protocols for more than 5 years, risking unresponsiveness to legal and other changes, and Department has opportunities to strengthen coordination with law enforcement agencies

Audit purpose

To review the Department's processes for initiating and conducting investigations of child abuse and neglect reports involving allegations of criminal conduct.¹

Key findings

- ▶ Statute requires county attorneys to work with law enforcement and the Department to establish criminal child abuse and neglect joint investigation protocols; however, 7 county attorney's offices had not updated their protocols for more than 5 years risking unresponsiveness to changes in law, resources, or child welfare investigation practices.
- ▶ Department's website had some outdated joint protocols, potentially hindering public understanding and transparency of investigation processes and responsibilities.
- ▶ Law enforcement agencies reported elements of effective coordination and opportunities for strengthening coordination with the Department for joint criminal investigations of child abuse and neglect, including through cross-training.
- ▶ Department did not always timely complete and/or properly document some key investigative activities and notifications for reports we reviewed.²

Key recommendations to the Department

- ▶ Periodically review joint investigation protocol sections related to the Department to identify and communicate needed changes to county attorney's offices.
- ▶ Identify and implement outreach activities aimed at further strengthening coordination with law enforcement agencies on joint investigations of criminal child abuse and neglect.

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.

² These findings were similar to our prior findings for the Department's noncriminal investigations—see Arizona Auditor General report 25-109 *Arizona Department of Child Safety—Investigations of Noncriminal Child Abuse and Neglect Reports*. Rather than making new recommendations, we will conduct work to assess the Department's correction of these issues for both noncriminal and criminal reports during subsequent followups on our September 2025 special audit.