



September 24, 2015

Ms. Debra K. Davenport  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, Arizona 85018

Re: Auditor General Report on Child Safety Assessment and Removal

Dear Ms. Davenport:

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide this response to the Auditor's General's report draft on Child Safety Assessment and Removal. The Department values the collaborative effort of the Auditor General's staff throughout this audit.

Enclosed is the Department's response to each individual recommendation. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback, we believe that the information in the Auditor General's report will be constructive in helping the Department to better serve the children of Arizona.

Sincerely,

Gregory McKay  
Director

Enclosure

cc: Shalom Jacobs, Deputy Director of Operations  
Katherine Guffey, Chief Quality Improvement Officer



**ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY'S RESPONSE  
TO THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT ON  
CHILD SAFETY ASSESSMENT AND REMOVAL**

The Department's response to the Auditor General's recommendations is described below:

**RECOMMENDATION 2.1:**

The Department should review the efforts that other jurisdictions have taken, including those agencies who participated in the BSC and Vermont's revised training program, to improve their child safety and risk assessment practices and determine whether similar actions would improve the Department's child safety and risk assessment practices.

**DCS Response:**

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

The Department recently formed a workgroup of field staff, subject matter experts, and community partners to recommend and implement methods that will increase workforce capacity to conduct high quality investigations and family assessments. These groups will review the efforts that other jurisdictions have taken, including jurisdictions that participated in the BSC and Vermont's revised training program.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.2:**

The Department should continue its efforts to modify or replace its safety and risk assessment tool and should ensure the new tool effectively facilitates and guides caseworker safety and risk assessments and decision-making through the use of a structured approach, standardizes information collected and reported by caseworkers, and results in useable data that the Department can analyze to assess its decision-making system and make informed changes for improvement. In developing a new safety and risk assessment tool, the Department should consider the following:

- Using automated and standardized checkboxes and/or prompts to ensure the appropriate level of detail, consistency, accuracy, and usefulness of safety and risk assessment data,

and supplementing these checkboxes and/or prompts with narrative fields within the tool as necessary for optional caseworker use;

- Bulleting out the specific risk factors, safety threats, and safety criteria within the tool to help guide caseworkers in decision-making by allowing them to go step-by-step through the assessment process and increase consistency in information gathering; and
- Including specific instructions and parameters within the tool itself on what type of information and level of detail is needed for areas where a narrative response would provide additional helpful information.

**DCS Response:**

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

As noted by the Auditor General and outlined in the Department's strategic plan, the Department is already modifying its safety and risk assessment tool in the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS, known as CHILDS in Arizona) so that it will include standardized checkboxes and prompts; the specific risk factors, safety threats, and safety criteria; and instructions.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.3**

The Department should develop and implement policies and procedures that would direct and guide an analysis of safety and risk assessment data to identify trends, assess the appropriateness and results of decisions, and then revise any relevant child safety and risk assessment processes and protocols accordingly.

**DCS Response:**

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

The Department will analyze trend and outcome data to inform the continuous improvement of safety and risk assessment processes and protocols after the safety and risk assessment tool in CHILDS has been revised to allow extraction of data. The Department currently evaluates trends and outcomes through the Department's qualitative case review process.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.4**

The Department should reduce the waitlists for in-home services in order to improve safety planning by analyzing the availability of funding for in-home services, assessing whether it has contracted with sufficient providers, and conducting a gap assessment to determine the level of

services available and the level of services still needed, and identifying available funding and/or resources to address this gap.

### **DCS Response**

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

The Department has been engaging with in-home service providers to identify service gaps and root causes for the current waitlist, and will continue to do so.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2.5**

In addition to its initial staff training, the Department should develop and implement continual training on TDMs for all relevant department staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and TDM facilitators to ensure that department staff are consistently and appropriately using TDMs. The continual training should reemphasize the core purpose of TDMs as a collaborative process to reach critical decisions regarding child safety, placement, and services.

### **DCS Response:**

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

The Department's Strategic Plan for State Fiscal Year 2016 includes tactics related to the expansion of Team Decision Making. Support for this expansion will include staff training.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2.6**

The Department should ensure that caseworkers and supervisors receive sufficient training related to assessing child safety and risk by:

- a. Developing and implementing a plan that ensures new staff have access to mentors and are able to complete all of their training requirements, including those mentoring and coaching requirements indicated as part of field training, prior to conducting safety and risk assessments unsupervised.
- b. Augmenting its training curriculum for supervisors by incorporating a field training component to allow for mentoring and shadowing opportunities for new supervisors regarding child safety and risk assessment;
- c. Developing training on the new safety and risk assessment tool, once it is developed and implemented, to ensure that the tool is used correctly and consistently across the State; and

- d. Ensuring that all relevant staff, such as caseworkers and supervisors, receive the new or revised training.

**DCS Response**

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

An advanced safety and risk assessment training will be developed as part of the Child Welfare Training Institute's advanced training curriculum. Staff will be enrolled in this training after they have been in the field for at least six months. In addition, the Department is developing supervision guides, including a guide for staffing with a supervisor and/or Assistant Program Manager when considering removal of a child. These guides are grounded in the Department's safety and risk assessment model. Initial implementation of these guides will include a coaching component.