

# Arizona Department of Child Safety Caseworker Caseload Reporting

Although the Department has various practices that can help ensure the reliability of the underlying data it uses to calculate caseloads for 3 public reports, its method for calculating caseloads results in less precise caseload numbers and increases the potential for reporting errors

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A Report to the Arizona Legislature

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Auditor General





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December 28, 2020

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor

Mr. Michael Faust, Director  
Arizona Department of Child Safety

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, *A Special Report of the Arizona Department of Child Safety—Caseworker Caseload Reporting*. This report is in response to Laws 2018, Ch. 282, §1, and was conducted under the authority vested in the Auditor General by Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1279.03. I am also transmitting within this report a copy of the Report Highlights to provide a quick summary for your convenience.

As outlined in its response, the Arizona Department of Child Safety agrees with the finding and plans to implement all the recommendations.

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

Sincerely,

Lindsey A. Perry, CPA, CFE  
Auditor General

## Arizona Department of Child Safety Caseworker Caseload Reporting

Although the Department has various practices that can help ensure the reliability of the underlying data it uses to calculate caseloads for 3 public reports, its method for calculating caseloads results in less precise caseload numbers and increases the potential for reporting errors

### Audit purpose

To assess the reliability of the data the Department uses to report caseloads.

### Key findings

- The Department reports caseloads in 3 public reports—the Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report, Monthly Operational and Outcome Report, and Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report.
- The Department primarily uses data from the State of Arizona Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and the Department's case management system (CHILDS) to obtain the information used to calculate the caseloads in these reports, including counts of filled full-time equivalent (FTE) case-carrying positions, open investigative reports, out-of-home children, and in-home children. In addition, Department regional staff provide counts of in-home cases used to calculate in-home caseloads for the Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report.
- The Department has various practices that can help ensure the reliability of data used in the caseload calculations.
- To calculate caseloads by casework type, the Department uses percentages to distribute the number of filled FTE positions by casework type rather than using the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type, which results in less precise caseloads and increases potential for reporting errors.
- The Department will use its new case management system, Guardian, to obtain the information for the caseload calculations that it currently obtains from CHILDS and regional staff.
- As of November 2020, the Department was in the process of developing and testing the queries that will generate this information from Guardian.

### Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Develop, implement, and document a more precise method for calculating caseloads that uses the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type.
- Complete its development and testing of the queries that will be used to obtain Guardian data for the publicly reported caseloads to help ensure their accuracy.



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This report addresses the reliability of the data the Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) uses to publicly report caseloads. This is the second of 2 reports that address the requirements of Laws 2018, Ch. 282, §1. The first report (Report 20-105) was published in July 2020 and addressed the Department's process for determining caseload standards and included a comparison of the Department's caseload standards with best practices and other states' caseload standards.

## Department is budgeted for 1,406 caseworkers assigned to investigative, out-of-home, in-home, or other specialized casework throughout the State

The Department's budget has included 1,406 DCS Specialist (caseworker) positions since fiscal year 2015, of which the Department reported 1,351 positions (approximately 96 percent) were filled as of August 2020. These positions are funded primarily by a combination of the State General Fund and various federal funds. For fiscal year 2020, the Department budgeted \$100,378,600 for caseworker positions, including salary, benefits, other operating expenses, and in-State travel.<sup>1</sup> According to the Department, it spent 99.6 percent of this budget.<sup>2</sup>

The Department assigns caseworkers to units—overseen by supervisors—that specialize in specific types of casework. Most caseworkers are assigned to units that work investigative, out-of-home, or in-home cases (see textbox).<sup>3</sup> Some caseworkers specialize in specific types of cases, such as adoptions, young

### Key terms for this report

**Caseload**—The number of individuals (usually counted as children) or cases a caseworker is responsible for, expressed as a ratio of individuals or cases to caseworkers.

**Workload**—The amount of work required to successfully manage a case and bring it to resolution based on the responsibilities assigned to complete a specific task or set of tasks for which the caseworker is responsible.

**Investigative cases**—Investigative cases comprise reports of alleged child abuse or neglect. Investigative caseworkers investigate allegations and complete assessments to determine any needed interventions for the family. Caseloads are reported as the average number of open investigative reports per investigative caseworker.

**Out-of-home cases**—Out-of-home cases involve children in Department care who have been removed from their homes and placed with a relative, in foster care, or in congregate care. Caseworkers provide services to the children and families to assess, monitor, and evaluate progress toward permanency. Caseloads are reported as the average number of children in out-of-home care per caseworker.

**In-home cases**—In-home cases involve children who either were never removed from or have been reunified with their families. Caseworkers provide services to strengthen families' capacity to safely maintain children in the home. Caseloads are reported as the average number of either in-home children or cases per caseworker, depending on the report.

Source: Auditor General staff review of definitions from the Child Welfare League of America, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, and Department policy documents and reports, and observations of Department staff.

<sup>1</sup> The Department was appropriated \$105,428,600 for caseworker positions in fiscal year 2020 but received Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) approval to move \$5,050,000 of its expenditure authority to support other line items in the Department's budget, resulting in the caseworker budget of \$100,378,600. The fiscal year 2020 appropriation included an increase of \$5,436,000 over fiscal year 2019's appropriation to pay for salary increases.

<sup>2</sup> The Department reported that it assumes vacancies when requesting an annual budget for the caseworker positions and that its annual appropriation would be insufficient if all caseworker positions were filled and all caseworkers earned the maximum salary for the position. For example, the Department estimated it would need nearly \$114,000,000 in fiscal year 2021 to pay for the caseworker positions in this scenario.

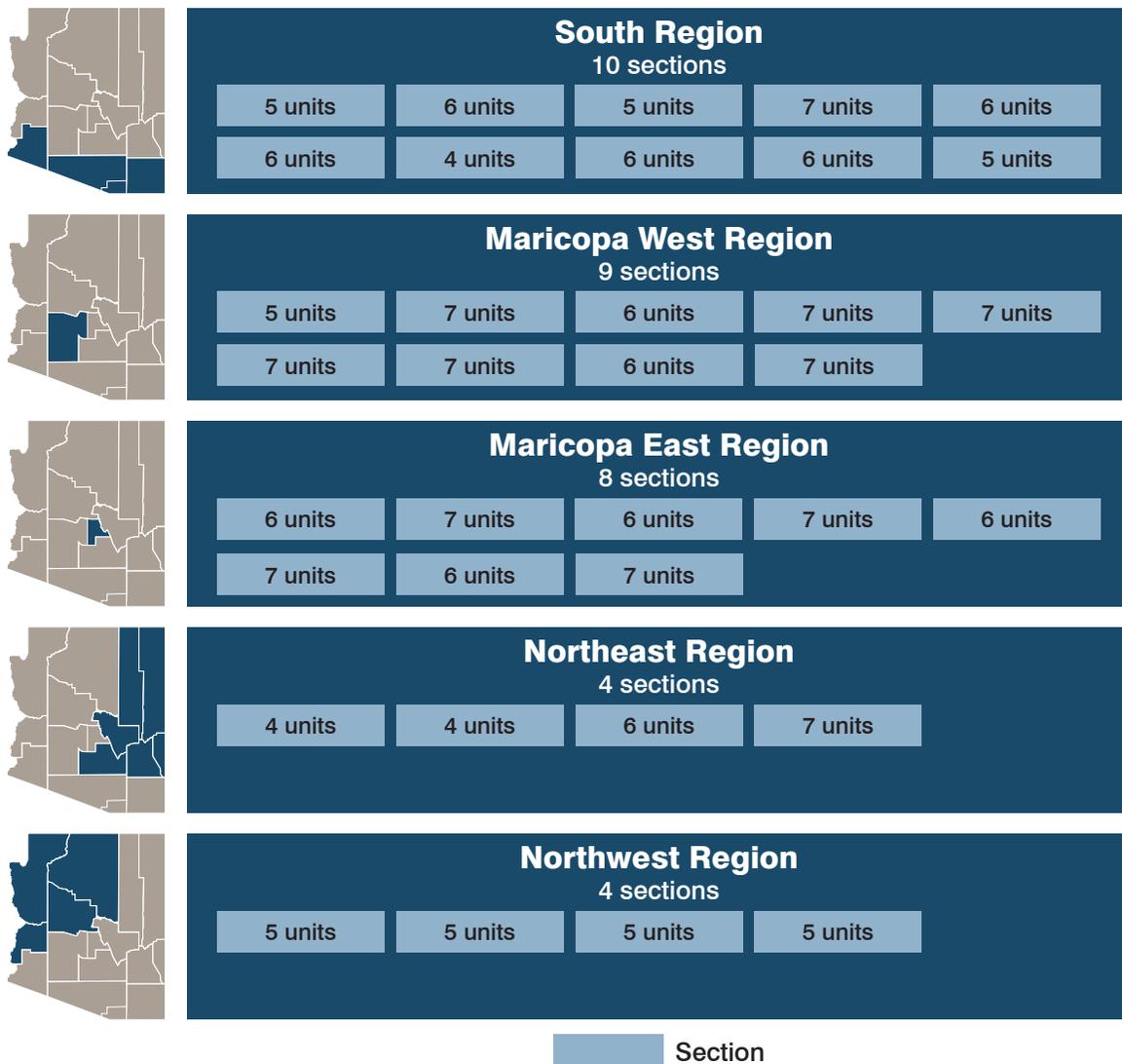
<sup>3</sup> Some units, particularly in rural areas, are mixed units that perform 2 or more types of casework.

adults, or cases concerning the Indian Child Welfare Act. Additionally, caseworkers work in the Department’s intake hotline to receive reports of alleged abuse/neglect and in the Department’s Placement Administration, which helps identify placements for children in Department care.

The Department groups units into larger organizational tiers called sections based on geographic location and/or function. For example, a section may comprise several in-home units or a mix of investigative and out-of-home units. Sections include between 4 to 7 units overseen by program managers. The Department groups sections into its largest organizational tiers, called regions. Regions are organized geographically, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 also shows that the Department had 208 case-carrying units, 35 sections, and 5 regions as of November 2020. In addition to these case-carrying units, the Department had 13 units and 2 sections for the hotline and 6 units and 1 section for Placement Administration.

**Figure 1**  
**Department regions and the number of case-carrying sections and units per region**  
**As of November 2020**



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Department-provided information that the Department reported was current as of November 2020.

## Department publicly reports caseloads in 3 separate reports

The Department publicly reports caseloads in 3 required reports that are available on its website: The Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report (Semi-Annual), Monthly Operational and Outcome Report (MOOR), and the Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report (QBR) (see Table 1). For the 3 reports, the Department calculates average caseloads by dividing the number of cases (i.e., the count of open investigative reports, out-of-home children, in-home children, or in-home cases) by the number of filled full-time equivalent (FTE) case-carrying staff who perform each casework type (see Appendix A, pages a-1 through a-2, for more information about these calculations). The Semi-Annual and MOOR provide caseload information by region, while the QBR provides caseload information by section. Additionally, the Semi-Annual and MOOR provide in-home caseload information based on the number of in-home children, while the QBR provides in-home caseload information based on the number of in-home cases. Because an in-home case can include more than 1 child, caseloads determined using the number of in-home children will differ from caseloads determined using the number of in-home cases.

**Table 1**  
Three Department reports that include caseload information

	Semi-Annual	MOOR	QBR
<b>Required by:</b>	A.R.S. §8-526(B) <sup>1</sup>	A.R.S. §8-526(F) <sup>2</sup>	Annual session laws <sup>3</sup>
<b>Reporting frequency:</b>	Semi-annually (March and September)	Monthly	Quarterly (March, June, September, December)
<b>Reports caseloads by:</b>	Region	Region	Section <sup>4</sup>
<b>Cases measured by the number of:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open reports</li> <li>Out-of-home children</li> <li>In-home children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open reports</li> <li>Out-of-home children</li> <li>In-home children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open reports</li> <li>Out-of-home children</li> <li>In-home cases<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Laws 2018, Ch. 110, consolidated the Department's Semi-Annual and Financial and Program Accountability Reports. Prior to this merger, caseloads were reported in the Financial and Program Accountability Report.

<sup>2</sup> Statute does not require the Department to report on caseloads in the MOOR. However, in February 2020, the Department added caseload information to the MOOR. According to the Department, it did this to be responsive to stakeholders and as a result of internal discussions.

<sup>3</sup> The QBR was initially required through a 2014 budget bill to report on the Department's progress in increasing its filled FTE positions and decreasing its backlog of uninvestigated reports. The requirement to report caseloads was added in 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Session laws require the Department to report caseloads by field office. However, the Department reported that because its field operations are organized by section and not by field office, it reports caseloads by section in the QBR.

<sup>5</sup> Session laws require the Department to report caseloads based on the number of in-home cases instead of in-home children. A case can involve multiple children.

Source: Auditor General staff review of the reports and associated laws.

The Department reported that it plans to work with the Legislature to eliminate the QBR requirement for several reasons. The Legislature has required the Department to report several pieces of information in the QBR, including its progress in reducing a backlog of investigations, increasing its filled FTE positions, meeting caseload standards, and reducing the number of children in out-of-home care. However, the Department reported that it believes the QBR is no longer necessary because it has eliminated the backlog, experienced a reduction of children in out-of-home care, and maintained what it believes to be a manageable investigations workload. Additionally, the metrics included quarterly in the QBR are also included monthly in the MOOR, although the MOOR reports caseloads by region rather than section. Further, the QBR measures in-home caseloads based on the number of in-home cases per caseworker rather than in-home children per caseworker. According to the Department, in-home children per caseworker is a more reliable measure and offers a more accurate reflection of caseloads. Finally, the Department believes that reporting caseloads by section is not useful because sections'

caseloads can fluctuate daily based on changes to staffing and case levels, whereas these changes have less impact on regional caseloads.

Appendix B (see pages b-1 through b-3) provides excerpts of caseload information from the 3 reports as reported in September 2020. As shown in the appendix, caseloads vary among the regions and sections because of differences in their number of cases and filled FTE positions. As reported in Auditor General Report 20-105, a report by the Child Welfare League of America—a coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies that provides best practices on policies, programs, and practices related to child welfare—identified 32 variables that affect caseworker workloads.<sup>4,5</sup> These include community or regional factors influencing the volume of families needing services and the complexity of the social problems they are facing and the number of children in a case. Because multiple factors can influence caseworker workloads, caseloads may vary between geographic areas, such as regions and sections.

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<sup>4</sup> See Auditor General Report 20-105 *Arizona Department of Child Safety—Caseworker Caseload Standards*.

<sup>5</sup> Collins-Camargo, C., Collins, J., & Wilfong, J. (2018). *Caseload & workload: A synthesis of: The evidence base, current trends, and future directions*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.



## Department has practices that can help ensure reliability of underlying data used in caseload calculations for 3 public reports but uses a less precise method for calculating caseloads

**LEGISLATIVE REQUEST:** Assess the reliability of the data the Department uses to report caseloads.

**CONCLUSION:** The Department has various practices that can help ensure the reliability of the underlying data that are used in the caseload calculations for 3 public reports—the Semi-Annual, MOOR, and QBR. However, as part of its method for calculating caseloads, the Department uses percentages to distribute the number of filled FTE positions by casework type rather than using the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type. This results in less precise caseload numbers and increases the potential for reporting errors. The Department should develop, implement, and document a more precise method for calculating caseloads that uses the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type. Additionally, the Department is replacing CHILDS with a new case management system, Guardian, and should complete its development and testing of the queries that will be used to obtain Guardian data for the caseload calculations to help ensure their accuracy.

## Department has practices that can help ensure reliability of HRIS and CHILDS data used in caseload calculations

The Department primarily uses data from the State of Arizona Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and the Department’s case management system (CHILDS) to calculate caseloads that are reported in 3 public reports—the Semi-Annual, MOOR, and QBR—and has various practices that can help ensure data reliability.<sup>6</sup> In addition, regional staff provide information used to calculate in-home caseloads for the QBR.

### **Department uses HRIS data to obtain counts of filled FTE positions used to calculate caseloads for all 3 reports and has practices for maintaining the data that can help ensure its reliability—**

Department staff use HRIS data to obtain counts of filled FTE positions by section/region and casework type for all 3 reports. These counts include case-carrying staff such as caseworkers and caseworker trainees. The reliability of the counts depends on the accuracy of the HRIS data. Department human resources staff are responsible for maintaining caseworker position data in HRIS and use forms for updating the data that require various approvals. According to Department procedures and staff, staff should complete requested updates within 5 business days, which can help ensure caseworker data is updated in a timely manner.

Our accuracy test work for a random sample of 36 caseworkers and other case-carrying staff found that the region, section, and type of unit they reported working in were consistent with the data in HRIS.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> HRIS is the State’s position and employee management system, which the Arizona Department of Administration administers.

<sup>7</sup> Using the HRIS report that Department staff use to obtain counts of filled FTE positions, we randomly selected 60 of 1,419 caseworkers and other case-carrying staff, such as Office of Child Welfare Investigations investigators, and asked them to complete questionnaires, of which 36 provided responses.

**Department uses CHILDS data to obtain various counts used to calculate caseloads for all 3 reports and has multiple practices that can help ensure the reliability of this data**—

Department staff use automated queries of CHILDS data to obtain counts of open investigative reports, out-of-home children, and in-home children by section/region (see textbox).<sup>8</sup> The reliability of these counts depends on the accuracy of the underlying CHILDS data, and the Department has multiple practices that can help ensure the data's reliability, including the reliability of specific data fields used in the queries to obtain the counts.<sup>9</sup> For example, based on interviews with Department staff, observations, and/or review of Department documentation:

**Counts obtained from CHILDS data**

**Open investigative reports**—A count of investigative reports that are not closed.

**Out-of-home children**—A count of children who have been removed from their homes (i.e., they have an open removal) and placed in Department care for more than 24 hours.

**In-home children**—A count of children who do not have an open removal (i.e., they receive services in their own homes), have a case plan permanency goal of "remain with family," and are under 18 years of age.

Source: Auditor General staff review of Department queries and documentation and interviews with Department staff.

- CHILDS automatically notifies caseworkers of key data fields with missing data for their assigned cases, and caseworkers are expected to enter the missing data.<sup>10</sup> These data fields include fields the Department uses to obtain the counts, such as case plan, permanency goal, and the assigned caseworker.
- Department policy requires staff to complete specific case tasks and data entry in CHILDS. For example, policy details what permanency goals are used for in-home and out-of-home cases and where to document the permanency goal in CHILDS. The permanency goal data field is used to count in-home children.
- The Department performs cleanup of CHILDS data reported to the federal government, which helps ensure the accuracy of data used to count out-of-home children.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Department runs a weekly report that identifies errors in CHILDS data, such as missing or inconsistent data. Regional staff are required to work with caseworkers to fix errors for the data elements with error rates over 10 percent. We reviewed the data error report for 3 data fields used to count out-of-home children and noted that these data fields generally had no errors.<sup>12</sup>
- Various Department staff are responsible for regularly reviewing CHILDS data reports and resolving data issues. For example, central office and regional staff review a report that identifies missing and expired placements for children in Department care, which affects counts of out-of-home children.

**Regional staff provide counts of in-home cases used to calculate caseloads for the QBR**—

Regional staff provide counts of in-home cases that are used in caseload calculations for the QBR because, according to the Department, CHILDS does not have data fields that could be used to count in-home cases.<sup>13</sup> Regional staff do not have a standard method to obtain these counts. For example, the Northwest region reported that it obtains the counts directly from supervisors, while the Maricopa East region reported that it uses

<sup>8</sup> The counts of open investigative reports and out-of-home children are used for all 3 reports, and the count of in-home children is used for the Semi-Annual and MOOR.

<sup>9</sup> The reliability of these counts also depends on the accuracy of the queries. The Department reported it developed and tested the queries several years ago, although it did not retain documentation of this testing.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Department, if no caseworker is assigned, CHILDS automatically assigns the case to the supervisor, and the supervisor receives the notification for the missing assigned caseworker data field. In addition, supervisors can also access a list of this missing data for their assigned caseworkers.

<sup>11</sup> Twice per year, the Department reports data to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), a federally mandated data collection system that began in federal fiscal year 1995 and receives case-level information on all children in foster care and those who have been adopted with a state agency's involvement.

<sup>12</sup> We reviewed the Department's data error report for the reporting period ending September 30, 2020, for the removal date, placement setting, and case plan goal data fields.

<sup>13</sup> The Department is required by law to report in-home caseloads based on the number of in-home cases rather than children in the QBR (see Table 1, footnote 5, on page 3).

a compliance report to obtain the counts. However, the Department reported that obtaining these counts will become standardized when the Department implements its new case management system, Guardian, which will include a new query for in-home cases (see page 8 for more information about Guardian).

## Department’s method for calculating caseloads for all 3 reports results in less precise caseloads and increases potential for reporting errors

As described in Appendix A (see pages a-1 through a-2), for all 3 reports, the Department calculates caseloads for each casework type by dividing the number of cases (i.e., the count of open investigative reports, out-of-home children, in-home children, or in-home cases) by the number of filled FTE positions that perform the work. To determine the number of filled FTE positions by casework type, the Department uses percentages to distribute a section’s total number of filled FTE positions to either “investigators” (i.e., investigative caseworkers) or “case managers” (i.e., out-of-home or in-home caseworkers).<sup>14</sup> For most sections, this distribution is 50 percent to investigators and 50 percent to case managers; while in other sections, the distribution is 34 percent to investigators and 66 percent to case managers.

However, this distribution results in less precise caseloads because it may not reflect the actual number of filled FTE positions for each casework type. For example, if a section had 30 filled FTE positions with 17 investigative caseworkers and 13 out-of-home caseworkers, the Department would distribute 15 FTE to each casework type using the 50 percent/50 percent distribution. This then affects the caseload calculation because the number of cases is divided by 15 for each casework type instead of 17 and 13. For example, if the section had 180 open investigative reports, using 15 filled FTE positions results in a caseload of 12 reports per caseworker while using 17 filled FTE positions results in a caseload of 11 reports per caseworker. Similarly, if the section had 380 out-of-home children, using 15 filled FTE positions results in a caseload of 25 children per caseworker while using 13 filled FTE positions results in a caseload of 29 children per caseworker.

This distribution also increases the complexity of the calculations because it requires the additional work of making the distributions, ensuring the distribution percentages are accurately applied, and updating the report footnotes describing the distributions when changes occur. This complexity, in turn, increases the potential for reporting errors. For example:

- We identified an error related to the distribution of filled FTE positions in 1 section. Specifically, when distributing the section’s filled FTE positions, staff erroneously added an extra 6 FTE positions to the total number of investigator positions in this section, which resulted in an understated investigative caseload in the QBR. We noted this addition of 6 FTE positions in the QBR calculations since at least the first quarter of fiscal year 2018. We also noted the error in the September 2020 Semi-Annual and August and September 2020 MOOR calculations, although the impact was minor in these reports because caseloads are reported by region. Department staff could not explain why an additional 6 FTE positions were added to this section in its caseload calculations but thought it may have been a relic of when the Department was using additional staff to work through a large backlog of uninvestigated cases.
- We also noted that the footnote in the QBR explaining the distribution of filled FTE positions in 3 regions does not accurately describe the actual distributions made. For example, since the June 2019 QBR, the footnote describing the South region distribution has not accurately described the actual distributions made in that region.

The Department reported that it decided to distribute the number of filled FTE positions by casework type because of data limitations that existed when it developed its caseload-calculation method. According to the Department, when it was initially required to report caseloads in the QBR, HRIS could only count the number of caseworkers

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<sup>14</sup> Before making these distributions, the Department first adjusts each section’s total count of filled FTE positions by counting each caseworker trainee as .66 FTE. The Department makes this adjustment because caseworker trainees do not carry a full caseload (see Appendix A, pages a-1 through a-2, for more information).

and could not differentiate that count by casework type. Further, the Department reported that it has continued to use this method for consistency in reporting to allow report users to assess trends over time, particularly in the QBR where changes to its method would be more apparent. However, using the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type would result in more precise caseloads and the Department could use HRIS data to obtain this information. Alternatively, the Department reported that once Guardian is implemented, it may identify methods of obtaining this information using Guardian.

## Guardian will replace CHILDS and regional counts as a data source for caseload calculations

According to Department documentation and staff, Guardian will replace CHILDS and regional staff-provided counts as a data source for the counts of open reports, out-of-home children, in-home children, and in-home cases used in the caseload calculations.<sup>15</sup> The Department will continue to use HRIS data to obtain counts of filled FTE positions. As of November 2020, the Department was in the process of developing the queries that will generate these counts from Guardian. The Department stated that this process includes testing the accuracy of the new queries. The Department reported that it will begin using data queried from Guardian to calculate caseloads for the 3 reports once the system goes live, which is planned for February 2021.<sup>16</sup>

### Recommendations

The Department should:

1. Develop, implement, and document a more precise method for calculating publicly reported caseloads that uses the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type and update the report footnotes accordingly.
2. Complete its development and testing of the queries that will be used to obtain Guardian data for the publicly reported caseloads to help ensure their accuracy.

**Department response:** As outlined in its [response](#), the Department agrees with the finding and will implement the recommendations.

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<sup>15</sup> Although the in-home case count will be queried from Guardian, the Department reported that it plans to continue obtaining in-home case counts from regional staff until it ensures the Guardian count is accurate.

<sup>16</sup> Case data prior to Guardian's go-live date will be migrated from CHILDS to Guardian.



## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Auditor General makes 2 recommendations to the Department

The Department should:

1. Develop, implement, and document a more precise method for calculating publicly reported caseloads that uses the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type and update the report footnotes accordingly (see Finding 1, pages 5 through 8, for more information).
2. Complete its development and testing of the queries that will be used to obtain Guardian data for the publicly reported caseloads to help ensure their accuracy (see Finding 1, pages 5 through 8, for more information).



## Summary of caseload calculation steps

As of September 2020, Department staff performed the following steps to calculate and report caseloads in the Semi-Annual, MOOR, and QBR. We provide textbox illustrations of each step for a section with both investigative and out-of-home units.

**Step 1: Obtain data needed to perform caseload calculations**—The Department primarily uses counts obtained from HRIS and CHILDS data to calculate caseloads. Specifically, staff obtain counts of filled FTE positions by section/region from HRIS and counts of open investigative reports, out-of-home children, and in-home children by section/region from CHILDS. In addition, regional staff provide counts of in-home cases used to calculate in-home caseloads for the QBR. Staff then compile the counts into Excel report templates and perform Steps 2 through 4 to calculate the caseloads for all 3 reports.

### Illustration of Step 1

Staff obtain the following section counts from HRIS data:

- 28 filled caseworker FTE positions
- 3 filled caseworker trainee FTE positions

Staff obtain the following section counts from CHILDS data:

- 180 open investigative reports
- 380 out-of-home children

**Step 2: Adjust the total count of filled FTE positions for each section**—Because caseworker trainees do not carry a full caseload, the Department adjusts each section's total count of filled FTE positions by counting each caseworker trainee as .66 FTE. Specifically, the Department multiplies the number of caseworker trainees by .66 and then adds this value to the number of caseworkers in the section. The resulting number is then reported as the total number of case-carrying filled FTE positions for that section.

### Illustration of Step 2

Department adjusts the total number of filled FTE positions:

- 28 filled caseworker FTE + (.66 x 3 filled caseworker trainee FTE) = **30 filled case-carrying FTE positions**

**Step 3: Distribute each section's adjusted total number of filled FTE positions to either investigators or case managers, as applicable**—The Department uses percentages to distribute the adjusted total number of filled FTE positions to either “investigators” (i.e., investigative caseworkers) or “case managers” (i.e., out-of-home or in-home caseworkers). The number of filled FTE positions distributed to investigators is used to calculate investigative caseloads, and the number of filled FTE positions distributed to case managers is used to calculate out-of-home or in-home caseloads.

Department staff reported consulting with the regions to determine the distribution percentages and that these distributions reflect how casework is organized. For most sections, this distribution is 50 percent to investigators and 50 percent to case managers. However, for sections that do not employ this distribution of casework, the distribution is 34 percent to investigators and 66 percent to case managers. According to Department staff, this 34 percent/66 percent distribution is based on various factors such as staffing and case volumes. In

addition, the Department has specialized sections, such as in-home and after-hours investigations, that do not require distribution; instead, the adjusted filled FTE positions in these specialized sections are all distributed to investigators or case managers, as applicable. To determine the number of distributed filled FTE positions for regions in the Semi Annual and MOOR, the Department totals the section numbers for each section in a region.

### Illustration of Step 3

*Adjusted total number of filled FTE positions from Step 2: 30 filled case-carrying FTE positions*

Department distributes 50 percent of the adjusted case-carrying FTE positions to investigators and 50 percent to case managers:

- 30 filled caseworker FTE x .5 = **15 filled investigator FTE positions**
- 30 filled caseworker FTE x .5 = **15 filled case manager FTE positions**

**Step 4: Divide the number of cases by the distributed number of filled FTE positions to calculate average caseloads by casework type**—To calculate the average caseloads by casework type for a section or region, Department staff divide the case counts (i.e., the number of open investigative reports, children, or cases) by the number of filled FTE positions distributed to investigators or case managers, as applicable. For example, to calculate a section's average investigative caseload, staff divide the number of open investigative reports by the number of filled FTE positions distributed to investigators. Thus, the caseload measure is an average for the section or region and does not represent the actual caseload of each caseworker in that section or region. After calculating the caseloads, Department staff use the Excel report templates to publish the reports.

### Illustration of Step 4

*Distribution of filled FTE positions from Step 3: 15 filled investigator FTE positions, 15 filled case manager FTE positions*

Department calculates the average caseloads for each case type:

- 180 open investigative reports / 15 filled investigator FTE = **12 investigative reports per worker**
- 380 out-of-home children/ 15 filled case manager FTE = **25 out-of-home children per worker**



## Department’s public reporting of caseload information

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show Department caseloads as reported in its September 2020 Semi-Annual, MOOR, and QBR. These reports also contain other information, but the figures include only the caseload information. For example, the Semi-Annual includes information on placement demographics, completed investigations, and children exiting out-of-home care. The MOOR includes information on out-of-home care population demographics, monthly staffing, and monthly financial information.

**Figure 2**  
**Excerpt from the Department’s September 2020 Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report (Semi-Annual) reporting caseloads as of June 30, 2020**

CASELOADS (B2, B4, B5, B6)										
as of 06/30/2020 <sup>16</sup>										
		Maricopa East	South	Northwest	Northeast	Maricopa West	Central Office	OCWI	GH/FH	Total
Investigations	# of Reports	1,201	1,042	356	529	1,030		606	40	4,804
	Filled FTE	116	119	41	47	137		57	9	526
	Caseload per FTE	10	9	9	11	8		11	4	9
In-Home <sup>17</sup>	# of Children	1,281	953	337	373	1,188	12	33		4,177
	Filled FTE	43	31	10	21	47				152
	Caseload per FTE	30	31	34	18	25				27
Out-of-Home	# of Children	4,420	2,999	1,195	1,385	4,105	2	45	1	14,152
	Filled FTE	161	152	51	58	156				578
	Caseload per FTE	27	20	23	24	26				24

<sup>16</sup> The methodology used to determine filled FTE and caseloads has been updated to align with the *Quarterly Progress Report on Reducing the Backlog, and Reducing Caseloads* which counts all open reports, not just new reports received in the reporting month.

<sup>17</sup> As a result of Senate Bill 1518, in-home counts will be based on the number of children compared to previous requirements to report in-home cases. Prior reporting periods utilize case based counts. The methodology used to calculate the number of In-Home children has been updated and will be utilized in future reporting periods.

Source: The September 2020 Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report obtained from the Department’s website.

**Figure 3**

Excerpt from the Department’s September 2020 Monthly Operational and Outcome Report (MOOR) reporting caseloads as of July 31, 2020

REGION	Investigation Caseload	SFY20	SFY21 YTD	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020
Maricopa East	Number of Reports	1,806		1,312	1,181	1,199	1,224
	Filled FTE	109		111	113	116	115
	Caseload per FTE	17		12	10	10	11
South	Number of Reports	1,570		1,166	1,111	1,042	998
	Filled FTE	119		118	118	119	118
	Caseload per FTE	13		10	9	9	8
Northwest	Number of Reports	499		379	348	354	404
	Filled FTE	46		46	48	41	41
	Caseload per FTE	11		8	7	9	10
Northeast	Number of Reports	647		517	532	534	573
	Filled FTE	42		44	45	47	47
	Caseload per FTE	15		12	12	11	12
Maricopa West	Number of Reports	1,648		1,161	1,054	1,029	996
	Filled FTE	133		136	139	138	136
	Caseload per FTE	12		9	8	7	7
OCWI / GH-FH / Other	Number of Reports	803		684	662	693	645
	Filled FTE	68		68	68	69	69
	Caseload per FTE	12		10	10	10	9

REGION	Out-of-Home Caseload	SFY20	SFY21 YTD	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020
Maricopa East	Number of Children	4,419		4,468	4,454	4,420	4,390
	Filled FTE	162		156	159	162	159
	Caseload per FTE	27		29	28	27	28
South	Number of Children	3,003		2,878	2,941	2,999	3,022
	Filled FTE	153		150	150	153	151
	Caseload per FTE	20		19	20	20	20
Northwest	Number of Children	1,198		1,223	1,211	1,195	1,172
	Filled FTE	51		56	57	51	50
	Caseload per FTE	23		22	21	23	23
Northeast	Number of Children	1,389		1,385	1,404	1,385	1,396
	Filled FTE	58		55	56	58	59
	Caseload per FTE	24		25	25	24	24
Maricopa West	Number of Children	4,105		4,141	4,129	4,105	4,045
	Filled FTE	156		154	156	156	153
	Caseload per FTE	26		27	26	26	26
OCWI / GH-FH / Other	Number of Children	51		47	43	48	62
	Filled FTE	69		68	68	69	69
	Caseload per FTE	1		1	1	1	1

REGION	In-Home Caseload	SFY20	SFY21 YTD	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020
Maricopa East	Number of Children	1,404		1,385	1,392	1,281	1,441
	Filled FTE	43		48	45	43	44
	Caseload per FTE	33		29	31	30	33
South	Number of Children	1,008		970	962	953	963
	Filled FTE	31		31	30	31	32
	Caseload per FTE	33		31	32	31	30
Northwest	Number of Children	357		331	376	337	312
	Filled FTE	10		11	11	10	8
	Caseload per FTE	36		30	34	34	39
Northeast	Number of Children	370		368	357	373	409
	Filled FTE	21		13	15	21	11
	Caseload per FTE	18		28	24	18	37
Maricopa West	Number of Children	1,286		1,335	1,392	1,188	1,291
	Filled FTE	47		45	48	47	47
	Caseload per FTE	27		30	29	25	27
OCWI / GH-FH / Other	Number of Children	38		44	41	45	33
	Filled FTE	69		68	68	69	69
	Caseload per FTE	1		1	1	1	0

Source: The September 2020 Monthly Operational and Outcome Report obtained from the Department's website.

**Figure 4**

Excerpt from the Department’s September 2020 Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report (QBR) reporting caseloads as of June 30, 2020

Region <sup>1</sup> Section #      Section name			Quarter 4 FY 2020							
			FTE		Workload					
			Investigators	Case Managers	# Open Reports (investigations)	# of In home cases	# of Out-of-Home Children <sup>2</sup>	Investigation (reports per worker)	In Home (cases per worker)	Out of Home (children per worker)
Maricopa-East (10)	3	Osborn	19	19	134	---	480	7	---	25
	4	In Home	---	43	31	481	13	1	11	0
	5	Mesa	19	19	171	---	475	9	---	25
	6	Gilbert	20	20	202	---	457	10	---	23
	7	Tempe	20	20	244	---	579	12	---	28
	8	South Mountain	19	19	214	---	400	11	---	21
	9	North Central	19	19	202	---	528	11	---	28
	10	Permanency - South Mountain		45	3	---	1488	0	---	33
South (20)	1	Eastside Loop	15	18	77	---	268	5	---	15
	2	Tucson North - Oracle	18	18	225	---	392	13	---	22
	3	Tucson South - Valencia	14	14	162	---	360	12	---	26
	4	Tucson Midtown - Oracle	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	5	Madera A - 4th Ave.	17	17	96	---	251	6	---	15
	6	Permanency - Alvernon	0	31	---	---	550	---	---	18
	7	Alvernon	16	16	137	---	393	8	---	24
	8	Cochise County	10	10	101	---	188	10	---	19
	9	Madera C / Nogales	16	16	149	---	289	9	---	18
	10	In Home	0	31	6	248	75	0	8	2
	11	Yuma	12	12	89	63	233	7	---	19
Northwest (30)	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	9	9	118	65	192	13	13	21
	3	Cocoonino County / Cottonwood	12	12	105	---	278	8	---	22
	4	Bullhead City/Lake Havasu	10	10	62	42	167	6	8	17
	5	Kingman	10	19	71	---	558	7	---	29
Northeast (40)	3	Globe / Payson / Safford	8	15	95	29	245	13	6	17
	4	St. Johns/Winslow/Show low	5	9	71	6	129	16	2	15
	5	Apache Junction/Kearney	17	17	164	37	533	10	5	32
	6	Casa Grande/Coolidge	18	18	199	30	478	11	6	27
Maricopa-West (50)	1	AHIT	25	---	2	---	---	0	---	---
	3	In Home	0	47	33	562	15	1	12	0
	4	Thunderbird	19	19	201	---	515	10	---	27
	5	Peoria	16	16	182	---	385	11	---	24
	6	Glendale/Durango	19	19	157	---	476	8	---	24
	7	Avondale/Advocacy	21	21	147	---	552	7	---	27
	8	Permanency	---	44	2	---	1222	---	---	28
	12	West 101	21	21	181	---	614	8	---	29
	13	Pinnacle Peak	15	15	125	---	326	8	---	22
<b>105, 106 - Other</b>	various	OCWI, GH/FH, Other	68	---	646	---	48	10	---	---

- As of Q1 FY2019, Specialists in a trainee status are accounted for in FTE figures in each section with an equal distribution of 66% caseload.
- In Home (IH) cases are based on a hand count of cases actively managed in each respective Region.
- IH cases assignments differ Regionally. Maricopa East, Maricopa West and South Regions employ specific IH units who manage IH cases only, while Northeast and Northwest Regions and portions of South Region have mixed units that may carry IH or OOH cases.
- FTE assignments to investigations or case management are based on assignment of 50% investigative and 50% ongoing in Maricopa East, Maricopa West and Northwest Regions. South and one Northeast Region sections employ a distribution of 34% Investigations and 66% ongoing.
- During the 4th Quarter of SFY2020, Section 4 in South Region was closed and cases were reassigned to other South Region sections.

Source: The September 2020 Quarterly Benchmark Progress Report obtained from the Department’s website.



## Objectives, scope, and methodology

The Arizona Auditor General has completed this special report of the Department that addresses the reliability of the data it uses to publicly report caseloads pursuant to Laws 2018, Ch. 282, §1. We used various methods to meet the report's objectives related to the reliability of the data for caseload reporting. These methods included reviewing Department reports (the Semi-Annual, MOOR, and QBR), statutes, applicable session laws, and JLBC appropriations reports; reviewing Department-provided documents, including policies and procedures, organizational charts, Guardian planning documents, and various standard work documents; interviewing Department management and staff; discussing with JLBC staff how they use the Department's reports; and observing Department caseworkers as they conducted their work in October and November 2019.

Further, we used the following specific methods to assess the reliability of the Department data used to calculate caseloads:

- Reviewed the September 2020 and June 2020 QBRs to determine if the report footnotes accurately represent the calculations performed.
- Reviewed the caseload calculations for 6 reporting periods of the Semi-Annual and 4 reporting periods of the MOOR.
- Reviewed the queries used to obtain counts of CHILDS data and identified key data fields the queries use.
- Reviewed the Department's AFCARS data error report for the reporting period ending September 30, 2020.
- Compared region, section, and caseworker type information from a Department HRIS report to survey responses for 36 randomly selected caseworkers and other case-carrying staff.<sup>17</sup>
- Compared caseload information reported in the September 2020 MOOR, Semi-Annual, and QBR.
- Surveyed the Department's 5 regional automation liaisons and reviewed relevant documentation to learn how they compile in-home case counts.

We express appreciation to the Department's Director and staff for their cooperation and assistance throughout the review.

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<sup>17</sup> Using the HRIS report that Department staff use to obtain the counts of filled FTE positions, we randomly selected 60 of 1,419 caseworkers and other case-carrying staff, such as Office of Child Welfare Investigations investigators, and asked them to complete questionnaires, of which 36 provided responses.

# DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

December 22, 2020

Ms. Lindsey Perry  
Auditor General  
Arizona Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44th Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, Arizona 85018

Re: Auditor General Report – Caseworker Caseload Reporting

Dear Ms. Perry:

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) is pleased to provide this response to the special report - *Caseworker Caseload Reporting*. The Department will continue its efforts to ensure the reliability of the data to report caseloads.

The Department is appreciative of the mutual collaboration demonstrated by the Office of the Auditor General and the willingness to incorporate the Department's feedback in the report.

Please see attached response to the recommendations made in the report.

Sincerely,

Mike Faust  
Director

**Finding 1:** Department has practices that can help ensure reliability of underlying data used in caseload calculations for 3 public reports but uses a less precise method for calculating caseloads

### **Recommendations**

The Department should:

1. Develop, implement, and document a more precise method for calculating publicly reported caseloads that uses the actual number of filled FTE positions by casework type and update the report footnotes accordingly (see Finding 1, pages 5 through 8, for more information).

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to, and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

**Response Explanation:** The Department will continue its efforts to ensure the reliability of the data utilized to report caseloads. The Department will also continue to accurately report caseloads and focusing on exploring strategies which will allow to enhance its current reporting practices.

2. Complete its development and testing of the queries that will be used to obtain Guardian data for the publicly reported caseloads to help ensure their accuracy (see Finding 1, pages 5 through 8, for more information).

**Department Response:** The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to, and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

**Response Explanation:** The Department is committed to data quality and to perfect its reporting capabilities. The Department will continue the development and testing of the queries utilized to obtain Guardian data. The development and testing will be completed prior to Guardian going live.

