

September 22, 2021

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

Re: Auditor General Report – *Comparing Department Practices for Classifying and Locating Runaway or Missing Children from Care to Best Practices*

Dear Ms. Perry:

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide this response to the Arizona Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) findings and recommendations in the report of the Department's practices for classifying and locating runaway or missing children. The Department acknowledges the importance of aligning practices with the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and values the importance of collaborating with law enforcement with children missing from care.

The report has been reviewed and the Department's response to each recommendation is enclosed. The Department appreciates the collaborative effort throughout this process.

Sincerely,

Mike Faust
Director

Enclosure: DCS Recommendation Response

Finding 1: Department practices for classifying and locating children missing from care are generally consistent with CWLA-recommended practices, but caseworkers did not always comply with documentation requirements

Recommendation 1: The Department should revise its policies to provide guidance on when specific stakeholder notification and documentation of those notifications by caseworkers are not applicable, such as when a stakeholder is already aware of a child's status or the notification is accomplished another way.

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

Response explanation: The Department acknowledges the policies for missing and runaway children would benefit from clarification. The Department agrees to revise its policies to provide more guidance on the specific applicable documentation requirements when a stakeholder notification is accomplished in an alternate way; most notably when a required stakeholder to be notified is in fact the individual notifying the Department.

Recommendation 2: To help ensure timely documentation, the Department should expand its biweekly review process to include determining whether efforts to locate children missing from care are occurring and documented in case notes.

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

Response explanation: Although documentation is secondary to action, the Department understands the importance of documenting efforts to locate children. In addition to the supervisory responsibility to ensure timely documentation, the Department will expand its biweekly process to include the review of documented efforts to locate children missing from care.

Finding 2: Department and law enforcement have not formalized expectations for collaboration, and Department lacks some detailed guidance for caseworkers' ongoing efforts to locate children missing from care

Recommendation 3: The Department should work with law enforcement to formalize expectations regarding their respective roles and responsibilities for locating children missing from Department care, and work with State policymakers to address potential barriers as needed. For example, the Department could pilot establishing a formal agreement or mutually agreed-upon protocols with 1 or more of the approximately 150 law enforcement agencies in Arizona, such as an agency where improved coordination would be beneficial; assess whether the pilot was helpful for improving coordination; and, if so, work with State policymakers to determine a practical approach to formalizing expectations between the Department and law enforcement agencies State-wide. The Department and law enforcement could explore other options for formalizing expectations as well.

Department response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: The Department values the collaboration with law enforcement agencies, currently has joint investigation protocols agreements in place and acknowledges the benefit of further partnership in locating children missing from care. The Department works diligently with

law enforcement agencies on a regular basis to ensure coordination. The Department may explore options, including working with State policymakers as required, to formalize expectations, and may explore coordination with the Arizona Department of Public Safety regarding the functions or role they have with missing children.

Recommendation 4: The Department should update its policies and/or develop supplemental guidance documents to provide additional guidance on its expectations for the types and frequency of caseworkers' ongoing efforts to locate children missing from care and their collaboration with law enforcement, and ensure caseworkers who manage cases involving children missing from care are informed of and trained on this additional guidance.

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

Response explanation: The types and frequency of efforts to locate children missing from care and collaboration with law enforcement are essential components. The Department will update its policies to provide additional guidance on the expectations to locate missing children.