

Arizona Department of Child Safety Information Provided to Local Foster Care Review Boards and State Ombudsman

Department did not provide some documents for local board case reviews because of AOC and Department issues, and some caseworkers did not attend case reviews, impacting boards' ability to review children's cases; and Department provided State Ombudsman access to Guardian, with some exceptions

Audit purpose

To determine whether the Department provided information necessary for local foster care review boards (local boards) to complete case reviews of children in out-of-home care and whether Department caseworkers complied with its case review attendance policy; and to provide information related to the Department's provision of access to the Department's case management system, Guardian, to the Arizona Ombudsman–Citizens' Aide (State Ombudsman).

Key findings

- In February 2021, the Department began using Guardian, which includes multiple tools for caseworkers to manage and store information about children's cases.
- Statute and Department policy and guidance require Department and its caseworkers to provide information to help local boards review children's progress toward permanency.
- Department's automated information exchange did not provide some case documents to the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) on behalf of local boards to help them review children's cases because of various issues, including AOC staff's errors requesting documents and Department not ensuring documents were stored in Guardian, which has negatively impacted AOC's and local boards' trust and confidence in the Department.
- Some caseworkers did not comply with Department's case review attendance policy, preventing some local boards from conducting complete reviews of children in out-of-home care.
- Department has provided State Ombudsman direct, remote access to Guardian pursuant to statute, with some exceptions, and these agencies will continue to meet to discuss the State Ombudsman's access to Guardian.

Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Ensure it provides all applicable case documents to AOC on behalf of local boards.
- Solicit feedback from AOC about automated information exchange issues and take steps to address these issues.
- Ensure caseworkers comply with Department case review attendance policy requirements, including tracking caseworker attendance at case reviews, and determine what information to provide to AOC when caseworkers cannot attend these reviews.
- Develop and implement guidance for what corrective actions supervisors should take in response to caseworkers' noncompliance with Department policies, such as policies for maintaining case documents in Guardian and attending case reviews.