

Arizona Foster Care Review Board (FCRB)

FCRB reviewed cases of children in out-of-home care within required time frames and judges reported some information in FCRB's local board reports provided for child dependency case reviews is useful, but report content and timeliness could be improved to help better advise judges on children's progress toward permanent placement and ensure efficient and effective use of staff and volunteers' time

Audit purpose

To determine whether FCRB assisted juvenile court judges in their reviews of child dependency cases; compare how other states review cases of children in out-of-home care; assess FCRB's compliance with State conflict-of-interest requirements and Arizona Code of Judicial Administration's open meeting law policy; and to provide responses to the statutory sunset factors.

Key findings

- FCRB consists of a State board and more than 100 local boards. Local boards are required by law to review to assist juvenile court judges (judges) in their reviews of child dependency cases by reviewing Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) efforts toward achieving permanent placement for children in out-of-home care at least once every 6 months and providing findings and recommendations reports (reports) to the courts within 30 days of local board reviews.
- Consistent with statute, FCRB reviewed cases of children in out-of-home care every 6 months and sent most reports to the courts within 30 days for the cases we reviewed.
- Most judges we interviewed reported FCRB's reports contain some useful information that assists them in their child dependency reviews; however, we identified issues that can impact reports' usefulness. For example:
 - Some judges indicated they find statements from parents and foster parents in reports are most useful; however, few reports we reviewed contained statements from parents and foster parents because they did not attend reviews. Although inaccurate addresses provided by DCS have contributed to low attendance, FCRB lacks a formal plan to improve attendance.
 - Because conditions in child dependency cases can change rapidly, outdated and untimely provided reports impact usefulness; 47 percent of reports we reviewed were 61 days or older by the time of the court hearing, and 15 percent of reports we reviewed were provided on the day of or after the court hearing.
- FCRB lacks a formal input process to help ensure its reports assist judges with child dependency reviews, unlike similar organizations in other states, which assess the impact of their reviews of children in out-of-home care.
- Useful reports are also important for FCRB's efficient and effective resource use. The Arizona Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts, which supports FCRB, spent nearly \$3.1 million on staff to assist local boards in fiscal year 2022, and in calendar year 2022 board volunteer hours were valued at more than \$1 million.

Key recommendations

FCRB should:

- Establish a work group to determine what changes should be made to help ensure judges have timely and useful information to related to child dependency cases.
- Continue to work with DCS to ensure addresses for parents and foster parents are accurate, and develop and implement a written plan to improve parent and foster parent attendance at local board reviews.