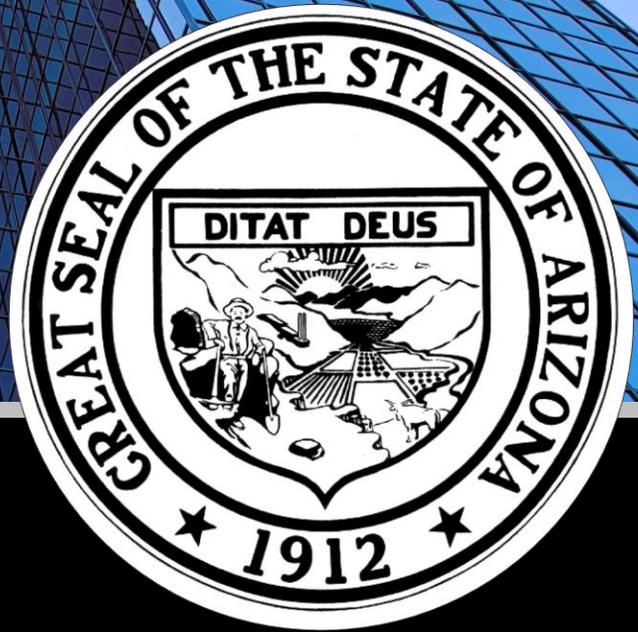


Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide  
2020 N. Central Ave., Suite 570, Phoenix, Arizona 85004  
Tel (602) 277-7292 | Fax (602) 277-7312  
[www.azoca.gov](http://www.azoca.gov)



# ARIZONA OMBUDSMAN- CITIZENS' AIDE ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2025: JULY 1, 2024 – JUNE 30, 2025

Submitted by ---

Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide, Joanne MacDonnell

December 31, 2025



## Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide

2020 N. Central Avenue, Suite 570

Phoenix, Arizona 85004

(602) 277-7292

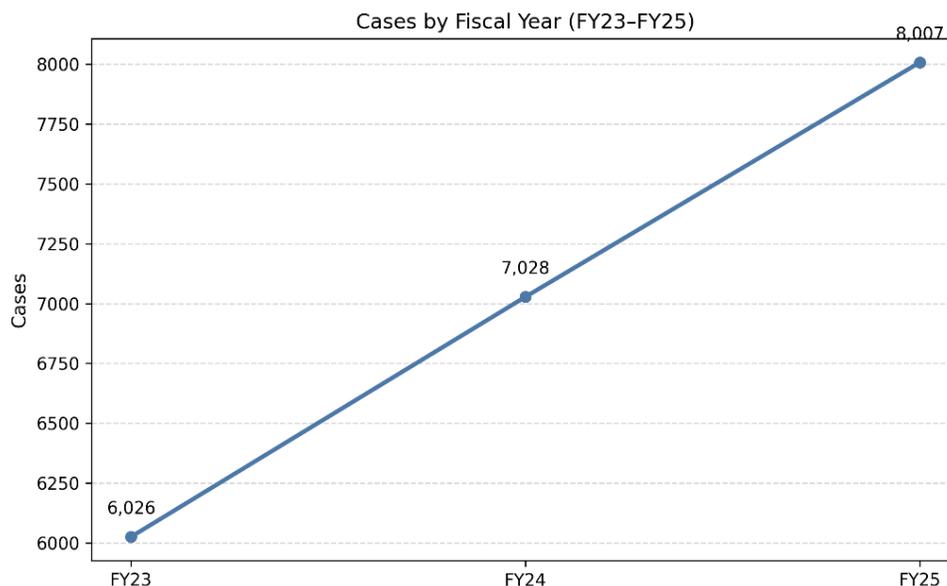
<https://www.azoca.gov/>

Greetings:

In accordance with A.R.S. §41-1376, I am pleased to present the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Office (AZOCA) Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report. This report includes key statistics from the year, a selection of case summaries illustrating the work our office provides for the people of Arizona, and other items mandated by law.

We hope the case summaries clarify how Arizona agencies interact with the public. In our work, we respond to questions and complaints from the public about state government agencies and issues related to public access at both the state and local levels. We review individual cases and analyze how agency policies and procedures affect people, businesses, and other government entities. We help resolve disputes without resorting to costly legal action. When an agency makes a mistake, we work to ensure it fully fixes the issue. When an agency acts properly and lawfully, we explain the reasons to the complainants. We support individuals who need help navigating government processes. Our focus is on addressing a wide variety of concerns across Arizona's more than 120 departments, boards, and commissions. Our authority to review local agencies—such as counties, cities, towns, school districts, charter schools, and special districts—is limited to matters involving public access and transparency.

Fiscal year 2025 (FY25) experienced an unprecedented increase in cases, except for the COVID-affected year of FY21. AZOCA handled 8,007 cases involving 239 government agencies in FY25. Additionally, we anticipate that our 2025 calendar year-end case total, as of December 30, 2025, will surpass 9,264 cases. In comparison, our case contacts in FY24 were 7,028, and in FY23, they totaled 6,026. This was the highest caseload after the COVID-19 year (FY21), which had 9,757 cases. FY26 has not yet reached the halfway point, but the first six months have seen approximately 5,254 cases. If that rate continues through June, we could exceed 10,000 cases.



We don't have a completely clear understanding of why we are seeing this significant increase, but we know several factors are contributing. We're receiving more referrals from various sources. Legislative, Executive, and Judicial agencies refer cases to us as we help people navigate government processes and ensure the government acts honestly and fairly. When lawmakers consider expanding our responsibilities through new laws, more people become aware of us due to increased mentions of our office's name and mission. We've also had a few positive media interactions that highlighted our office. Other reasons include agencies experiencing a rise in case numbers or gaining more publicity, which often leads to an increase in our case totals.

Our expertise in areas such as public access assistance also plays an important role. For example, in FY25, we held thirty-four open meetings and public access training sessions. Government and public entities voluntarily seek our advice on the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law to better serve their members. Additionally, when the Attorney General's Office discovers violations of the open meeting law by government officials, it often requires those groups or individuals to undergo training from us. This results in an increased workload and tight deadlines; typically, the agencies must complete remedial training within three months.

However, we believe the main reason for the increase in cases is the standardization of Arizona's state agency websites. We are seeing higher traffic following the redesign of the State of Arizona website portal and main agency pages. Most agency pages now prominently feature our office at the top and center of their websites.

We have also noticed that some agencies are experiencing an increase in their case numbers, which creates a ripple effect and raises our overall totals. As mentioned last year, the public expects better customer service from these agencies. Common complaints include poor service, lack of communication, and issues caused by government workers telecommuting (workers are not available for public meetings in offices). The public responds very positively when agencies add a human touch — such as quick phone or email responses or in-person meetings to review paperwork or other evidence. The three agencies with the highest number of complaints and inquiries in fiscal year 2025 were the Department of Economic Security, the Department of Child Safety, and ADOT. You will find an analysis and a full grid of all our case contacts toward the end of this annual report.

A key achievement for the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide in FY25 was the collaboration among our office, the Fingerprint Board, and DCS to recommend that the legislature amend existing law. This legal change enhances efficiency between DCS and the Fingerprint Board by allowing the sharing of confidential records that must remain private. We resolved a long-standing issue that had persisted for years by negotiating a mutually acceptable agreement and proposing legislative change. We appreciate the swift and decisive action taken by the Legislature.

Despite the surge in cases, we undertook several projects during the 2025 fiscal year, in addition to our core operations. All projects utilized our existing appropriation of general funds, rather than requesting additional funding. Examples include:

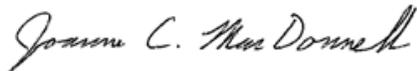
- Updated our two open-access publications.
- Completed our project to update our retention schedule, verify retained records, and remove all records from the Iron Mountain Records facility. This eliminated the ongoing charges from Iron Mountain. This is the first step toward moving to a paperless record system environment.
- Created an electronic portal to enable our staff to work more efficiently.

- Updated our resource referral list and added more links to assist the public and our staff.
- Continued improving and updating our case management system, including new features to facilitate adding documents.
- AZOCA worked with the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Reentry (ADCRR) to gather specific case information for cases we referred to ADCRR and investigations involving ADCRR. The Legislature amended A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8) to mandate our office to collect and report certain ADCRR information to the Legislature in our annual AZOCA reports. This new assignment necessitated adjustments to our case management system, resulting in the creation of a new section in this annual report.
- Completed a comprehensive redesign of our website, modernizing the site and adding new features. Take a look! <https://www.azoca.gov/>
- Finished updating our telephone, fax, and internet systems.

I would like to discuss two additional aspects of our operations. We have noticed an increase in highly vexatious and socially troubling complaints received via phone and email. We have had to refer several of these to DPS or other law enforcement agencies when needed. Since our office is the last resort for people dissatisfied with the government or the world at large, this is somewhat expected. Secondly, we observe people arguing with us using artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Sometimes this improves writing and communication, but other times it impedes the communication process because not all AI is accurate, and complainants do not always understand this. Sometimes, this leads to unproductive encounters until I am forced to declare we are finished.

I am happy to elaborate on any of our office activities if you wish. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need anything or if our office can assist your constituents. We are happy to assist people in navigating the government.

Respectfully submitted and best regards,



**Joanne C. MacDonnell**  
**Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide**

2020 N. Central Avenue, Suite 570

Phoenix, AZ 85004

Office: (602) 277-7292

[jmacdonnell@azoca.gov](mailto:jmacdonnell@azoca.gov)

<https://www.azoca.gov/>



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# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

## OUR MISSION

The mission of the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide is to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness of state government by handling public complaints, investigating the actions of state agencies, and offering fair and suitable solutions to resolve issues. Additionally, the Ombudsman - Citizens' Aide provides training, assistance, and investigates complaints related to public access laws and Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA).

## OUR ROLE

The Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide is an independent agency of the Arizona Legislature established to make government more responsive to residents of Arizona. It assists citizens in navigating government systems. Citizens can contact the office if they believe a state administrator, agency, department, board, or commission has treated them unfairly. The services offered by the Ombudsman are free and confidential.

The office's authority comes from A.R.S. §§ 41-1371 through 41-1383 and operates under A.A.C. Title 2, Chapter 16.

## Aiding Citizens

### HOW WE HELP

The Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide's Office provides a unique service by offering objectivity to citizens who complain when they believe their state government has mistreated them. The first thing our experienced team does is listen to the person's complaint. For some people, this is the first time they feel that anyone in government has actually heard them. Then, we identify the nature of the dispute and respond appropriately to resolve the issue.

We categorize responses into three groups:

### Coaching

Many residents can resolve their concerns when they understand the services available. Often, a citizen doesn't have a complaint but is seeking information. We help these residents by informing them about their options tailored to their specific needs and issues.

Coaching involves defining issues and rights, identifying options, referring people to the appropriate employee or department, redirecting citizens to services outside our jurisdiction (such as non-profits, federal agencies, or the Better Business Bureau), explaining agency policies, researching information, offering conflict management strategies, and setting reasonable expectations.

### Assistance

Sometimes, coaching alone isn't enough, and individuals need our office to communicate directly with government agencies. Most assistance complaints result from miscommunication, lack of

follow-up, or simple errors. In such cases, we contact the relevant agency on behalf of the citizen, facilitate communication between the parties, or coordinate actions among agencies. Our investigators establish relationships with staff across all state agencies to resolve complaints efficiently. We present the complaint to the agency, note the allegation and the circumstances that

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

brought it to our attention, and request that the agency work directly with the complainant to resolve the issue. The agency takes the lead in managing the matter and updates us on the outcome. We advise the complainant to contact us if they remain dissatisfied.

Some assistance cases involve special tasks. We provide training, conduct research, issue ombudsman or public access materials, and participate in other activities. It is more than coaching; we are actively helping.

## **Investigation**

Complaints about administrative acts of agencies within our jurisdiction may lead to investigations. In such cases, we work with constituents and agency staff to ensure compliance with the law and the delivery of quality public service. While we cannot compel an agency to follow our recommendations, most administrators are willing to address constituent concerns and correct errors once they are aware of them. If the allegations lack merit, we defend the agency and provide an explanation of our findings to the complainants. When necessary, we prepare investigative reports that outline our conclusions and recommendations, which are sent to the relevant agencies, the legislature, the governor, and the complainants, and are also posted on our website.

Investigations can be either informal or formal. They begin with a complaint that an agency within our jurisdiction has taken an administrative action that is contrary to law, unreasonable, unfair, oppressive, arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, unnecessarily discriminatory, a mistake of fact, based on improper or irrelevant grounds, lacking a sufficient statement of reason, conducted in an inefficient or discourteous manner, or otherwise wrongful. Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) § 41-1377.

Arizona Administrative Code (A.A.C.) R2-16-303 authorizes us to conduct informal investigations when the complaint can be resolved quickly and through mutual agreement. Most investigations begin with an informal process and are typically resolved in this manner. When situations become more complex, the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide may determine that a more formal investigation process and report are necessary.

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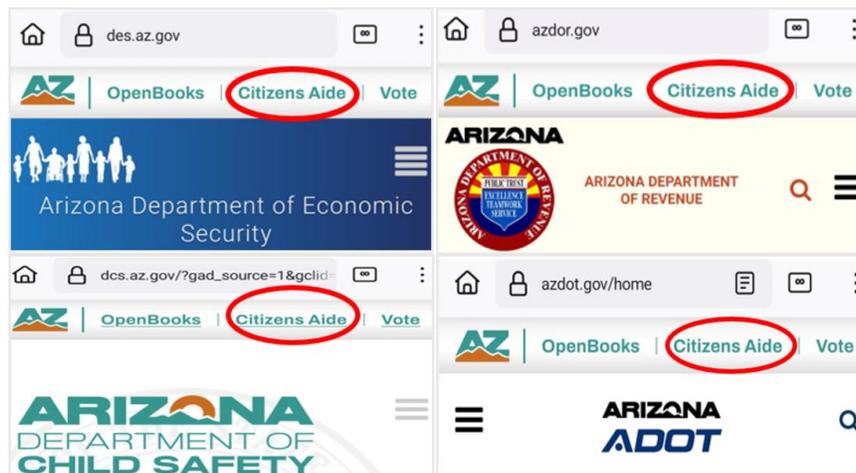
## OUTREACH

The Legislature directs us in A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(2)(f) to document the Office of the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide's (OCA) public awareness and outreach activities. Below are some of our engagement efforts and interactions. Below are instances of Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide outreach.

- The Ombudsman's website (<https://www.azoca.gov/>) was entirely redesigned and launched in April 2025. It now provides more resources to assist the public. The site explains laws and individual rights in various situations. It features a general "How to file an effective complaint" tutorial, FAQs, and our electronic complaint form. It also offers information about public access laws. Additionally, there is a tab with tips for effective interactions with the Department of Child Safety (DCS). We clarify the difference between our office and the DCS Ombudsman Office, as this often confuses the public. There is also a section about the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program and when it's appropriate to contact us with disputes.
- The Arizona state web directory, AZ Direct, features the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide's Office as a primary tab for the public. With Arizona's updated branding and website graphics, we now appear in a more prominent and visible position. Typically, we are shown as the top middle tab on most state agency websites and on the front page of the state directory. The listing there appears as follows:



- The Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Office is prominently placed at the top and center of most agency pages when accessed via cell phones. The message displayed there simply says "Citizens Aide" and appears as follows:



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- Public access booklets - We publish and distribute our updated comprehensive Public Records Law and Open Meeting Law guidebooks. The booklets include our analysis of each area of record and meeting access law. We distribute these public access materials to elected officials and the public throughout the state. Cities, counties, fire districts, school districts, and state agencies across Arizona rely on and refer to these booklets in their training. We monitor and publish statutory updates from recent legislative sessions to ensure our online and printed materials stay current with new legislation. Our latest versions are available at the links below.
  - **Public Records Law** - <https://www.azoca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025-Public-Records-Law-Booklet.pdf>
  - **Open Meeting Law** - <https://www.azoca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025-Open-Meeting-Law-Booklet.pdf>
- Public Access Training – We provide training for public officials and the general public statewide. Our expert attorneys in public access lead sessions and participate in forum discussions about lawful practices related to public records law and open meeting law. We also offer training videos on these topics for those unable to attend live sessions. We updated our videos in FY2024, and demand remains high. In the 2025 fiscal year:
  - We conducted live training sessions and provided training videos multiple times. We offered 34 training sessions for public bodies from locations such as Phoenix, Douglas, Quartzsite, Yavapai County, and Navajo County, and distributed training videos to government entities across the state.
  - Our former attorney, Danee Garone, served as a trainer in State Bar Continuing Legal Education sessions during FY25. He also delivered periodic training for the assistant attorney general staff. Moving forward, our other attorneys, Melissa Henry or Nick Bacon, will oversee these activities.
  - We trained various public officials, including the governor’s councils, executive agencies, special taxing districts, government clerks, community colleges, school districts, and police departments.
  - We post public access training videos on YouTube and make them available on our website. For example, one video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/U7GcJaJGXdC>.

At each event, we provide our office’s contact information and website, and explain our services related to public access issues and our general jurisdiction. Additionally, we distribute many of our office’s public records law and open meeting law handbooks at the training. On numerous occasions, new complainants have informed us that they became aware of our office through the training.

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- Media interactions – Occasional interviews with the Ombudsman – Citizens’ Aide Office or one of our public access attorneys. For example, ABC Channel 15 interviewed Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell and former staff attorney Danee Garone during Sunshine Week (March 16–22, 2025) about the Ombudsman's Office and its work. The video segment is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRCWrLWTrSk>
- On the Arizona Supreme Court’s website, in a training video called ***Guide to More Effective Communication and Representation***, Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell explains the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide’s Office in general and its specific role relating to DCS dependency cases: <https://www.azcourts.gov/improve/Admin/Parent-Engagement>.
- We work with DCS to identify and address both immediate and systemic issues within the child safety agency. Several laws require DCS to display the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide’s Office on its website, include it in its Notice of Duty to Inform and Temporary Custody Notice, and describe it in the DCS Parent Handbook. Information about our office is also available on the DCS website as a public resource.
- Arizona Revised Statute § 18-305(D) requires that "Each state agency that maintains a generally accessible internet website, or for which a generally accessible website is maintained, shall include a link on that website to the website of the ombudsman-citizens aide and a statement that reads as follows: "The ombudsman-citizens aide helps citizens to resolve ongoing issues with state agencies."
- Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell, Deputy Lane Organ, attorney Melissa Henry and former attorney Danee Garone, were speakers, trainers, or participants in the following:
  - Forums with legislative assistants – orientation meetings and one-on-one.
  - Forums with legislators – orientation meetings and one-on-one.
  - Various speaking engagements –to agency record officers, ASU Fellows, and others.
  - DES and DCS leadership individual and team meetings.
  - Outreach, speeches, and open house events at ASU, working with professors and interns.
- Better Business Bureau—Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell serves as an ethics judge for the annual *BBB Torch Award Ethics Program* and as a panelist for the Torch Ethics Guidance meetings.
- Court panels—Arizona Court Improvement Panel for Juvenile Court, Parent Representation Standards Committee—Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell serves on these committees.
- Ombudsman training - Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell and Deputy Ombudsman Lane Organ periodically teach seminars about ombudsman procedures to various offices or officials.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

- The Self-Help Desk at the Maricopa County Courts—We distribute information about our office to them.
- United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) – The State of Arizona is one of the five classical state ombudsman offices in the United States. Our state is a model for many smaller jurisdictions. The Associations’ business office and Board Officers refer people to us who have questions about classical offices.
  - Network—We receive referrals from other ombudsman jurisdictions across the United States. By sending representatives to the national USOA conference or participating in other USOA initiatives, we gain insights into the practical activities and best practices of various jurisdictions, which helps us enhance our office. We also send new OCA staff members to USOA’s renowned New Ombudsman Training. Furthermore, we assist new jurisdictions throughout the USA in launching and teaching them effective ombudsman methodologies.
  - Participate in training – Our staff periodically teaches seminars.
  - Ombudsman Joanne MacDonnell served as an elected Director and was the Secretary/Treasurer of USOA for 14 years, rotating off the Board in October of 2025. Joanne is also active in the Children and Family Chapter of USOA and has served as a co-chair of that group twice in the past decade.
  - Our DCS specialists, Alicia Nugent and Thomas Driscoll, participate in USOA Children and Family Chapter meetings. These virtual meetings provide child safety ombudsmen from across the United States with a chance to connect and exchange best practices and helpful information across different jurisdictions involved in child safety issues.
- The Attorney General’s Office refers cases to us, mainly when they find violations of public access laws involving government agencies, staff, and elected officials. They also send us cases they cannot handle for some reason. We regularly assist their Consumer Division with expertise in open meetings and public access. Additionally, we provide general government navigation help when the Attorney General’s Office is unsure where to direct the public.
- Information about our office is available on the State of Arizona websites for agencies that conduct investigations according to A.R.S. §§ 41-1001.01 and 41-1009.
- We work with the Arizona Library, Archives, and Public Records at the Secretary of State’s Office regarding public record retention and disclosure. We collaborate with the agency to facilitate discussions on public records retention and management.
- We share our Point of Contact (POC) Google Doc resource directory with various government agencies – including legislative assistants.

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## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

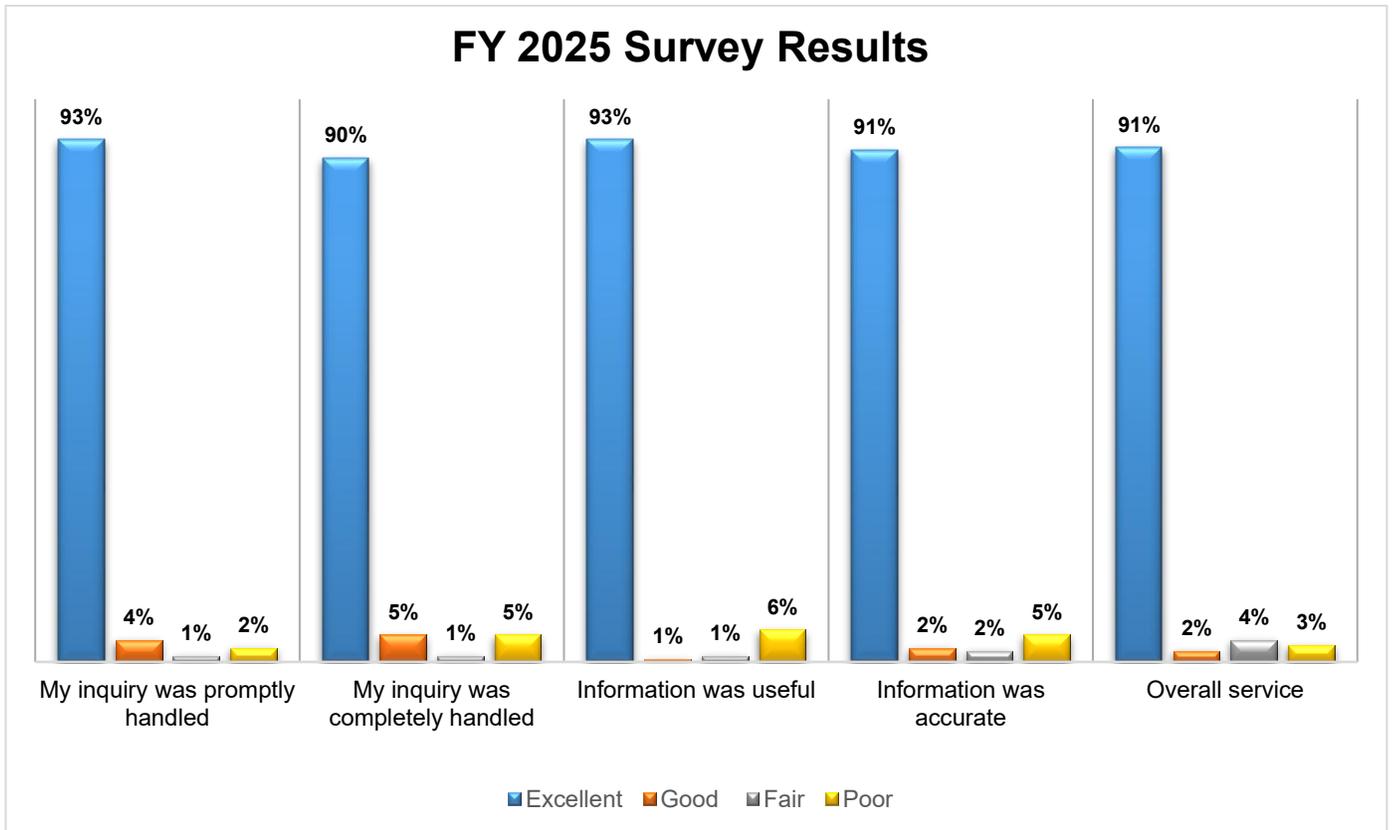
We collect feedback from the citizens we assist to evaluate our performance, address issues, and enhance our service. We gather feedback through our customer satisfaction survey, which we send at the end of each case and include in our signature blocks. The survey assesses how well we meet the six standards outlined in our strategic plan.

These standards are:

- Treat everyone **fairly**.
- Treat everyone with **courtesy and respect**.
- Respond **promptly** to citizen inquiries.
- Provide as **complete** a response as possible.
- Provide **practical** solutions to citizens.
- Provide **accurate** responses to citizen complaints.

## WE WELCOME FEEDBACK

The chart and accompanying comments on the following pages summarize the survey results for FY25.



# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

## KUDOS AND COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS WHO USED OUR SERVICES IN FY2025:

“Not being able to get a clear answer from the government agency was very frustrating. The ombudsman office was able to get answers in just a few days that I was not able to get on my own. Even though I was frustrated, they treated me well and got the answers I needed.”

“I appreciate the service this office provides.”

“Within one day of my complaint, my entire case got settled from your help! Thank you so much. I didn’t even know what an ombudsman even WAS, and you solved a problem I was trying to figure out on my own for months!”

“Frank replied promptly and was instrumental in getting the issue I reported resolved quickly. THANK YOU!!!

“(Yvonne) was very informative and very helpful. She pointed me in the right direction so I could get my situation handled in the correct way.”

“Service was quick and concise.”

“I was able to get a lot of help that I needed to agencies that can help me. Thank you so much.”

“Danee was excellent in helping me to resolve the matter that I contacted the office for, and I'm highly appreciative of their help!”

“The ombudsman was very beneficial at a time when the state agency (ESA) was impossible to work with and even worse to communicate with.”

“I gave the representative a very high score.”

“Thank you so much for your help with referrals. I greatly appreciate your assistance.”

“Very helpful direction and discussion.”

“I am very grateful to have received the information I required, as I was inquiring from Canada. Thank you.”

“I felt that my needs and concerns were not only heard, but cared about, and she was extremely helpful. Thank you!”

“I received prompt, courteous, and effective action regarding my request. Thank you, Brandon.”

“She was amazing, getting me all the resources and information I need. Very pleasant and calming voice.”

“Very kind and helpful.”

“Yvonne exhibits a clear and honest desire to understand the constituents' issues so they are properly addressed and resolved.”

“Your representative is highly professional, courteous, knowledgeable.”

“Very helpful and informative discussion.”

“Very informative, made it very clear to my understanding on information provided.”

“Extremely helpful and explained everything thoroughly! I appreciated everything she did.

“Yvonne was kind and professional in helping me with the appropriate information to resolve my needs.

“I am so grateful . . . Thank you.”

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

"Frank - First off, I would like to thank you and the AZ Ombudsman's office for the quick response. This was a surprise to say the least. I work in government and am not used to internal customers providing such a quick response--let alone external responses like yours. Next, your office put me in contact with "Erica" at the MVD Director's Office Constituency Services. Erica was incredibly responsive and worked with me on my issue. She was very helpful and frank. . . your office and MVD's follow-up were/are outstanding. These mechanisms for "problem solving" are not necessarily avenues that folks like me would otherwise know about. I am appreciative for both of your service." ". . .full of information and the most helpful person I could have called. She walked me through the websites and went the extra mile. You don't come across people like this anymore."

"Thank you for your help!"

"My issue was resolved promptly, and I received training on how to allow for this to happen. For example, I was told how to write the emails, how long to wait, and who to contact if I didn't receive a response. This was very helpful."

"Great! . . . SUPER HELPFUL."

"It was frustrating trying to get in touch with AZ government office, you provided the best number and contact to get my issue resolved. Thanks so much!"

"The Ombudsman resolved an issue with the MVD that I have been trying to resolve for 9 months."

"Helpful and friendly. It was great to hear a sympathetic and knowledgeable voice to help me with my problem."

"Employee was very professional and courteous."

"Extremely helpful!"

"I was very satisfied with the help I received; it was quickly taken care of."

"Thank you for your service."

"Very professional & patient. . . She went far & above. . . I am very grateful ."

"Provided valuable information and resources regarding my concerns in a positive manner"

"I was provided with names and contact information to help me find a solution. . . I felt heard, understood and supported in my search."

". . . Thank you, again."

"Thank you very much for all the help. . . Superb!"

"He exhibited compassion and was able to effectuate near-immediate results."

"Very helpful and informative!"

"Melissa is a real asset to your department. She was courteous, friendly and very informative."

"Yvonne was incredibly helpful! Thank you SO much!"

"I was surprised to receive an answer with instructions as to what I can do to resolve this issue. I will follow those instructions."

"The best in the West"

"I felt as though she really wanted to help me. She gave a bunch of resources to try and explained great detail how to use each link. She was patient a thorough. Thank you"

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"Totally professional and courteous totally understood my issues clearly and calmly explained best course of how to proceed toward resolution."

"Yvonne went above and beyond to answer all my questions."

". . .Extraordinary. She provided me with all the contact information I needed."

"I would like to go ahead and thank the ombudsman office for answering my questions and making my concerns visible, it really meant a lot to me because I felt like hopeless, multiple people from the ombudsman office helped which I absolutely appreciate."

"I also want to go ahead and thank Thomas ....Even after my issues have gotten resolved he still reached out ! Thank you guys so much!"

"Frank was very courteous and helpful. Very much appreciated."

"What a great representative I was able to talk to !! OUTSTANDING"

"I appreciated the thorough response and the clarity of the responses."

"Thomas was great!"

"Informative and compassionate."

"Provided professional service."

"I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the exceptional assistance I received. . ." From our first interaction, Yvonne was warm, understanding, and incredibly knowledgeable about the various services available. . . I am deeply appreciative of her efforts . . ."

"Frank was courteous and responded promptly. He has help me before and always make sure matters were taken care of. He is a great asset to the company and the whole process was easy and stressless. Thank you very much for all of your assistance."

"I dealt with John on an issue we had with MVD. John promptly contacted the appropriate person(s) in MVD, and our issue was resolved, promptly, to our satisfaction."

"I have had questions regarding my claim for 16 weeks now without pay from azui. I only submitted a small paragraph highlighting my problem to AZ Ombudsman and immediately received a response. Thank You"

"Was amazing and helped me so much!!!"

"My experience was very positive. The lady I spoke with was kind, patient, and helpful. She listened carefully to my concerns and provided clear guidance, making the whole process much easier. I appreciated her professionalism and the time she took to ensure I had all the information I needed."

"Very professional, thorough and courteous."

"EXCELLENT!"

"Professional, respectful, patient, kind and very, very helpful . . ."

". . . (My issue) was not in your purview, but she provided several resources/suggestions on where I could go to try and get help."

"I really appreciate the help I received today!"

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

"Extremely helpful."

". . . knowledgeable and professional and most of all very helpful, she gave much needed information, as well as being very understanding, kind and patient too."

"Very knowledgeable and helpful with my call and concerns"

"I cannot say enough about the help I received . . . Her customer service skills went far beyond anything I have experienced before. You have one heck of a valuable employee."

"Government like it's supposed to be. Too good to be true but it is true."

"Was awesome and helpful."

"Everything worked out wonderful and fast"

"Very professional and very resourceful"

". . . knowledgeable, professional, courteous, and very helpful."

". . . very professional, went beyond the call of duty finding the resources/contacts I am needing."

"Your employee was very kind and helpful . . . "

"I really felt heard and like I was given useful information that empowered me for the situation I am in."

"I really appreciated the quick assistance."

"He researched information about my question and provided all the information needed and guidance. He was very professional and courteous."

"Thank you for your prompt attention."

". . . a wealth of knowledge, kind, and thorough."

"Good service & prompt response."

". . . Very patient and courteous. She gave great information and took her time to ensure everything was accurately timed."

"Understood my problem and gave me direction to finding a solution. . . Thanks for having such valuable and competent employees."

"I am so very thankful for the Ombudsmen site. Melona helped me today. I had looked and looked for what I needed and couldn't find it. She searched and even asked others there in order to help me. She is a tremendous asset to your organization and I sincerely hope she gets the recognition!!! Thank you!!!"

"Deeply grateful for your assistance in getting my state acupuncture license renewed when our board was unresponsive. Thank you!"

"I can speak to the fact that my feelings of relief, that there is another person looking at my" saga " with fresh eyes and a legal mind. I have called on Ombudsman's Office for help on other topics, both were positive outcomes."

"I felt she listened to me and verified she understood my issue. She provided me with so much valuable information/knowledge and followed up with an email with all the information that we discussed."

"I didn't even know this office existed until I had a huge problem that in 5 months just wasn't getting resolved and was very stressful. A friend who works for the State suggested I contact the Ombudsman's office. If every office in AZ and elsewhere

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were this helpful and got results like this one—at least in my case—the world would be a better place. I can't thank them enough."

"Please pass my thanks and appreciation . . ."

". . . very helpful and followed up with an email providing further information."

"He is amazing!!!"

"Very helpful and professional"

"I appreciate it very much!"

"I am very pleased with the turn of events in my case. . . This is where the Ombudsmen's office is so very much needed. I have had great results from everyone I have worked with the last 3 times they assisted me. They deserve many more thank-yous than they likely get. In this case, I am blown away how quick my misery was over. Justice is still there to be had, and I am so grateful for the Ombudsmen's office of heroes. I believe I could have eventually fixed it but my brain would have been fried to a crisp. You gotta fight your own battles in life, but there is a safety net if you get weak. Be honest, be prepared, be patient... but first be grateful we have Ombudsmans Dept. that only hire heros like Whitney."

". . . even after my case was over, I reached out with a couple of questions and was happy to get a timely response as if my case was still in their hands to manage. Sometimes, once a case is closed in some agencies, it's like you don't exist anymore. . . there are still humans on the other end that do their job well."

"This was the best customer service I have received in a long time. Thank you!"

"Thomas was polite, informative, patient, and very knowledgeable and courteous. Thank you for helping me to understand the process and how I can better provide useful information."

"I appreciate the time spent with me to provide guidance, direction, and resources that allow me to gather the appropriate information for my problem so that I can obtain a satisfactory solution."

"I've been struggling to file my unemployment claim for five weeks since March 28, 2025. Today is May 23, 2025. She took time to explain a lot while I was trying to be polite and not take too much of someone's time, although I really need it. Thank you"

". . . kind, compassionate and knowledgeable!!!"

"Thorough, patient & knowledgeable."

"Excellent service"

"She was very HELPFUL, patient, and kind! 10 stars!!!! Knows her job extremely well."

"Handled my call and questions with professional courtesy!!!"

"I contacted several AZ state entities for assistance, but in the end, the AZ Ombudsman was the one and only that quickly and professionally brought resolution to my case. This agency is priceless given AZ state agencies performance."

## COMPELLING CASES

The following case summaries are examples taken from the 8,007 cases we handled in FY2025.

### GENERAL COMPLAINTS ABOUT STATE AGENCIES

**Our intervention resulted in stopping an unfair financial burden on a citizen or small business as exemplified by:**

**2406852. Department of Economic Security - Employment and Rehabilitation**

A woman complained that the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) told her she owed money due to an overpayment. She disputed this overpayment, believing it was caused by fraud in her account. While DES was investigating her fraud claim, she was notified by the US Treasury that they had sent her federal tax refund to DES to cover the overpayment. The woman also claimed that the US Treasury had indicated there was fraud related to her account. Now, she was worried because she did not want any fraud linked to her. She also argued that DES should not have intercepted her tax refund.

Our office asked the DES Ombudsman's Office about the woman's claim. After several weeks, DES told us they had investigated and concluded she had not committed fraud. Therefore, she was eligible for her tax refund. However, DES seemed to give conflicting information about when the refund would be issued. Sometimes, they even restated that she owed the overpayment. DES also informed us that they had mailed the check, but it had not yet been sent. After months of back-and-forth with DES, the woman informed our office that she had finally received her check. She was very thankful for our help. Regarding the fraud alert with the US Treasury, DES explained that they had not sent any fraud alert to the US Treasury, so they could not help with that issue.

**2407533. Arizona Department of Administration**

A person contacted our office to file a complaint against the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA). They stated they were a COBRA benefits recipient and had trouble removing their son from their account. The person tried multiple times to reach ADOA's COBRA division for assistance but claimed that the phone lines seemed to be stuck in an "out-of-office" mode, making it impossible to leave a voicemail. The person had to pay for a month of benefits coverage for their son, who no longer needed it.

We contacted the ADOA COBRA division and requested that they address the individual's concerns. An employee from the division contacted the individual and assisted in removing their son from the account. They also refunded the extra month of benefits the individual had paid for. We confirmed all of this with the individual, who said they were satisfied with the outcome.

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## **2403871. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office regarding a refund owed to them by the Department of Revenue. They expressed frustration over the difficulty in getting the department to respond and secure their refund. We reached out to the Department of Revenue with the details of the case and requested that their Problem Resolution Office ensure the taxpayer received the necessary assistance. Later, the taxpayer contacted us to confirm that they had been contacted by the agency's Problem Resolution Office and had received the refund they were seeking. They expressed gratitude toward both our office and the DOR Problem Resolution Office.

## **2502545. Department of Economic Security - Employment and Rehabilitation**

A woman taxpayer faced issues with Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). She claimed that DES intercepted and took her tax refund because the agency suspected she committed fraud. The woman insisted she was innocent and took DES to court. She won her case, but DES did not follow the court order to return the money it had taken. During our discussions, we learned that she had not yet filed a complaint with DES's internal ombudsman as required by law, so we advised her on how to contact the DES Ombudsman's Office.

Soon after, the taxpayer returned to us, saying that the DES internal ombudsman had not helped correct the mistake. The woman stated that she believed no one at DES was attempting to refund her money and was not following the order. To make matters worse, she was laid off during this time.

We contacted the DES Ombudsman's Office on her behalf, shared her story and allegations, and requested that the DES Ombudsman's Office investigate. We had to follow up several times over a few weeks, but eventually, the DES internal Ombudsman's Office informed us that the errors in the DES system had been fixed. DES agreed that the taxpayer was eligible for a full refund. She went to the office, picked up her check, and the case was closed. We not only saved her money but also ensured the issue was resolved during a difficult time for her.

## **2501530. Department of Revenue**

The finance officer of a manufacturing company stated that their company had amended its 2023 tax return. The return was then audited by the Arizona Department of Revenue (DOR). The DOR determined that the company was owed nearly \$200,000 in a refund. On April 18, 2024, the DOR informed the company that the refund would take about 20 weeks to process. Twenty weeks had passed without the check arriving. When he contacted our office, it had been over 40 weeks since the initial notice. He claimed he was unable to get any information from the DOR about why the refund had not been issued.

Our office obtained a signed release from the individual, authorizing us to access information about his case. We then contacted our DOR contacts regarding the delayed refund for his company. The DOR responded quickly, stating the refund check would be issued soon. However, they did not provide an explanation for the delay. About a week later, the man contacted our office to thank us for helping him obtain his refund check.

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Since the DOR did not explain why the refund was delayed, our office inquired again. DOR responded, stating that its refund processing team had faced issues that complicated reviewing the refund, including retirements and other staff turnover. A new audit manager was finally able to research and analyze the return, enabling the issuance of the refund. The agency said that its Audit Division Assistant Director and Deputy Assistant Director were taking steps to ensure that future turnover does not cause similar problems.

## **2404474. Department of Transportation – Motor Vehicle Division**

A business owner with a fleet of 11 vehicles complained that the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), Motor Vehicle Division (MVD), was imposing financial penalties on four of his vehicles, claiming the insurance had lapsed. The man disputed this and stated his coverage had never lapsed, providing timely proof to the MVD; however, they had not removed the penalties or returned his calls.

Our office contacted MVD to inquire about the man's issue. Several days later, MVD confirmed that the man was correct and his insurance had not lapsed, nor had he failed to submit proof on time. MVD explained that the error was due to an employee leaving and improper workload distribution. Regardless, MVD removed the man's penalties and updated his insurance information.

We informed the man about what we had learned, and he thanked us for our help, stating that he believed he would have had to pay the penalties to the MVD if we hadn't contacted the agency and prompted them to re-review the case.

## **2501128. Department of Public Safety**

A security guard was renewing his armed security license with the Department of Public Safety (DPS). However, he was recently informed that his license renewal would take longer than usual. The guard was worried because he had started the renewal process on time, but it was delayed through no fault of his own. He emphasized that obtaining the renewal was essential, as he would not be able to continue his job without the renewed license.

Our office contacted our contact at DPS to explain the man's situation and asked if his renewal could be expedited to prevent him from losing his job. DPS responded that they could expedite his renewal, which has now been issued. We told the security guard that his renewal had been processed, and he expressed gratitude for our assistance.

## **2502333. Department of Economic Security - Employment and Rehabilitation**

An individual contacted our office regarding an issue with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) and Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits. She alleged that DES demanded repayment due to a procedural error when she was approved. The individual had already appealed and requested reconsideration. She also contacted the DES Ombudsman's Office, but her taxes were levied despite her case still being in the reconsideration process and without proper notice of intent to levy. Our office requested that the DES Ombudsman's Office look into the complaint.

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After a few weeks, an Administrative Law Judge reconsidered her case and granted a waiver of repayment. The individual thanked our office for our help and for making her feel less alone during the process, especially given her location many hours from Phoenix and how overwhelming it can be to navigate large agencies.

## **2407542. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office about the Department of Revenue (DOR) reaching out to him regarding fees they were improperly assessing. He said he had already paid the bills sent by the DOR and couldn't reach their office to resolve the issue. We contacted the DOR to discuss the situation and requested that they review the case. The DOR quickly contacted the taxpayer and discovered that he was attempting to pay through a bank method with technical issues. They waived the penalties and agreed to accept the payment by mail to settle the case. The taxpayer thanked us, and we subsequently closed the case.

**Our intervention resulted in identifying a field practice that was not in accordance with the agency's stated procedures and/or statutes, as exemplified by:**

## **2403961. Department of Economic Security - Employment and Rehabilitation**

A client of DES contacted our office to request assistance in reversing an overpayment received from the Department of Economic Security (DES). The DES client mentioned that they had already tried to resolve the issue through the DES Ombudsman's Office without success. We contacted the DES Ombudsman's Office to request a review of the case. DES confirmed the agency made a mistake. DES corrected the file in the claimant's favor.

## **2405443. AHCCCS**

An individual contacted our office to file a complaint against the Arizona Long Term Care System (ALTCS), a part of AHCCCS that provides health insurance for individuals who have an age-related and/or physical disability. The individual stated that they held the power of attorney for their cousin and claimed that ALTCS was not enrolling their cousin in a coverage plan due to a technical error with its computer system. The individual stated that the ALTCS employee they spoke with said they had no idea when the issue would be fixed and that their cousin would have to wait until it was resolved to get coverage.

We contacted the AHCCCS Office of Client Advocacy and requested that they address the individual's issue. The Office of Client Advocacy stepped in and worked with ALTCS to manually resolve the system issue, enabling the cousin to apply for ALTCS coverage. ALTCS explained that the issue was a one-time glitch with the cousin's account, not a systemic problem. We verified this with the individual and advised them to contact us again if any further issues arise.

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## **2502328. Arizona Department of Administration**

A state employee who changed her health care coverage during the recent open enrollment period complained about the Department of Administration (ADOA) benefits. The woman had coverage from another source, so she canceled her state medical coverage. However, she wanted to keep her dental coverage. Unfortunately, ADOA canceled all her coverage, including the dental. She had been trying for months to get ADOA to fix the mistake but was having trouble even getting anyone to respond to her.

Our office contacted our ADOA representative and relayed the woman's issue, asking them to review the open enrollment changes she entered and compare them with the changes made by ADOA.

It took several weeks, but ADOA responded by informing her that they had made a mistake by canceling her dental coverage. However, they reinstated her dental coverage and refunded her for the dental premiums she had paid since then. We informed the woman of what we had discovered, and she was very grateful.

## **2406574. Department of Economic Security – Benefits and Medical Eligibility**

A woman applying for Cash Assistance was told she had provided all the necessary documentation and that her son's birth certificate was not needed. DES never followed up with her, and her application was denied. She tried to contact DES but received no response or callback. She is homeless and believes she was more than qualified for assistance.

We directed her to the DES Ombudsman's Office, but she never received any replies to her emails or calls. We decided to reach out on her behalf, and within two weeks of making contact, we received a response. DES informed us that the original worker had made an error by not requesting the birth certificate, which led to the case being closed. They sent this error back to the office for review and contacted the client to inform her of what happened. They also reviewed prior case processing to identify any previous errors.

## **2406380. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office about an overdue refund from the Department of Revenue. They said they couldn't get help from DOR, despite multiple attempts, and explained that they needed the money due to a large overpayment related to their family business. Our office reached out to DOR and discovered that the taxpayer's contact information had been accidentally overlooked. DOR promptly issued a check to the taxpayer to settle the refund. The taxpayer thanked us for the quick assistance. We also expressed gratitude to DOR for processing the refund, and later, we closed the case.

## **2406753. Department of Liquor Licenses and Control**

A Flagstaff business owner encountered issues when applying for a liquor license with the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control (DLLC). The owner claimed that his application was abruptly canceled by the DLLC without any explanation or opportunity to appeal. He had made reasonable efforts to find out why, but was unsuccessful.

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Our office contacted the DLLC to inquire about the owner's application and, if it was denied, to request a copy of the denial notice. We also asked the DLLC to ensure the owner receives an explanation for the denial and is informed of his appeal rights.

A few days later, the Assistant Director of the DLLC responded that the DLLC had made mistakes when it processed the application. Staff mistakenly denied the application without communicating with or allowing the owner to correct the errors. However, he had spoken with the owner and instructed him to fix the errors on the application and assured him he would personally ensure the DLLC processed his application. We informed the man of what we had learned, and he thanked us.

## **Our intervention helped identify a problem with or lead to a change in statute, rule, or policy:**

### **2404605. Arizona Board of Fingerprinting / Department of Child Safety**

A woman claimed that the Board of Fingerprinting (the Board) failed to complete her Central Registry Exception (CRE) decision within the legally required timeframe. After investigating and substantiating the complaint, our office worked with the Board and the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) to draft new legislation to help streamline the Board's process. SB1438 passed during the 57th Legislature, 1st Regular Session.

*A detailed summary of the case is included in the Department of Child Safety section of the report.*

## **Our intervention helped lead to a change in an agency's procedure or practice / corrected a systemic problem as exemplified by:**

### **2403693. Department of Economic Security – Benefits and Medical Eligibility**

A woman faced issues with her Nutrition Assistance benefits from the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). She was approved for one period but denied for another, leading her to file an appeal. However, she disagreed with the DES Administrative Law Judge's (ALJ) recommendation and asked for clarification. She noticed that the appeal document she received included instructions on how to request an audio recording of her hearing. To verify the ALJ's recommendation, she called the phone number provided to request the recording, but there was no option to do so during the call. She felt this was unfair. Our office requested that she send us a copy of the appeal document.

After reviewing the document, it included a statement: "To request an audio recording of the hearing, please call [phone number omitted]." We called the listed number but found no option to request the recording. To make sure it wasn't a temporary technical issue, we called several times over the next few days; however, the outcome was the same each time.

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Our office contacted DES and explained the issue, stating that callers should be able to request an audio recording or have their statement removed from all appeal documents. A few days later, DES responded, confirming they had verified our concern and that their IT department had added an option for callers to speak with a representative and request a copy of the recording.

## **2501159. Board of Nursing**

A resident contacted our office, claiming that the position statement issued by the Board of Nursing discouraged his wife's pharmacist from providing her with the pain medication she needed to live comfortably. Our office reviewed the statement and found it to be consistent with the current Arizona statute and Administrative Rule. However, we reached out to the Board of Nursing to discuss the concern raised by the resident. The Board removed the original position statement and posted a new one that included outlined exceptions, hoping it would encourage pharmacists to follow best practices. We thanked the Board for their special consideration and later closed the case.

## **2502358. Acupuncture Board of Examiners**

A licensee contacted our office regarding difficulties renewing their license and being unable to reach the Acupuncture Board of Examiners. We contacted the Board and helped ensure the license could be processed and renewed. The Board resolved the issue and identified the technical problem that had caused the delay. We then closed the case.

## **2403824. Arizona State Parks**

A complainant contacted our office regarding the State Park policy on service animals in training. We reviewed the concern and discussed various factors with State Parks. The State Parks considered the matter and updated their policy to include new information about service animals in training. They also corrected the information provided to the public about the rule.

## **2500379. Department of Housing**

A vendor contractor for the Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH) contacted our office to claim that their permits were being unfairly withheld and that the agency was causing unnecessary delays. Our office examined the allegations and discussed with ADOH the reasons why the process appeared to be blocked. Upon reviewing the case, we found that the vendor had commenced construction without obtaining a permit. For this violation, the agency stated that the contractor was required to sign a Consent Agreement with the agency to acknowledge the wrongdoing before the permit process could proceed.

Our office reviewed the correspondence between the vendor and ADOH and recommended that ADOH establish a procedure to promptly set a date for when it would consider a Consent Agreement to be rejected, as the vendor seemed to be rejecting a Consent Agreement, or appeared to be confused about the process or purpose of the Consent Agreement. ADOH agreed with our advice and implemented a process to ensure that future vendors were aware of the timeline for Consent Agreements and the procedures for any subsequent requests for a hearing. We thanked ADOH for their assistance in reviewing the matter, reported our findings to the constituent, and subsequently closed the case.

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## **2500708. Registrar of Contractors**

A resident contacted our office regarding their case with the Arizona Registrar of Contractors (ROC). They claimed the ROC had incorrectly closed their case and reported difficulty reaching the ROC for clarification. We contacted the ROC to discuss why the case was closed and to review the communication issues. After review, we found that the ROC was partly correct since the case was outside the statute of limitations specified in the law. However, the case was originally submitted to the ROC within the proper timeframe, and the ROC failed to act on the submission during that period. We discussed the case with the ROC. During this review, the ROC realized the issue was due to only a single investigator being notified about the submission, and that investigator had been on a long leave of absence. The ROC acknowledged this problem and took steps to prevent similar oversights in the future. We thanked the ROC for their help in reviewing the issue and for implementing systemic improvements. We informed the resident of our findings and later closed the case.

**Our intervention resolved cases that no one else was able to resolve internally, as exemplified by:**

## **2502631. Department of Economic Security - Child Support Services**

A father contacted our office with a complaint about the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) and specifically the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) because they continued to assess the child support balance and levy tax refunds for an outstanding amount due to a lapse in the child's insurance coverage. This occurred despite the father submitting proof of continuous coverage multiple times via mail, fax, email, and after numerous unsuccessful attempts to resolve the issue by phone, email, and in person visits. Our office assisted by gathering all relevant documents and release forms and reaching out to the DES Ombudsman's Office to investigate and contact the father. We continued to facilitate communication until the matter was resolved. The father and his wife thanked our office sincerely for providing guidance and resources to help them address their concerns.

## **2403873. Arizona State Retirement System**

A retiree living abroad contacted our office about difficulties they were facing in receiving their retirement funds from the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS). They were experiencing technical issues in getting the funds to the country where they lived and couldn't reach ASRS to resolve the problem. Our office contacted the ASRS with the details of their case and worked with their agency to help ensure the retiree received the funds. After resolving the technical issues with the international retiree, our office helped confirm that checks were being properly issued to them to cover the lost funds. The retiree confirmed they received the checks and expressed gratitude.

## **2405666. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer submitted all necessary documents to receive her tax refund, but she hasn't received anything in months. The Department of Revenue kept asking for more documents and even requested a new I.D., but there was no progress for five months.

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We contacted the DOR's Problem Resolution Office on her behalf and reviewed the case. Within three days, the issue was resolved. We helped settle this month's long-standing problem, and the DOR's Problem Resolution Office agreed that the return should be processed with interest. DOR realized that the return had not been processed, despite initially thinking they had resolved the issue. DOR stated that the taxpayer's account was fixed and said she would receive her money within two weeks.

## **2502233. Acupuncture Board of Examiners**

A licensee contacted our office because they were experiencing trouble renewing their license and were unable to reach the Acupuncture Board of Examiners. We reached out to the Board to help resolve any technical issues that were preventing the process and to ensure their license renewal was completed on time. The Board promptly resolved the issue, and the licensee thanked us for our assistance.

## **2500806. Department of Agriculture**

A woman concerned about the Salt River wild horse herd, under the jurisdiction of the Arizona Department of Agriculture, contacted our office regarding an outstanding record request. She said she wanted the records to help determine information about the horses and herd counts. She was especially worried that a stallion had been separated from its family band and might be gelded. She stated that, despite her best efforts and giving the agency ample time, she was having trouble obtaining the documents or getting a meaningful response. She provided evidence to support her complaint and showed that the agency had not responded in a timely manner.

We contacted the Arizona Department of Agriculture and reviewed the matter. We asked them to take steps to respond to the lady. Initially, the agency claimed it had no meaningful records to provide on the subject. We reviewed the matter again with them and asked what could be provided. The agency then provided her with a copy of the state contract, the management plan, as well as any herd health reports for the past three years. Additionally, the Department Ombudsman provided the resident with his direct number and answered all the woman's outstanding questions. The woman thanked our office for helping facilitate the assistance, and we later closed the case.

## **Our intervention helped resolve a grievance against a state agency as exemplified by:**

### **2503627. Board of Pharmacy**

A pharmacist complained that the Arizona Board of Pharmacy ("the Board") was slow to process his Arizona license application and had improperly disclosed his criminal history. Our office investigated his concerns, communicated with the Board, and discussed Arizona laws and regulations related to his license application with him. The man appreciated the guidance and resources we provided. He later asked for additional help and advice on communicating with the Board. Our office responded to his questions, explained the statutes and procedures for board hearings, and helped facilitate communication as needed until he completed his hearing at the Board and received his license. He thanked us for dedicating so much time to guiding him through a stressful time.

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**2503314. Department of Housing - Manufactured Housing Office**

An Arizona individual reported that the Arizona Department of Manufactured Housing was wrongly withholding a permit for her home. Our office investigated her concerns, communicated with the Department, and thoroughly discussed with the individual the relevant laws and the options for obtaining a permit to complete her home. We made sure she had the correct contact information for the Department, and she thanked us for our time and the resources we provided.

**2503143. Arizona State Parks**

A recreational rental company complained that the Arizona Department of Parks Board (the Board) would not grant him a concessionaire permit at a state park because another private company had already applied for and received a state contract with exclusivity. He was concerned that this violated state and federal antitrust or monopoly laws. Our office investigated his concerns, reviewed applicable statutes and state policies, and confirmed that the Board was following proper procedures and laws. We shared our research with the complainant, the owner of the rental company, and advised him on how to best utilize the Board's existing systems in the future so he can be considered for future business and bidding opportunities. He thanked us.

**2404147. Department of Public Safety**

An applicant for a clearance card contacted our office with concerns about receiving a DPS clearance card and having difficulty reaching DPS for a response. Our office discussed the matter with DPS and helped ensure they responded to the applicant. We also reviewed the claim that DPS had wrongly denied him a clearance card, despite it appearing that they had issued one to him. DPS acknowledged a brief mistake that they quickly corrected, which initially caused confusion. We explained the situation to the applicant, thanked DPS for their prompt correction and handling of the issue, and the resident expressed gratitude. We later closed the case.

**2407401. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted us regarding a tax refund they were owed and had difficulty receiving a response from the Department of Revenue (DOR). We discussed the issue with the DOR and found that the delay was due to the taxpayer leaving the applicable address incomplete on the paperwork. DOR agreed to fix the issue. DOR corrected its database, processed the refund, and mailed the check to the constituent. The constituent contacted us shortly after to confirm their issue was resolved and expressed gratitude.

**Our intervention resulted in better service for the citizens, as exemplified by:**

**2405982. Department of Economic Security - Employment and Rehabilitation**

A woman seeking benefits from DES contacted our office for help with her DES unemployment (UI) benefits application. She said she tried to reach DES staff to learn about the application process but couldn't connect with someone knowledgeable who could answer her questions.

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We reviewed her situation and explained the DES UI process. Based on the information she provided and the details on the DES website, we told her it was unlikely she qualified for the program because she was currently unable to work. We noted that DES would make the final decision and, depending on her circumstances, she might or might not have valid grounds to appeal. We also provided her with information about other resources that could support her besides UI benefits. Additionally, we explained the benefit options process to her. We told her she could contact us again if needed and mentioned that DES has an internal Ombudsman's Office if she encounters any new barriers.

The woman thanked us for the information and said that before reaching out to our office, she had been unable to get through to anyone at the agency to find out if she could receive unemployment benefits while unable to work.

## **2404681. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office to file a complaint against the Arizona Department of Revenue (DOR). The taxpayer claimed that the DOR charged them and added a penalty to a tax payment they had already made. The taxpayer had tried to resolve the issue with the DOR but was told they needed to complete and submit additional paperwork before the DOR could review their case. We contacted the DOR Problem Resolution Office and discussed the matter with them. We requested that they address the taxpayer's concerns, and the Problem Resolution Office agreed. DOR staff then responded the same day and successfully resolved the taxpayer's issue without delay.

## **2405604. Department of Economic Security – Benefits and Medical Eligibility**

A woman whose son had died from a fentanyl overdose complained about being unable to contact the Department of Economic Security (DES). The woman's son had been receiving benefits through an EBT card at the time of his passing, and she was worried that other people might have taken his card and were now using it. Additionally, the woman said her son had just received a letter notifying him that his benefits would be extended. She had tried calling DES to cancel his benefits, but she couldn't get through to anyone, and her voicemails were not returned.

Our office contacted our DES contacts and explained the woman's issue, asking someone to reach out to the mother and help her cancel her son's benefits. The next day, the woman emailed our office to say that DES had contacted her and placed a fraud alert on her son's account. She thanked us for our help. A few weeks later, DES also informed our office that they had been in touch with the woman and confirmed her son's passing, as well as the placement of a fraud alert on his account.

## **2502818. Department of Economic Security - Developmental Disabilities**

The owner of a Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) agency complained that the Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), part of the Department of Economic Security (DES), was failing to enforce its oversight responsibilities by continuing contracts with service providers who improperly classify employees as independent contractors, thus gaining an unfair market advantage over compliant providers. The owner filed a formal grievance with DDD last year, but DDD has not responded despite multiple requests for a status update.

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Our office reviewed the relevant policies and laws, provided contact information for the DES Ombudsman's Office to improve communication, and shared resources and contacts for pursuing changes within the agency and in accordance with Arizona law regarding potential labor and tax law violations by Arizona employers with other state agencies or lawmakers. We asked the owner to contact us again if additional assistance is needed with DES, DDD, or if more informational resources are required.

## **2405252. Department of Transportation – Motor Vehicle Division**

A motorist contacted our office, claiming that the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) and their Abandoned Vehicle Unit were unresponsive despite multiple follow-ups to register a vehicle in their name. We contacted ADOT to discuss the case and ensured they processed the vehicle correctly. We learned that the motorist needed to fill out a transfer form, so we quickly reached out to update them and provided the necessary form to facilitate a prompt transfer. They appreciated our assistance.

## **2503823. Department of Public Safety**

A security guard contacted our office regarding a license they needed to maintain their employment. They informed us that they were waiting for an update on their license and had been experiencing trouble contacting the Department of Public Safety (DPS). We contacted DPS, reviewed the issues, and DPS updated its records and quickly sent the license to the security guard, allowing them to continue working.

## **2404149. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office about an outstanding tax return issue and difficulty reaching DOR. We contacted DOR to discuss the matter, and they immediately resolved it, ensuring the tax return was submitted and waiving any potential late fees. We thanked DOR for their quick response and later closed the case.

## **2404879. Department of Insurance and Financial Institutions**

A motorist was having issues with his auto insurance company, claiming they threatened not to pay for his repairs unless he took his vehicle to one of their affiliated service centers. He believed this was illegal in Arizona, so he contacted the Arizona Department of Insurance and Financial Institutions (DIFI) to file a complaint. However, during his interactions with a DIFI employee, he said the employee was unprofessional and rude. He refused the employee's request to transfer his complaint to another DIFI employee and to speak with a supervisor. Frustrated with his experience, the man contacted our office.

Our office reached out to our contacts at DIFI and shared the man's complaint, requesting they address his issues with the auto insurance company and review his concerns regarding the DIFI employee.

A few days later, DIFI informed us that they had contacted the motorist and resolved his issues. They also told us that their review of the communications from the DIFI employee assigned to the case revealed the need for one-on-one coaching. Additionally, at the man's request, DIFI managers reassigned his case to another employee.

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## **2503053. Department of Economic Security - Developmental Disabilities**

A sister complained that the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) was denying her sibling's applications for essential care because she couldn't access old records confirming his developmental disabilities from his youth. She was worried that the denial was unfair because the state programs, schools, and medical providers involved at that time didn't digitize, preserve, or share records from that period with her. As a result, she was unable to meet the application requirements, which she felt were unreasonable. Our office examined the complaint, along with the relevant laws and procedures used by DDD. In the end, we helped by reconnecting the sister with DDD so she could reapply, now with more resources, tools, and documentation. She thanked us for taking the time to provide resources and answer her questions.

## **2502914. AHCCCS**

An Arizona patient contacted our office to file a complaint against the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). She claimed that AHCCCS was refusing to cover dental procedures included in her insurance plan. We advised her to contact the AHCCCS Office of Client Advocacy first and provided their contact information. However, due to her technological limitations, we ultimately arranged multiple written and phone communications between her and the agency, ensuring she could escalate her concerns to the right people. Our office also provided resources that connected her to additional benefits in Arizona, such as nutrition assistance and medical care, and helped her pursue complaints about her perceived mistreatment. She expressed sincere gratitude for taking the time to listen to her, help her navigate her benefits, and develop a plan to access the care and resources she needed.

## **2500810. Department of Revenue**

A taxpayer contacted our office about an unresolved issue with contacting DOR regarding an electronic filing. She complained she was unable to reach anyone at DOR through conventional means to resolve her problem. Our office discussed her concerns with DOR, and they agreed to contact the constituent promptly. DOR followed through and contacted the taxpayer, answered her questions, and waived the relevant penalties resulting from the confusion. The resident expressed gratitude for our assistance, and we subsequently closed the case.

## **2404162. Department of Transportation – Motor Vehicle Division**

A motorist contacted our office to file a complaint against the Arizona Motor Vehicle Division (MVD). They claimed they had been denied a driver's license in another state because Arizona had placed a hold on their license for a DUI from over ten years ago. The motorist had completed the required interlock hours in a different state but no longer had access to the records Arizona needed to lift the hold.

We worked with the motorist and then advised them to contact the MVD Constituent Services Office, as they had not tried to do so for over a year and therefore had no recent responses from the MVD regarding their account. The motorist followed our advice and contacted the MVD Constituent Services Office. Within a few days, the DOR completed the review and removed the hold from the motorist's account. The motorist thanked us and the MVD for helping them.

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## **2503727. Industrial Commission of Arizona**

An injured Arizona worker raised concerns that the Industrial Commission of Arizona (ICA) was not properly handling his workers' compensation claims to cover necessary medical treatments. He also stated that the ICA was holding claimants to higher standards than insurance companies regarding paperwork and protocol completion.

Our office reviewed his concerns, along with the applicable statutes and policies related to his case. Some aspects of his complaint were premature, as he was still involved in the administrative law process of adjudicating his claims. Nonetheless, we advised him on how to escalate complaints through ICA Claims and the ICA Ombudsman, providing contact information when needed. We requested he reach out again if he requires more resources or has further questions. He thanked us.

## **2406821. Department of Transportation – Motor Vehicle Division**

An active-duty military member contacted our office to convert a standard Class D driver's license into a travel license. The individual did not understand what was required for the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) to process the request and was having difficulty resolving the issue on their own. Our office reached out to the MVD to discuss the matter, learned the process, and explained it to the complainant, along with providing a copy of the form they needed to complete to move forward. The complainant completed the required form, and the MVD accepted it, allowing the process to proceed. They thanked us for our help, and we later closed the case.

## **Our intervention helped resolve issues associated with administering the Arizona Department of Education's Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) as required by A.R.S. § 15-2405:**

### **2406867. Department of Education – Empowerment Scholarship Account**

A grandmother was not receiving the proper funding for her granddaughter's ESA account and felt the agency was giving her the runaround. We contacted the agency on her behalf, but after a couple of weeks, there was no reply. We followed up again and received a response. We informed the agency that our review showed that although the grandmother had always stated her granddaughter was autistic, the agency never fully acknowledged this or provided her with the correct level of funding.

After we followed up, the agency conducted a thorough re-review of the case. They identified the mistake and corrected the issue. They told us that the grandmother would receive the correct funding moving forward. In a later email, the Department of Education also clarified that they had added extra funds to compensate for the amount she had been receiving incorrectly before. Not only were we able to secure the proper funding for her, but she also received the money she should have been getting from the start.

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## **2403872. Department of Education – Empowerment Scholarship Account**

A teacher contacted our office with a concern that the Department of Education was not processing a renewal contract for the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA). Our office reached out to the Department with the details of their concern and the contract submission so that the preschooler to whom it applied could continue participating in the program. The Department quickly processed the contract and ensured that the student could remain in the program. We thanked the Department for their prompt assistance and later closed the case.

## **2404193. Department of Education – Empowerment Scholarship Account**

A parent who is a member of the Navajo Nation and lives in Phoenix encountered an issue with the Department of Education's (ADE) rejection of her Proof of Residency document when applying for the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program. She argued that she had submitted an acceptable Proof of Residency document listed on the ESA website. However, the ESA program kept rejecting it, claiming that the form needed to be issued by the tribe. The woman disagreed, stating that the form, titled Certificate of Tribal Enrollment (506 Form), was not issued by the tribe but was a self-attestation form.

First, our office reviewed the section of the ADE/ESA website listing acceptable Proof of Residency documents for the ESA program. We confirmed that the Certificate of Tribal Enrollment (506 Form) was on the list. We also downloaded this form from the ADE/ESA website. To be thorough, we searched the internet for other 506 forms in case more than one exists with the same name; however, we found none. After reviewing the form, our office agreed with the woman, as the tribe did not issue the Certificate of Tribal Enrollment (Form 506), but it was a self-attestation document. The form contained fields for tribal information, but it required the tribal member's signature, not the tribe's.

Our office contacted ADE to explain the woman's issue and requested that the ADE/ESA program review the form, as we believed the woman's Proof of Residency document had been unjustly denied. Several days later, the ESA program responded and advised, "Our team is working on finalizing a user-friendly document for acceptable Proof of Residency documentation, which will not include the self-attestation form. In [the complainant's] case, after further review, the enrollment team was able to verify her Arizona residency and has approved her application." Our office informed the woman, who was grateful for our assistance.

## **2407494. Department of Education – Empowerment Scholarship Account**

A mother explained that she was caught in the Department of Education's (ADE) Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) funding delay regarding educational services for her child with a disability. She said she used ESA funds to enroll her son in a special needs program at a school. However, the program at that school did not turn out to be suitable, so she looked for an alternative at another institution. When she discovered the new program, she withdrew her child from the old school, hoping to enroll him in the new program. The ESA funds were refunded from the old school and returned to the ESA program. However, when she tried to enroll her son in the new program, she found that the refunded ESA funds were not accessible to her. As a result, she was unable to use the funds to enroll her child. When she

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contacted the ESA program, she was informed that it could take six to nine weeks for the money to become available again. This delay, understandably, created barriers to enrollment, caused childcare issues, and also seemed unnecessarily lengthy.

Our office contacted our ADE contacts to inquire about the mother's issue and whether a timeframe of six to nine weeks is typical.

The ADE responded that, due to the significant dollar amount involved, the ESA program conducted several checks to ensure proper use of ESA funds. However, since the funding was delaying a child's special-needs program, the mother's request was prioritized for processing.

We informed the mother that she would likely receive the funding soon or be contacted by the ESA program if any issues arose. A few days later, the ESA program notified our office that the funding was now available for the woman. We informed her, and she expressed her gratitude.

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## OMBUDSMAN INTERVENTION IN CHILD SAFETY (DCS) CASES

The Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide investigates complaints from people against the Department of Child Safety (DCS). Parents, grandparents, children's relatives, and other family members often turn to our office when they feel DCS has mistreated them. Other sources of complaints include foster parents, service providers, attorneys, and members of the Arizona State Legislature. Although less common, we also receive complaints from foster care teenagers and DCS employees.

Most of the coaching and assistance inquiries we receive involve helping families communicate with the assigned caseworker or legal counsel, explaining the DCS and dependency processes, clarifying investigations and placement decisions, and educating about the proper way to address grievances related to investigations or child removal. We contact DCS to gather insights from agency administrators regarding assistance and investigation complaints. Typically, a phone call or email to DCS staff can resolve common issues, such as a lack of communication with the caseworker, questions about the DCS process, placement considerations for children in foster care, or inquiries about visitation rights. Case managers, supervisors, or upper DCS management can provide clarity on events, laws, or policies and procedures. We facilitate clear communication between families, our office, and the various points of contact within DCS.

Some of the complaints we receive require a thorough review of the case and direct contact with the caseworker or agency representative. Many complaints involve residents feeling that the agency has violated their rights or failed to provide adequate services. For these complaints, our office may conduct full-file reviews, request documents and supporting data, and/or meet with DCS staff. We examine case correspondence, therapeutic reports, and the DCS Guardian database as sources of information to help resolve disputes.

Many of the complaints we handle are fairly isolated or specific to individual cases. However, for certain issues, we have noticed patterns across multiple complaints that indicate systemic problems or deficiencies in DCS actions. In these instances, addressing just one complaint is insufficient. Instead, we identify recurring issues and escalate them with DCS management to seek systemic solutions.

Most often, in DCS cases, we serve as an informational resource for the public. We go to great lengths to equip parents, other family members, foster parents, service providers, mandatory reporters, and even older children in the system with knowledge on how to better inform themselves and improve outcomes for their child's safety. In FY23, we developed two resource booklets with the Supreme Court Improvement Committee. We continue to provide these booklets to the public. One booklet contains reference and explanatory materials for those involved with DCS or dependency cases. The second booklet is a compilation of community services that may be helpful in various circumstances.

During FY25, we worked with acting DCS Director David Lujan. In his interactions with our office, he embraced the role of the ombudsman office within DCS and our office (AZOCA), an independent, external ombudsman agency. He was a particularly effective partner in our efforts to seek a speedy legislative solution to alleviate the difficulties between DCS and the Board of Fingerprinting. See case #2404605 in the summary of DCS cases below.

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## OMBUDSMAN DCS CASE LOG FY 2025 KEY CATEGORIES

The following chart illustrates the origin of some of our DCS calls, as well as the types of complaints they involve.

DCS Complainant Information Chart– July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	
<b>DCS Complaint Source Relationship</b>	
Parent/Guardian	800
Kin/Significant Contact	206
Unknown/NA	54
Other	35
Foster	32
Service Provider	16
Child	9
Attorney	5
Agency Worker	5
CASA	1
<b>Type of Complaint</b>	
Communication Issues	352
Case Worker	342
DCS Process Questions	265
Investigation Issues	216
Placement Issues	172
Removal Issues	125
False Allegations	118
Case Worker Supervisor	116
Records	106
Inadequate Case Plan Efforts	104
Visitation Issues	85
Other	67
Service Issues	51
Unknown/NA	46
Judicial Issues	44
DCS Ombudsman Communication Issues	39
Reporting Abuse	35
Attorney Issues	31
Needs DCS Contact Info	23
Criminal Investigation Issues	15
DCS Ombudsman General	15
Central Registry	13
Payment Issues	13
Transportation Issues	12
PSRT	11
Adoption Issue	9
Other (Out of Jurisdiction)	8
Foster Licensing Issue	5
ICWA Tribal Concern	5
OCWI	4

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The Legislature directs us in our budget note to focus on DCS cases. During FY 2025, 14.4% of our cases involved DCS, totaling 1,153 cases. The previous year, FY 2024, DCS cases represented 18% of our total, with 1,254 cases. In FY 2023, DCS cases accounted for 22.32%, comprising 1,345 cases. In FY 2022, we handled 1,497 DCS cases, and in FY 2021, there were 1,794 DCS cases. Therefore, the number of DCS cases we receive has been trending downward over the past five years.

## **Our intervention helped resolve a case involving more than one agency or level of government.**

### **2501464. Department of Child Safety**

An attorney representing a father whose children were in DCS care claimed that DCS refused to transcribe vital documents into the father's preferred language. Our office directed the attorney to DCS's internal ombudsman's office, which then referred her to the Attorney General's office. The Attorney General's office had previously told her to contact the DCS Ombudsman's office. Our office intervened to ensure the attorney was not sent repeatedly between the two offices.

The Attorney General's office initially offered to have the documents orally translated but refused to provide a written translation. After a meeting between the father's attorney and the Assistant Attorney General, DCS agreed to translate the documents into written form. DCS committed to disclosing all documents in English to the juvenile court within the required timeframes, then submitting the documents to a translation service for the father to receive them in his preferred language.

## **Our intervention helped resolve a case that no one else was able to resolve internally.**

### **2404008. Department of Child Safety**

A mother and stepfather (the parents) asked for their case records from the Department of Child Safety (DCS). They submitted a records request to DCS on February 22, 2024. DCS apologized 132 days later, on July 3, 2024, for not fulfilling the request; however, DCS still had not provided the records more than a month and a half later, on Saturday, July 22, 2024, when the parents gave up and contacted our office. The parents noted in their report to us that they had also attempted to resolve several concerns with DCS's Ombudsman office ten weeks earlier, and again on July 29, 2024, but their concerns hadn't been fully resolved.

We explained that DCS's Ombudsman office would need a reasonable amount of time to contact the agency's records department and request that it produce the records without further delay. We suggested that they give the DCS Ombudsman's office a short timeframe of a few days to assist before our office intervened.

The parents were very patient and allowed DCS three weeks, after which they reported back to us that neither the DCS Records Unit (CRCU) nor the DCS Ombudsman's office had resolved their concerns. We contacted the DCS Ombudsman office on August 21, 2024, reviewed the case, and noted the extensive

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delay and other issues. We urged the DCS Ombudsman office to ensure progress with the case and improved communication. We requested DCS to address the issues and report back to us.

Later that same day, DCS informed us that its records department had spoken directly with the parents about 20 days earlier and was familiar with the matter. The DCS Ombudsman rechecked with the records department to determine if the parents could receive a new estimated release date. The records department then told the DCS Ombudsman's office that it had contacted the parents again to notify them that the records would be released the next day. DCS later confirmed that the records were sent to the parents.

## **2404081. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother, who was the kinship placement for her grandchild, sought guidance regarding her grandchild's Department of Child Safety (DCS) case. She mentioned that the child's mother told her she would pick up the child after the next court hearing, but the grandmother hadn't heard from DCS about whether they would be reunifying the child with her mother. She expressed frustration because she had contacted the case manager and their supervisor multiple times, but neither responded, leaving her unsure about the child's placement status. We asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to help facilitate contact between the grandmother and the DCS team.

The DCS Ombudsman's office responded a few minutes later, saying they would ask the supervisor to contact the grandmother. About an hour later, they informed us that they had contacted the supervisor, who then reached out to the grandmother and answered her questions.

The grandmother confirmed with our office that the supervisor had answered her questions. She also reiterated that her main concern was not hearing from either the supervisor or the case manager for nearly two months before she contacted us. The grandmother told us she appreciated our quick response and help in connecting her with DCS.

## **2404329. Department of Child Safety**

An aunt of a child in Department of Child Safety (DCS) custody alleged that DCS was not following court orders. She stated that, on July 24, 2024, the judge ordered DCS to contact the family so they could participate in Children and Family Team (CFT) meetings. The aunt said that as of August 13, 2024, DCS had not contacted any family member about the CFT, which was especially problematic because several family members had requested to be the child's placement. The aunt had contacted the case manager's supervisor a few weeks prior and the DCS Ombudsman's office the week before she contacted our office. However, she had not received any further communication. We asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to respond to the aunt.

Within a few hours of our prompting, the DCS Ombudsman's office responded to the aunt's concerns. They asked her for a list of family members the case manager had not contacted. They informed the aunt that the case had recently been reassigned and provided her with the contact information of the new case manager. The DCS Ombudsman's office also let the aunt know that they had reviewed court

documents and did not find any orders requiring the family to be contacted about the CFT meetings. Nonetheless, the DCS Ombudsman's office had asked the case manager to reach out to the aunt on this matter.

The aunt provided the DCS Ombudsman's office with a list of family members who had asked to be the child's placement, and within a few hours, the office informed her that they had spoken with each person and shared the list with the case manager. They asked the case manager to review each family member to determine if any were suitable for placement.

A few weeks later, the aunt contacted our office, saying she hadn't received any further updates from the case manager. She mentioned that the family still wanted information about the CFT and the possibility of placement. She also expressed concern for the child's safety due to the child's background, although she did not offer specific details. The aunt couldn't recall exactly when she last heard from the DCS Ombudsman's office.

Our office advised the aunt that we had been copied on an email from the DCS Ombudsman's office sent to her a few days earlier. We encouraged her to follow up directly with the DCS Ombudsman's office and allow them some time to assist her before we stepped in. We informed her that if she did not hear back after a reasonable period, we would be able to help. Additionally, we urged her to call the child abuse hotline about any immediate concerns for the child's safety, and we provided the hotline number. We also advised the aunt that any family members requesting to be the child's placement should contact either the DCS Ombudsman's office or our office directly for assistance.

## **2404452. Department of Child Safety**

A woman whose parental rights had been terminated was worried about the child she was no longer allowed to see. She had read a news article about several teenagers who ran away from a group home together. According to the article, one of these teens had medical needs that made it more dangerous for her to live on the street or elsewhere without proper care. The woman believed that this teen was her biological daughter. She wanted to share her concerns and suggest next steps to the Department of Child Safety (DCS). Our office quickly contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office. The DCS Ombudsman clarified that the runaway teen was not her biological daughter, which relieved her worries. We also confirmed that DCS staff took the right actions by reporting the runaway to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

## **2404481. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) failed to produce some requested records within a reasonable timeframe. Her attorney submitted the records request form in July of 2024. She noted that DCS confirmed receipt of the form the same day but never provided the records or contacted her or her attorney about their status. The mother contacted our office a month later, saying she was desperate for the records because she had a court hearing scheduled for the following Friday. Although she had not yet spoken to the DCS Ombudsman's office, our office stepped in because of the tight

deadline. We asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to have the records department expedite the mother's request.

The DCS Ombudsman's office contacted the mother about an hour after our inquiry. They told her they had forwarded the request to the Central Registry Coordination Unit (CRCU) to expedite her record request. CRCU shared with the DCS Ombudsman's office that they would work directly with the mother and that they would assign her request internally that day. The following week, DCS informed us they had produced the mother's case records two days before the deadline. They sent the records to her attorney and to the mother. Our office followed up with the mother, who confirmed she received the records. She thanked us.

**2405408. Department of Child Safety**

A foster mother alleged that DCS was moving too quickly in reunifying some of her foster children with their father, which she believed could be potentially dangerous to the children. She also claimed that DCS staff had been unprofessional and retaliated against her when she brought up these concerns, including mocking her and laughing during a Team Decision-Making meeting (TDM).

The foster mother tried to address these issues directly with DCS, but she said that the DCS Ombudsman's office had not responded to her. Our office spoke with the DCS Ombudsman and requested that the office contact the foster mother. The DCS Ombudsman's office then contacted her. After speaking with her, DCS found that many of her concerns involved a service provider rather than DCS itself. The Ombudsman gave the foster mother information on how to file a complaint with the provider. They also coordinated with the DCS Unit Supervisor and Program Manager to discuss the case's progress, the reasons behind the reunification efforts, which might appear retaliatory or rushed, and to make sure any unprofessional conduct was addressed.

**2405922. Department of Child Safety**

A father claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) delayed too long in providing the records he requested. He told us that his attorney submitted the request on July 15, 2024, but he had not received the records by October 16, 2024, when he contacted our office. The father explained that both he and his attorney had followed up multiple times with the records department and the DCS Ombudsman's office, yet neither had received any further contact. He emphasized that he needed the records by the following week to present them in his family court case. He emphasized that the records were crucial to ensure the child's safety, particularly from the child's mother. We asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to contact the father and expedite the processing of his request by the records department. We reiterated the urgency of obtaining the records by the next week for his court case. Our office also recommended that the father consult his attorney about possibly requesting the records through a subpoena or court order if he could not receive them in time.

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The next day, the DCS Ombudsman's office informed us that they had contacted the records unit, which agreed to expedite the father's records request. The records department said they believed they could provide the records before the father's deadline, considering the size of his request, but they could not guarantee it. The DCS Ombudsman's office asked the records department to communicate directly with the father and his attorney to fulfill the request. The records department confirmed they relayed this information to the father and his attorney.

We later confirmed with the father that he received his records on October 24, a week and a half before the court date. He said he appreciated how much our office cared and helped him get the ball rolling after he had hit so many roadblocks within the agency. He said the records were extremely helpful and would have a positive impact on his child's safety.

## **2406075. Department of Child Safety**

A mother received a letter from the Department of Child Safety (DCS) informing her that DCS had closed its investigation, was substantiating allegations against her, and would be placing her on the central registry. The mother had already received a conflicting letter when the investigation closed, more than a year earlier. That first letter notified her that the allegations had been unsubstantiated.

Our office directed the mother to the DCS Ombudsman's office. After speaking with that office, the mother returned to our office, reporting that the employee she had spoken with in the DCS Ombudsman's office was rude and had mocked her over the phone. Our office spoke to that employee's supervisor. The employee in question did not intend to mock the mother but recognized how some behaviors could be perceived that way. The supervisor coached the employee on how to improve their communication with clients over the phone. The mother's complaint was also assigned to a different employee.

The DCS Ombudsman's office concluded that the field supervisor intended to substantiate the allegations against the mother, and the initial letter to the mother was incorrect. However, when questioned by the DCS Ombudsman's office, the field supervisor could not explain why the report should have been substantiated. The field supervisor was unable to justify their decision to substantiate the allegations, so they changed the finding to unsubstantiated. As a result, the mother was not placed on the central registry and did not need to appeal her case with the Protective Services Review Team (PSRT).

## **2406093. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) was taking too long to provide the records she requested. She submitted her records request form on September 10, 2024. The records department confirmed they received her request. However, she told our office that she had not received any updates from the records department as of October 23, 2024, despite following up multiple times. She also requested a letter from DCS confirming she has no substantiated past cases or current open cases. She mentioned she copied the DCS Ombudsman's office on one of her requests to the records department but had not contacted their office directly. We explained that the DCS Records Department was experiencing a backlog of about six months and that we had been working with the agency to reduce this

delay. We informed her that, in the meantime, the DCS Ombudsman's office might be able to provide a letter with the information she sought. Our office requested that the DCS Ombudsman's office give the mother a letter and have the records department contact her with an estimated timeframe for releasing her records.

The DCS Ombudsman's office informed us that they had contacted the mother on the same day and provided her with the letter she had requested. They asked the mother for further information on her records request before they could ask the records department to contact her with the estimated timeframe for her remaining records request. The DCS Ombudsman's office worked with the mother to ensure that she received her records.

## **2406286. Department of Child Safety**

A mother was upset because she believed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) improperly denied her the opportunity to appeal the decision DCS made about a grievance she had filed with the Department. The mother said she was rejected because she did not appeal promptly. However, the mother claimed that she had filed the appeal within the 30-day deadline. The mother further claimed that DCS's initial grievance decision did not adequately address her concerns and provide a satisfactory outcome.

Our office contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office to request the denial letter, the initial response sent to the mother, and any other communications between the mother and the agency regarding her grievance. By reviewing the initial response sent to the mother, we found that the response letter was dated August 2, 2024. Next, we learned that on August 30, 2024, the mother informed the Program Manager she had been unable to receive the initial letter from the post office. Then, on September 9, 2024, the mother went to the field office to try to pick up the letter in person. The Program Manager was in a meeting and could not provide the mother's letter immediately. However, they sent the letter to the mother electronically later that day. The mother then filed her appeal on October 3, 2024, which was 24 days after she received the letter electronically and 62 days after the initial response letter was mailed. Our office determined that the DCS Ombudsman's office denied the mother's appeal seven days later, consistent with their published rules. The letter explained that the mother was ineligible for an appeal because the initial letter was sent on August 2 and the appeal was filed on October 3. Since DCS provided the mother with ample opportunity to appeal and the appeal was submitted two months after the initial response, we found that the evidence did not support the mother's allegation.

Our office also investigated the mother's claim that the Program Manager's initial response did not properly address her concerns. We reviewed the initial response letter from the program manager regarding the mother's grievance. We found that the letter acknowledged the mother's allegation that the case manager was discriminatory and biased. The letter explained that the program manager identified behaviors by the case manager that should not have happened and that the case manager provided inaccurate information. The program manager stated in the letter that they had already discussed the matter with the case manager and their supervisor. The letter also confirmed that the mother requested a formal investigation into the case manager's conduct and informed her that the

allegations had been forwarded to the agency's human resources department for further review. The human resources department would not share the investigation's outcome with the mother. Our office found that the evidence did not support the mother's claim. We notified her of our findings.

**2406657. Department of Child Safety**

A mother alleged that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) Ombudsman's office and the case manager's supervisor were not responsive to her, she was not provided with removal paperwork promptly, DCS did not provide her with the allegations against her in a timely manner, and she had requested her child's medical records, but DCS had not provided them to her. The mother stated that she had contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office and the supervisor two weeks prior to contacting our office, but she had not received a response from either. The mother stated that DCS took legal custody of her child on November 12, 2024, but she did not receive the Temporary Custody Notice or the Court Authorized Removal paperwork until November 25, 2024. Furthermore, she stated that DCS initially contacted her on October 31, 2024. However, she had still not received the Notice of Duty to Inform when she spoke to our office on November 26, 2024. This means that DCS had not provided her with the allegations against her in writing on time. The mother stated that she had requested her child's medical records from DCS, but different employees had instructed her to follow different procedures to obtain the records, and she was unsure what steps to take. We requested that the DCS Ombudsman's office address the mother's concerns. We also provided the mother with several resources that might be helpful in her DCS case.

The DCS Ombudsman's office told us they contacted the mother shortly after our inquiry. They confirmed that the case manager's supervisor responded to her and addressed her concerns, including giving her the allegations against her and her child's medical records.

Our office later reviewed the DCS system and found that the Notice of Duty to Inform was not filled out correctly. The form only listed the allegation against the mother as "neglect"; it did not include the specific details required by the law. We explained to the DCS Ombudsman's office that the form needed to be more detailed and provided them with the correct allegations in this case. We asked them to remind the case manager how to fill out this form properly. The DCS Ombudsman's office agreed to inform the case manager and their supervisor on how to correctly complete the Notice of Duty to Inform to meet the legal requirements.

**2407082. Department of Child Safety**

A Department of Child Safety (DCS) Specialist sought advice regarding an open DCS case. The children had been removed from a family member who was their legal guardian at the time, during which the family member was receiving a DCS guardianship stipend. After the children's removal, the family member applied for nutrition assistance benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but these were denied by the Department of Economic Security (DES) because its system showed the family member still received the DCS guardianship stipend, which was counted as sufficient income to disqualify them from benefits. Our office found that the DCS case management system, Guardian, still listed the guardianship subsidy as active. After informing the DCS specialist, they worked with their supervisor to resolve the issue. As a result, the family member became eligible for SNAP benefits.

**2407244. Department of Child Safety**

A father claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) improperly dismissed a report of child neglect against the child's mother. Specifically, the father disagreed with DCS's conclusions about the mother's suspected drug use and her allowing the children to associate with a registered sex offender. He also requested his records, alleging the process was taking too long.

First, the father argued that DCS based its findings on an unreliable drug test provided by the mother, despite having another positive drug test ordered by the court. Our office found no evidence to support the father's claim: Although he expressed concern that the mother might be using illegal drugs, DCS did not investigate this concern because he did not explain how it was negatively affecting the child.

DCS's interviews and observations did not indicate any substance abuse in the home. This allegation was not reported. While investigating this allegation, our office found that many documents the father provided to DCS were not uploaded into DCS's Guardian case management system. We informed the DCS Ombudsman's office, which followed up with the assigned DCS supervisor. The documents were later uploaded to Guardian, and the specialist received coaching on documentation.

Our office also found no evidence to support the father's claim that DCS should have confirmed his allegations that the mother allowed a sex offender to be around the children. There was evidence that the person in question was a sex offender, but no evidence that the mother knew about the individual's status or that he posed a threat to the children before DCS staff informed her. Once she was informed, the mother responded appropriately. Our office substantiated that DCS delayed producing the records for an unreasonable amount of time. The father requested his records in early October 2024, and DCS fulfilled the request in early May 2025, a process that took approximately seven months. DCS reported that the average time to produce records was around six months. This was a known issue with DCS. Our office had already discussed this delay with DCS management, who were exploring options to speed up the redaction and delivery of the requested records.

**2501027. Department of Child Safety**

A father sought a letter from the Department of Child Safety (DCS) confirming he had no open DCS cases. He needed it for court two business days after contacting our office. Because the deadline was tight, we asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to help him. The DCS Ombudsman's office informed us that they could provide the father with the letter before his court hearing.

**2501209. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) was taking too long to provide her case records. She had submitted a records request form on September 11, 2024, and another on November 8, 2024. However, neither request was fulfilled when she contacted our office on February 28, 2025. The mother said she had followed up with the records department multiple times, but they had not responded. She explained that she needed the records for a family court hearing scheduled about five weeks after she contacted us. The mother had reached out to the DCS Ombudsman's office two weeks before contacting our office, and they had planned to forward her request to the records department.

However, she had not heard anything further from either the DCS Ombudsman's office or the records department.

Our office contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office about the mother's records request. We checked in with the mother and the DCS Ombudsman's office every couple of days to confirm she received her records before her family court hearing. After a few days, the mother told us that DCS had provided her with the documents she requested. She received them about four weeks before the hearing and thanked us for our help.

**2502348. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother tried to report potential abuse of her grandchild to the Department of Child Safety (DCS). She stated she had called the child abuse hotline and local law enforcement two days earlier, before reaching out to our office. The grandmother said she was told a case manager would contact her within 24 hours, but it had been over 48 hours, and she had not received any updates from DCS. Because she was very concerned about the child's safety, she visited our office for help. We contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office on her behalf and asked them to assist in connecting her with the investigative team.

The DCS Ombudsman's office informed us that the DCS investigator conducted a present danger assessment the day after the allegations were reported. DCS determined that the child was safe. They said the investigative team had not contacted the grandmother yet because the assessment was done over a weekend, and the field staff only work during business hours. The investigative team contacted the grandmother on Monday morning following the hotline report and confirmed that the child had been assessed as safe. They told the grandmother they could not provide any additional information because she was not a party to the case. The DCS Ombudsman's office encouraged her to have the child's parents contact them, as they could provide more information than the grandmother.

The grandmother contacted our office a few days later, saying that DCS hadn't given her any updates and that the DCS Ombudsman's office had been dismissive of her concerns.

Our office reviewed the response from the DCS Ombudsman's office and confirmed that they had correctly informed the grandmother that they could not provide as much information to her as they could to the child's parents. Additionally, we examined the DCS Guardian case management system and confirmed with the grandmother that DCS had completed the initial steps of the investigation properly, following their policies. We provided the grandmother with copies of several policies and laws that clarify DCS's investigation process, including what information may be released, when, and to whom. We advised her to share any additional information she might obtain about the child's well-being with the child abuse hotline and to allow the investigation to proceed. We also told her to return if she remains dissatisfied.

**2502650. Department of Child Safety**

A father sought contact information for his Department of Child Safety (DCS) case manager. He stated that he last heard from the case manager approximately one month before reaching out to our office. However, he hasn't received any communication from either the case manager or their supervisor since then, despite making several follow-up attempts with both. We asked the DCS Ombudsman's office to help facilitate contact between the father, his case manager, and their supervisor.

The DCS Ombudsman's office facilitated contact between the father and the case manager on the same day as our request. The father had recently received a new case manager, who told the DCS Ombudsman's office that they apologized to the father for a lack of communication. The case manager arranged a meeting with the father and asked him to provide the mother's contact information as well, since they did not have her details.

**2503589. Department of Child Safety**

A service provider contacted our office, expressing concern that a group home manager had disclosed personal information about several children under the care of the Department of Child Safety (DCS or the Department). The complainant requested to remain anonymous with the Department but asked that we inform DCS of their concerns. We explained that our office could not investigate the group home manager because they are contracted to work with DCS and are not Department employees. However, we informed the service provider that we could pass their concerns to DCS so they would be aware of the issues. Our office forwarded the original correspondence to the DCS Ombudsman's office, noting that the complainant had requested to remain anonymous, and asked that they notify the Office of Licensing and Regulation (OLR) about the matter.

The DCS Ombudsman's office requested that our office encourage the complainant to contact the child abuse hotline to report a licensing concern regarding the group home manager. Additionally, the DCS Ombudsman's office also contacted the hotline with the information and forwarded the correspondence to OLR and the DCS privacy office.

We informed the service provider of the DCS Ombudsman's office's request. The provider thanked us.

**2503885. Department of Child Safety**

A complainant came to our office with concerns that her neighbor may be neglecting their child. We redirected the complainant to the Child Abuse Hotline. The complainant repeatedly provided information to our office instead of calling the Child Abuse Hotline. Our office passed the information to the Department of Child Safety (DCS) Ombudsman's office, which forwarded the information provided to the Hotline. The Hotline used the information to generate a report about the family, listing the complainant as the reporting source. If our office had not communicated with DCS, then the allegations would not have been investigated.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

**Our intervention provided an alternative avenue to a more expensive dispute resolution mechanism.**

**2405164. Department of Child Safety**

A mother whose rights had previously been severed for some of her children wanted to find out if it is possible to arrange visits between the child still in her care and the children who are no longer legally hers but are still in the state's custody. Our office learned that she could contact the Department of Child Safety (DCS) Ombudsman's office, which would pass the request on to the current case managers or adoptive parents as appropriate. We also provided additional resources to the family, including information about using a confidential intermediary or the Sibling Information Exchange Program to reconnect family members who have been separated by adoption but are no longer in DCS care. Using the DCS Ombudsman's office or a confidential intermediary would allow the mother to avoid spending money on attorneys or private investigators to locate her children and facilitate sibling visitation.

**We provided knowledge of an agency's processes, procedures, or other relevant information to help a citizen who otherwise would not have known it.**

**2404127. Department of Child Safety**

A woman sought guidance regarding a Department of Child Safety (DCS) appeal. She mentioned she had an appeal hearing scheduled for the end of the month and asked a few questions about the process. We answered her questions and explained the DCS process to her. We also provided her with a document from DCS that describes the role of the Protective Services Review Team and outlines what happens during the appellate hearing. She expressed her thanks.

**2404645. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) did not thoroughly investigate allegations against her before substantiating them. She said she had video evidence that directly refuted the allegations, but the DCS investigator refused to review the video. The grandmother explained that DCS returned her grandchild to her care and closed the investigation about a year before she contacted our office. However, she recently received a letter from the Protective Services Review Team (PSRT) stating that DCS was substantiating the allegations against her. She mentioned she wanted to file an appeal but did not remember receiving the appeal packet with the letter proposing substantiation, so she was uncertain how to begin the process.

After speaking with the grandmother, we learned there had been a misunderstanding. The grandmother had already filed an appeal. The letter she received two days before contacting our office was a notice of hearing from the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). We explained the DCS investigation and appeals processes. We addressed the grandmother's questions. We advised her to gather any material she might have to refute the allegations, encouraged her to attend the hearing, and explained several possible outcomes depending on the administrative law judge's decision. We provided multiple resources to assist her with her appeal, including a document describing the appellate process. She expressed her gratitude.

**2405617. Department of Child Safety**

A foster mother contacted our office for help with a Department of Child Safety (DCS) case. She mentioned that her foster child's sibling was reunified with their biological parent earlier in the year, and since then, visits between the siblings have been infrequent. She noted that visits were more regular before the siblings' reunification, when the other child was still in DCS custody. However, the foster mother also reported several incidents after each visit that she needed to address with DCS. She shared that she is in the process of adopting her foster child and wants to make sure the children can keep a relationship through visits.

Our office explained that since the child's sibling had been reunified with their biological parent, it is likely that the juvenile courts had dismissed that child's dependency case. We clarified that this would mean DCS probably no longer has legal custody of the child and that DCS will no longer be involved with her. We also explained that if that is the case, it is unlikely DCS could help her facilitate visits between the siblings, and she will likely need to go to family court after finalizing her foster child's adoption. We provided the foster mother with several resources, including information about the Sibling Information Exchange Program through the courts and the court's contact details. She thanked us.

**2406544. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother asked our office several questions about the Department of Child Safety's (DCS) operations. She stated that DCS came to her house to investigate her daughter but felt they had not done enough. She mentioned that the investigator told her they would provide her with resources, but she had not received any additional information. The grandmother also claimed that DCS did not conduct proper interviews during the investigation, as they failed to interview all adults in the home and did not separate the children's interviews from those of the family. Our office offered guidance on the DCS process and advised her to contact the case manager's supervisor to raise her concerns about the investigation. We explained that, according to DCS policy, children should be interviewed alone if possible. However, the policy also states that if children are uncomfortable being alone with DCS workers, they can have a parent who is not an alleged perpetrator present during the interview. We clarified that the resources she was seeking would likely come from another state agency. We provided her with various resources to help her move forward. She thanked us.

**2500334. Department of Child Safety**

A kinship foster mother sought assistance in obtaining a license from the Department of Child Safety (DCS). She stated that the child was placed with her after the court approved an Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) in August 2024. The ICPC allowed the child in DCS custody to live with kin in another state. The foster mother had been trying to get a license from DCS since the child was placed with her. However, she noted that she faced several setbacks with her licensing agency, which caused significant delays in getting her license from DCS. The kinship foster mother said she filed her application with her licensing agency in August 2024, right after the court approved the ICPC. At that time, the agency told her that her application had been sent to the DCS Office of Licensing and Regulation (OLR). However, five months later, the licensing agency informed her they had not actually submitted the application to DCS. As a result, the kinship foster mother was worried she wouldn't be

eligible for financial reimbursement for the time the child had been in her care. She informed our office that OLR had confirmed receipt of her application the day before we spoke, and that they would begin processing it immediately.

Our office provided the kinship foster mother with several resources, including the foster care warmline, for assistance. We explained that the warmline might be able to answer her question about back pay. We encouraged her to contact OLR if the warmline couldn't assist her. We directed her to the foster care licensing rules in the Arizona Administrative Code. We highlighted a few specific rules that may be relevant to the kinship foster mother's situation and emphasized the timeframe for the application process. We encouraged her to return if she needed further help with the licensing process. She thanked us.

**2501867. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) refused to place her grandchild with her. She stated that DCS told her it was easier to keep the child in a licensed foster home than to complete the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) process, which would have been necessary before the child could be placed with her. The grandmother mentioned she adopted the child's biological sibling the previous year and had no changed circumstances, so she was unsure why DCS was unwilling to give her the child. She noted the child had been in their current placement for most of their life, just under ten months. She said she had asked DCS several times to have the child placed with her, but they did not respond. She added that the new case manager contacted her immediately after she reached out to their office, and they were planning to start the ICPC process to place the child with her.

Our office spoke with the grandmother and explained the ICPC process. We informed her that even if DCS decided to proceed with an ICPC, the judge would ultimately make the final decision regarding placement. We provided her with the law that governs children's placement preferences in DCS care. We also explained that because the child is under three years old and has been with their current placement for over nine months, the foster parent would also be considered the child's kin. We encouraged the grandmother to work with the new case manager and to return to our office if she needed further assistance. She thanked us.

**2502904. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) Ombudsman's office was not responding to her. She said she had submitted a complaint to the DCS Ombudsperson about a week earlier but had not received any follow-up. The mother believed DCS retaliated against her by closing its investigation into her husband and dismissing the allegations. She stated that this retaliation was because she refused to cooperate by not allowing the case manager to see or interview her child. She mentioned she had numerous pieces of evidence to support her claims against her husband, but DCS refused to accept the evidence. The mother also alleged she repeatedly asked the DCS case manager to disclose the allegations against her, but the case manager declined to provide the information.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Our office requested that the DCS Ombudsman's office contact the mother and update us on how her concerns are being addressed. The DCS Ombudsman's office informed the mother and our office that they would relay her concerns to the supervisor overseeing the case. They stated that the supervisor had contacted the mother several times since their initial contact and had included their office in the correspondence. Later, the DCS Ombudsman's office requested that our office contact the mother for clarification regarding her case. They indicated that the case manager's supervisor was willing to reopen the case against her husband. However, if they reopened the case against her husband, they would also need to reopen their investigation into her, as it was one case and they were not separated. The DCS Ombudsman's office told us that the mother was not willing to have her case reopened and only wanted DCS to accept the evidence she had against her husband. They informed us that the Department could not do that and would have to either reopen the whole case or keep it fully closed.

We spoke with the mother and explained the DCS process. We clarified that DCS policy limits the ways it can close a case. We told her that because she would not allow DCS to see her child, and they could not assess whether the child was safe, it was likely that DCS closed the case as "unable to locate." We read Chapter 2, Section 6 of the DCS policy manual to her, which states, "Enter a finding of Unable to Locate if the investigation cannot be completed because: despite reasonable efforts, the child victim cannot be located; and there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the child was abused or neglected without interviewing or observing the child." We informed her that this policy states that if DCS receives another report about her child, it will need to include the allegations from the current investigation in the new one. We explained that if there was an incident of domestic violence, as she described, DCS must list both parents as the alleged perpetrators because they evaluate the situation based on how it would affect the child.

We also explained that if the child was present during such an incident, even if one parent caused the problem, DCS would have to categorize the other parent as failing to protect the child from witnessing the violence, in accordance with A.R.S. § 13-3623(A). This statute states, "Under circumstances likely to produce death or serious physical injury, any person who causes a child or vulnerable adult to suffer physical injury or, having the care or custody of a child or vulnerable adult, who causes or permits the person or their health to be harmed, or who puts the child or vulnerable adult in a dangerous situation, commits an offense..." We encouraged her to discuss with DCS whether she wanted the Department to reopen the case. The mother said she would consult her attorney about her options and thanked us.

## **2503382. Department of Child Safety**

A mother sought assistance with her appellate hearing for her Department of Child Safety (DCS) case through the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). The mother explained that she had initially gone through the appeal process six months before contacting our office. The mother said she was in the process of filling out paperwork for her appeal, but she wanted to know if there were any entities that could assist her so that the process would happen faster.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Our office explained that although we could not complete the paperwork for her, we could provide her with information on the OAH process and offer resources to assist her further. We explained the OAH process and informed her that if she were placed on the central registry, there is a process through the Board of Fingerprinting to obtain an exception. We provided her with a link to the Board of Fingerprinting's website, which outlines this process. Lastly, we explained that the DCS Central Registry was undergoing a change that would take place in September of 2025. We explained that instead of being either on or off the registry, there would be a tiered system, so it was possible that even if she was put on the registry, she could be removed when this system was implemented, depending on how DCS categorized the situation. We provided her with A.R.S. § 8-804.02, which described this change. We encouraged her to return if she had any further questions. She thanked us.

**Our intervention helped settle a relatively inexpensive dispute that was causing a negative ripple effect on an organization.**

**2404126. Department of Child Safety**

A woman claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) incorrectly released her identifying information on a court document after she reported to the DCS Child Abuse Hotline. She stated that because of this, the parents knew she was the person who made the report. She mentioned she had previously spoken to the DCS Ombudsman's office, which confirmed that the records department had made a mistake by not redacting her information properly. She said they escalated the issue to the supervisor to prevent it from happening again, but she wanted the department to take further action. She believed the mistake was not malicious, but it allowed the mother to obtain an order of protection against her, harming her reputation.

We informed the woman that if the DCS Ombudsman's office had already contacted the redactor's supervisor and requested retraining for that redactor and the entire unit—just as she noted—our office wouldn't have any further recommendations, as it would be a case of human error. We assured her that the DCS Ombudsman's office would contact the redactor's supervisor. We also advised her to consult an attorney for legal assistance. Additionally, we provided her with several court resources to help her.

Our office inquired with the DCS Ombudsman's office about the steps taken after her contact. DCS told us they followed up with the records unit, which confirmed that a mistake occurred during dependency redaction, and her information was not properly redacted. Management apologized for the error and emphasized the importance of properly redacting information on court documents. The DCS Ombudsman's office confirmed that the records unit's management addressed and corrected the issue with the redactor and the rest of the team to ensure it would not happen again.

## **Individual cases caused us to identify trends.**

### **2404849. Department of Child Safety**

A Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) alleged that Department of Child Safety (DCS) staff were being too lenient with a mother and not holding her accountable. The CASA alleged that this treatment had significantly negatively affected the child, who was in DCS care. Specifically, the CASA alleged that DCS had changed case managers and case aides too often and against judge's orders, that DCS was allowing visits to occur in the mother's home when they should be in the community, that a DCS specialist lied about the mother's drug test results in a court report, and that DCS staff regularly disclosed documents late to the juvenile court.

Both the CASA and the DCS Ombudsman's office cooperated with our investigation, providing drug test results, court reports, and a psychological assessment that had been disclosed to the court. Our office did not find evidence to support three of the CASA's four allegations. Our office found that DCS did not arbitrarily change case managers and case aides. DCS changed case aides and service providers for cause, such as when a DCS worker left DCS or an employee went on extended leave. Although DCS allowed visits to take place in the mother's home, our office found that there was no court order prohibiting the visits. Per DCS policy, visits should occur in the home if safe to do so. Likewise, our office did not find evidence that the DCS specialist lied about the mother's drug use. These tests included a positive result for both alcohol and an illegal substance. There were also some diluted tests. DCS staff did not call attention to the diluted tests in the court report but did disclose the results to the juvenile court.

On the other hand, our office found evidence that DCS disclosed documents to the court in an untimely manner. When records must be submitted to the court, the practice is for the case manager to provide the records to the Centralized Records Coordination Unit (CRCU), which is tasked with redacting the documents and disclosing them to the juvenile court. In this case, the CRCU took too long to complete this task. Our office discovered that this happens regularly. Although it had improved at the time we investigated, the CRCU was still not meeting the required 10-day timeframe required by Juvenile Court Rule 315 for redacting and providing records to the court. DCS upper management was aware of this issue and was already working to find a solution.

## **We discovered a cover-up of the truth or other ethical lapse.**

### **2500491. Department of Child Safety**

A mother whose child was in Department of Child Safety (DCS) custody alleged that the DCS Specialist falsely accused her of attempting to run over the DCS Specialist in the parking lot of the children's daycare. DCS reported this incident to the juvenile court. The court interpreted the incident as evidence that the mother was violent, therefore needing additional services before returning her child. Our office found that the mother's allegation was supported by evidence.

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Our office reviewed notes in DCS's Guardian case management system, the report DCS submitted to the juvenile court, the police report about the incident, and evidence of the mother's whereabouts, which the mother submitted directly to our office. The police report indicated that a vehicle was driving aggressively and following DCS staff. The police report also stated that the responding officer believed that the driver of the vehicle was the mother, although she was not positively identified. The police report did not say that the aggressive driver attempted to run over the DCS Specialist. The DCS report submitted to the juvenile court plainly stated that the mother attempted to run over the DCS specialist. The mother had receipts from two different stores that showed that she was shopping at the time of the alleged incident.

The DCS Ombudsman's office elevated our office's finding to DCS upper management, but the Specialist resigned prior to completion of an internal investigation. Our office recommended that DCS correct the record with the court so the last information presented to the judge was not the statement that the mother definitively attempted to run over the specialist. The mother's attorney presented the evidence to the court before DCS did so. The judge returned the child to the mother's care.

## **2501334. Department of Child Safety**

A mother alleged that DCS took an unreasonable amount of time to conduct interviews with her family for an open investigation into child abuse. According to the mother, the delay was caused by DCS failing to schedule a sign language interpreter for herself and other deaf family members. This resulted in the assessment being open for longer than was legally allowed. Our investigation showed that the evidence supported the allegations.

Our office found that DCS took an unreasonable amount of time to find and schedule an interpreter for the family. DCS received a report about the family in October 2024. DCS observed the children but did not conduct interviews due to the language barrier. DCS did not conduct interviews until April 2025. DCS staff initially claimed that they could not find an interpreter.

Our office confirmed that there was one interpretation service that was contracted with DCS. That service had been able to schedule an interview within two weeks for an interpreter to be present in person. The same service offered interpretation virtually via devices with screens, such as laptops or mobile phones, which DCS staff have as standard equipment. Taking so long to schedule interviews was not only discourteous to the family, but also violated A.R.S. 8-456, which requires DCS staff to submit a written report of the investigation within 45 days after receiving a report. Notably, this event occurred after the United States Department of Justice had completed an investigation and confirmed that DCS had violated the rights of disabled clients who were hard of hearing by not providing interpreters.

Our office recommended that DCS utilize mobile options for interpretation if an in-person interpreter was not available. This was already available through at least one contracted interpretation service, but it did not appear that DCS staff considered the option.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

**Our investigation of a complaint shed light on a related matter that was not the subject of the complaint.**

**2404656. Department of Child Safety**

A grandmother complained that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) had not filed criminal charges against her grandchild's father, which was negatively affecting family court proceedings. Our office explained that DCS may substantiate or unsubstantiate allegations, but DCS does not have the authority to file criminal charges. Our office explained that her concerns appear to involve the police and the family court judge, not DCS. The grandmother clarified that she agreed with DCS's decision about the allegations. We provided her with resources about seeking legal advice and submitting a complaint about the judge in her family court case.

The grandmother shared a second concern involving a letter she received from DCS about the findings in this case. This letter stated that DCS substantiated the allegations but claimed that the perpetrator could not be identified, even though the perpetrator's identity was never in question. Our office researched and found that the DCS field staff had sent the wrong form letter to the grandmother. According to DCS, the field staff should not have sent her a letter at all. Instead, per DCS policy, the Protective Services Review Team (PSRT) should have sent a letter notifying the grandmother of substantiation after PSRT reviewed and approved the specialist's findings.

As part of our research regarding the grandmother's complaint, our office reviewed the relevant files in DCS's case management system, Guardian. Our office discovered that the Assessment had been closed for more than a year and a half, but the finding was still listed as "Proposed Substantiated." This status means that PSRT had not yet approved the finding. After following up with DCS, we found that PSRT had reached out to field staff about eight months after the proposed substantiation to request that the field staff update its findings. Field staff had never responded, and nobody within DCS had followed up. Although this information was documented in Guardian, the information was in a part of Guardian that is not labeled intuitively, making it difficult to find and review.

During this case, our office also found what appeared to be a field that we could not access, which would be contrary to law. The field displayed only asterisks. In Guardian, asterisks typically indicate that information is confidential. However, DCS staff informed us that the asterisks display when the field is blank. There was no explanation for why this field displays differently from others when blank, other than to say it is "an odd design." DCS said that it would address this "odd design" as part of its ongoing improvements to PSRT, findings, and the central registry.

**Our intervention helped identify a problem with or lead to a change in statute, rule, or policy.**

**2404605. Arizona Board of Fingerprinting / Department of Child Safety**

A woman claimed that the Board of Fingerprinting (the Board) did not complete her Central Registry Exception (CRE) decision within the required legal timeframe. She also said the Board would not give her

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an estimated date for when her CRE application might be decided. The woman had received a fingerprint clearance card and wanted to work in healthcare, which requires a search of the Department of Child Safety (DCS) central registry. Since she was listed on the registry, she needed a CRE from the Board to work in healthcare. She applied for a CRE. The DCS central registry is a confidential list of individuals against whom DCS has confirmed allegations of child abuse or neglect. In some industries, people need extra background checks after getting a fingerprint clearance card. For example, in healthcare and jobs involving children or vulnerable adults, applicants must pass a central registry check. If someone appears on the registry, they are barred from working in those areas. However, those who do not pass can request a Central Registry Exception from the Board. If the Board finds the person is not a repeat offender and no longer poses a threat, they may approve a CRE, allowing the person to work in their chosen field. It's important to understand that not all CRE applications are approved, and being granted a CRE does not remove someone from the central registry. To decide on a CRE, the Board reviews records from DCS about the applicant, including details of alleged abuse or neglect and the reasons for listing them on the registry. The Board also looks at the applicant's Criminal History Record from the Department of Public Safety. After the applicant submits a complete application, the Board requests the necessary records from DCS. Legally, the Board must complete its "expedited review" within 20 days of receiving all required documents. The Board cannot meet this deadline if it does not receive the DCS information on time. The Board stated that it receives nearly 100 CRE applications each year. At the time of this complaint, the Board had 35 active CRE cases, with 22 waiting for records from DCS. Like most of these applications, the complainant's application had been pending for over a month.

At the time of this complaint, DCS was taking 45-60 days to provide the necessary records to the Board. Our office learned that this delay was mainly due to the extensive review and redaction required by DCS statutes. DCS confidentiality laws are strict, and the Board did not qualify for any exceptions, despite the Board having equally strict confidentiality laws.

When our office contacted DCS and the Board, both agencies expressed interest in resolving the problem. Although they attempted to collaborate on addressing the issue, our office concluded that their current practices would likely remain noncompliant with the law unless the relevant statutes were amended. We recommended that the agencies pursue legislative changes. Working with both agencies, our office drafted proposed legislative language to enable DCS to share records more quickly with the Board while protecting DCS's confidentiality. This would help the Board meet its statutory deadlines. Specifically, the language added a statute requiring DCS to share certain information, authorized the Board to receive DCS data, and made it a felony for the Board to disclose confidential DCS information improperly. Both agencies supported the proposed language. Our office then presented it to legislative leaders. Senator Werner introduced it as SB 1438. The bipartisan bill was co-sponsored by four Senators and three House members. The bill was passed with overwhelming support and was signed into law by the Governor, taking effect on September 26, 2025.

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This new law will simplify the Board's processes, making them faster and easier, and allowing eligible individuals to enter the workforce sooner. The Board also approved our office's recommendation to update its rules, policies, and procedures to match best practices and new laws. These updates, which our office helped create, support economic independence, self-sufficiency, and pride for many Arizonans.

**Our intervention revealed a field practice that was not in accordance with the agency's stated policy/procedure, statute, or case law.**

## **2404115. Department of Child Safety**

A mother alleged that the Department of Child Safety's (DCS) Protective Services Review Team (PSRT) sent her a letter of proposed substantiation to the wrong address several months after the close of the investigation. The mother said the investigation was closed in September 2023, and the mother was not sent the Initial Notification Letter (INL) until July 2024, approximately ten months after the close of the investigation. The mother said the letter was sent to her old address, which was her mother's house (maternal grandmother). The mother said that because of this, she only received a picture of the INL from the maternal grandmother and nothing from DCS. Because the twenty-day appeal deadline was almost up and she still had not received the INL from DCS, the mother asked whether the timeline could be extended. We sent her requests to the DCS Ombudsman's office for assistance.

The DCS Ombudsman's office contacted the mother the following day. They provided the mother with contact information for PSRT management. PSRT management worked directly with the mother. They provided the mother with an updated timeline. They also sent the letter to the mother's new house and to her email.

We found that PSRT violated the deadline for sending an INL by sending the INL approximately ten months after the investigation was completed. Under DCS rules in the Arizona Administrative Code, DCS is required to send an INL to the alleged perpetrator within 14 days of completing the investigation. Our office worked closely with the DCS director and other agency management to ensure that PSRT sends the INL promptly. We confirmed with the mother that she received the new letter and time frame. She thanked us.

## **2405497. Department of Child Safety**

The aunt of a child in the Department of Child Safety (DCS) care claimed that DCS refused to consider her for placement of the child without any reason. The child was placed in a licensed foster home after being removed from a previous placement. DCS staff and its contracted psychologist argued that the child had already been moved too many times, and another change could harm the child's mental health. There were no safety concerns for the child's safety in the aunt's home. Our office found that the child was under two years old and had experienced a total of four placements since birth. The first two placements lasted only a few days each. The child had been placed in only two separate placements for any significant length of time. The child had only been with the licensed foster family for a few months. Under A.R.S. § 8-514.07, the aunt should have been given priority when considering placement, and DCS

should have tried to contact her. According to A.R.S. § 8-529, a child in foster care has the right to be placed with relatives when it is in the child's best interest. Our office determined that DCS did not follow either law.

Following our office's guidance, the aunt filed a grievance with DCS and spoke with the Program Manager overseeing the child's case in the field office. We urged DCS to respond promptly because a court hearing regarding the child's permanency was approaching. The Program Manager agreed that the aunt should have been considered for placement.

DCS staff filed a Motion for Change of Physical Custody with the juvenile court and began facilitating visits so the child could spend time with the aunt. The DCS Program Manager attended the court hearing and presented oral arguments in support of the motion. The juvenile court judge reportedly denied the motion, deciding to keep the child with the licensed foster placement despite a safe relative being available, considering the progress the child had made since placement.

## **2501801. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) case manager was rude, made dismissive comments about her religion, tried to make inappropriate medical decisions, and accused her of submitting false documentation to DCS. She also said that the DCS worker was insensitive to her financial situation and caused her undue stress. During our investigation, we found that DCS staff improperly stopped the mother from recording a meeting.

The mother stated that the assigned DCS specialist was extremely rude and seemed to fall asleep during the interview. The specialist denied falling asleep but reported the accusation to her supervisor. The supervisor advised the specialist on the importance of active listening. Our investigation into the claims that DCS staff made inappropriate comments about her religion, attempted to make medical decisions without consulting professionals, and dismissed her letters was inconclusive. We found insufficient evidence to support these allegations.

The mother argued that the reason we couldn't find enough evidence was that DCS staff did not allow her to record the TDM. She said she tried to record it but was told she couldn't. DCS staff denied specifically telling her she could not record the meeting. However, they acknowledged that they had asked her not to have her phone out on the table. Not permitting her to have her phone out strongly implied she could not record. Under A.R.S. § 8-456, DCS cannot prohibit a parent or guardian from recording conversations with DCS. The DCS Ombudsman's office addressed this issue with internal management and advised staff that parents can record the TDM.

## **2502231. Department of Child Safety**

A mother who recently moved to Arizona from another state claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) removed her children from her care due to allegations of past sexual abuse by her husband, which lacked evidence. The mother said her child was lying about the abuse and that this had already been proven in their previous state. We found this allegation to be unfounded. Regardless of whether the

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matter had been previously investigated, DCS took protective measures based on a disclosure from a child old enough to understand what she was reporting. Our office determined that DCS's action was reasonable.

The mother also claimed that the Temporary Custody Notice was improperly completed when her children were taken. Our office confirmed this, as the document was missing details on how temporary custody was obtained, the DCS supervisor's name and phone number, the method of notice, and the DCS representative's signature. DCS staff coached the specialist responsible for the removal. This was the specialist's first removal, though the documentation in other cases handled by the same specialist was complete. The mother also alleged that she was not informed of her rights when she spoke with the assigned DCS specialist. Our investigation supported this claim. DCS staff did not give her a Notice of Duty to Inform before removing her children but provided it afterward. The specialist received coaching on the importance of this form.

The mother asserted that she had requested a copy of the court order granting DCS permission to remove the children, but the specialist denied her request. We found insufficient evidence to confirm whether DCS staff provided this document, although she was given a copy at the Team Decision-Making (TDM) meeting.

Finally, the mother claimed that DCS filed a dependency petition in juvenile court before the TDM. Our office verified this and noted that DCS staff explained they filed the petition within the legal timeframe after taking temporary custody; however, no TDM facilitator was available at that time. We recommended that DCS consider using facilitators from different offices and explore options for remote participation if none are available in person.

## **2503005. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that Department of Child Safety (DCS) staff removed her stepchild from her and the child's father based on false allegations. She also stated that her child was taken from her care solely because she did not cooperate with the investigation about her stepchild. Additionally, she reported that DCS staff behaved inappropriately during the Team Decision-Making meeting (TDM), including not allowing the family to record the meeting.

DCS removed the children from the home due to concerns about the parents refusing services for issues such as the child's substance abuse and suicidal thoughts, potential physical abuse—including intentionally harming one of the children using chokeholds, a cord, and a vehicle on different occasions—and possible domestic violence. The claim that DCS removed the children only because of non-cooperation or false allegations was unsupported.

Although our office determined that the mother's child and stepchild were removed for other legitimate reasons, we found that DCS staff prevented the mother from recording the TDM. The mother provided letters from several friends and family members who participated in the TDM. These letters indicated that the TDM facilitator explicitly stated that recordings were not allowed. Under A.R.S. § 8-456, DCS

cannot prohibit a parent or guardian from recording conversations with DCS. The DCS Ombudsman's office raised this issue with internal management and instructed staff—including multiple TDM facilitators—that parents are allowed to record the TDM. Our office recommended that DCS staff change their procedures for conducting TDMs in the future.

## **Our intervention resulted in better service to citizens.**

### **2404856. Department of Child Safety**

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) removed children from a grandmother who had been granted legal decision-making for her grandchildren in family court. The grandmother alleged that DCS had mishandled her case in several ways. First, she claimed that DCS lied to get the court order to remove her grandchildren and that her grandchildren were not in any danger in her care. Secondly, she complained that the DCS Specialist did not produce the court order authorizing DCS to remove the children at the time of removal. According to the grandmother, when she later requested the court order, DCS staff only made it available at the front desk of the DCS office for her to pick up. Thirdly, despite being the legal caregiver at the time of removal, the grandmother alleged that DCS staff did not offer her a Team Decision-Making meeting (TDM). Fourth, she stated that DCS staff threatened to have her and her husband arrested at the time her grandchildren were removed and told her that she should divorce her husband. Finally, the grandmother alleged that the DCS specialist was a relative of the specialist's direct supervisor.

Our office researched the DCS case in DCS's case management system, Guardian, and spoke with staff in the DCS Ombudsman's office. The grandmother filed an official grievance and spoke about her concerns with the local office's Program Manager. After we talked to DCS staff, DCS considered the grandmother as a placement option for her grandchildren.

Our office found that DCS had not lied in the application for the court order and that there had been concerns for the children in the grandparents' care at the time of removal. We also found that the specialist and supervisor were not related.

DCS staff should have provided the grandmother with a copy of the court order when removing her grandchildren. However, our office found that DCS staff did not have the court order in hand at that time. It was also true that the grandmother was not offered a TDM. Although our office learned that DCS staff threatened to call the police and may have made comments about the grandparents' relationship, we learned more about the context of those statements. Although our office could not definitively confirm that these statements were incorrect, DCS agreed to coach its staff in de-escalation techniques. The DCS Ombudsman's office and the Program Manager agreed that the staff involved should be coached on best practices and laws related to the process of removing children from legal caregivers who are not the children's parents, to ensure that all legal caregivers' rights are respected.

**2500296. Department of Child Safety**

A mother claimed that her assigned DCS case manager was rude and made threatening statements. She also alleged that DCS fabricated a report in retaliation for her complaints about the specialist and that DCS left her assessment open beyond legal time limits.

Our office found that the specialist did make inappropriate comments to the mother. However, DCS had already addressed the issue internally.

Our office determined that DCS did not fabricate a report in retaliation. Although there were multiple reports linked to the family, those reports came from external sources. None originated within DCS. DCS is required to respond to all reports of abuse or neglect.

Our office found that DCS exceeded the required time limits for completing assessments. According to DCS policy, assessments must be closed within 45 days of receiving a report. In this case, the assessment remained open for over 100 days. When asked why, DCS management explained that the assigned specialist was struggling with their caseload. The specialist and their supervisor were working to reduce the number of open cases.

After the mother spoke with the Program Manager, the assessment was reassigned to a different case manager, who completed the investigation and closed the case promptly. All allegations against the mother were unsubstantiated.

**Our intervention resulted in financial savings for a citizen or helped stop an unfair financial burden on a citizen.**

**2406089. Department of Child Safety**

A young adult claimed that her Department of Child Safety (DCS) case manager closed her case too soon. She made it clear she wanted to keep participating in the Young Adult Program (YAP) for extended foster care. She tried to talk to her case manager, the supervisor, and the DCS Ombudsman's office about the early closure but did not get any responses from them.

Our office contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office and informed them of the young adult's attempts to reach out. We highlighted the urgency of the matter due to the limited time for reopening her YAP case. The DCS Ombudsman's office followed up with the case manager and supervisor, who confirmed that DCS had not held a policy-required meeting with the young adult before closing her case. DCS then coordinated with the young adult to set up a meeting. During this meeting, the team agreed to continue services for the young adult through the YAP program. This enabled the young adult to receive case management and financial support going forward.

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## **2406345. Department of Child Safety**

An adoptive mother claimed that her adopted child was not receiving health insurance because the Department of Child Safety (DCS) adoption subsidy case manager failed to properly update the information system that interfaces with the Arizona Healthcare Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). The AHCCCS help line informed the adoptive mother that the issue needed to be fixed by DCS, but the DCS adoption subsidy case manager had not resolved the problem despite the adoptive mother reaching out multiple times. Our office connected the adoptive mother with the DCS Ombudsman's office and requested a prompt response, given the child's medical needs. The DCS Ombudsman's office worked with a DCS Eligibility Supervisor to correct the error. The adoptive mother received the child's insurance cards within one week.

## **2502592. Department of Child Safety**

An adoptive mother alleged that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) did not complete paperwork correctly after she adopted her child, which resulted in her lacking authority and access to her child's AHCCCS and social security accounts. She stated she only discovered that her child received Social Security Income (SSI) after the adoption and after she started working on the issue. Our office explained that she should have been granted access to both accounts and also informed her that she should have received the funds in her child's Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account and been named as the recipient of future Social Security payments. She had not yet contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office, so we redirected her there. She reported that staff in the DCS Ombudsman's office had redirected her to call Social Security. We also contacted the DCS Ombudsman's office, whose staff provided her with contact details for the DCS SSI/SSA Liaison and the appropriate agency to discuss the ABLE account. This agency should have contacted her when the DCS case was closed but did not. The DCS Adoption Subsidy team verified that all information in DCS's Guardian case management system was correctly updated. The adoptive mother and her husband were able to update their child's AHCCCS account after visiting the Department of Economic Security (DES) office in person and providing paperwork proving the legal adoption. Regarding the SSI payment, Social Security claimed that DCS had not remitted the funds, though DCS staff disagreed. Once the situation was clarified, she received the funds into her child's ABLE account and also began receiving Social Security payments alongside the Adoption Subsidy. Additionally, she was granted access and control over her child's health insurance, which continued without interruption.

**Our intervention helped resolve grievances against state agencies, even though the resolution might not involve financial benefit.**

## **2500820. Department of Child Safety**

A mother needed her Department of Child Safety (DCS) records for her job. She claimed that DCS had not provided those records after she had requested them. When speaking with the mother, our office learned that she didn't need all her records—only a letter stating she had no open DCS assessments or cases. We directed the mother to the DCS Ombudsman's office. They contacted the DCS Central Records Coordination Unit (CRCU), which was handling her records request. We informed DCS staff that the

mother only needed a letter confirming all her DCS cases were closed and she had no current open cases. While her request was still being processed, CRCU issued the letter. The mother then provided the letter to her employer.

**2501730. Department of Child Safety**

An adoptive parent claimed that the Department of Child Safety (DCS) improperly withheld the Social Security Income (SSI) for their two adoptive children. The parent believed that DCS was supposed to deposit the money into an account and give it to them once the adoptions were finalized. They had received some funds, but thought they should have received more.

Our office explained to the parent that the law changed in 2023, so any money received for their children before July 2023 did not need to be saved. We discussed the law and DCS policy regarding handling a child's SSI and transferring it to the adoptive parent after the dependency ends. Based on calculations, the parent received more money than DCS's minimum requirement. The parent was satisfied with the explanation.

## **OMBUDSMAN AND THE ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, REHABILITATION, AND REENTRY**

FY2025 marks the first year our annual reports include the required information about the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Reentry (ADCRR), as mandated by A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8). The details below are provided in accordance with A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8), which requires AZOCA to report the number of complaints filed against ADCRR, including the subject of each complaint and how each was resolved.

AZOCA is governed by provisions in A.R.S. § 41-1377(D) and A.A.C. R2-16-302, which prohibit our investigation of inmate complaints related to any agency, not just ADCRR. These laws state that our office does not have the authority to investigate complaints filed by, or on behalf of, inmates. Before the passage of SB 1629, the legislature expected inmates to use ADCRR Friends and Family resources, the ADCRR grievance process, and the state and federal court systems to address their complaints.

Meanwhile, our office addressed complaints about ADCRR from correctional officers, inmates' friends and family members, and other parties. We followed the legislative guidance in A.R.S. § 41-1377(D), declining complaints directly from inmates and redirecting them to these resources instead. Although ADCRR remains responsible for investigating inmate complaints, the amendment to A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8) now requires us to collect the resolutions of these ADCRR complaints once ADCRR completes its investigations.

A.R.S. § 41-1376 requires our office to work with ADCRR to gather specific information from the cases we refer to them. As a result, ADCRR investigates these inmate complaints and reports the findings to us. We still do not directly investigate inmate complaints; however, as previously mentioned, we may continue to investigate all other ADCRR complaints from ADCRR staff, friends and family members of inmates, and other non-inmates. The amendment to the statute now mandates that we report the following information to the legislature in our annual reports:

- The number of complaints we receive regarding the ADCRR.
- The topic of each complaint.
- How each complaint was resolved.

To meet the requirements of SB 1629, our office had to redesign parts of our Case Management System (CMS) and website. We also updated employee procedures at both our office and ADCRR. Although SB 1629 only requires tracking three specific data points, we collect over eight in CMS, including more than 35 subsections (Topic Categories), to ensure accuracy, accountability, and to identify potential systemic issues. Our staff records this information for each ADCRR complaint received, and a summary of the data will be included in our reports. The new screen captures key details, including inmate information, the complaint reporter (source), the relevant facility, the complaint category, the complaint itself, the dates it was sent and returned from ADCRR, and the resolution determined by ADCRR. Below is an image of our ADCRR screen that helps our office monitor ADCRR complaints.

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## ADCRR Screen on the AZOCA Case Management System

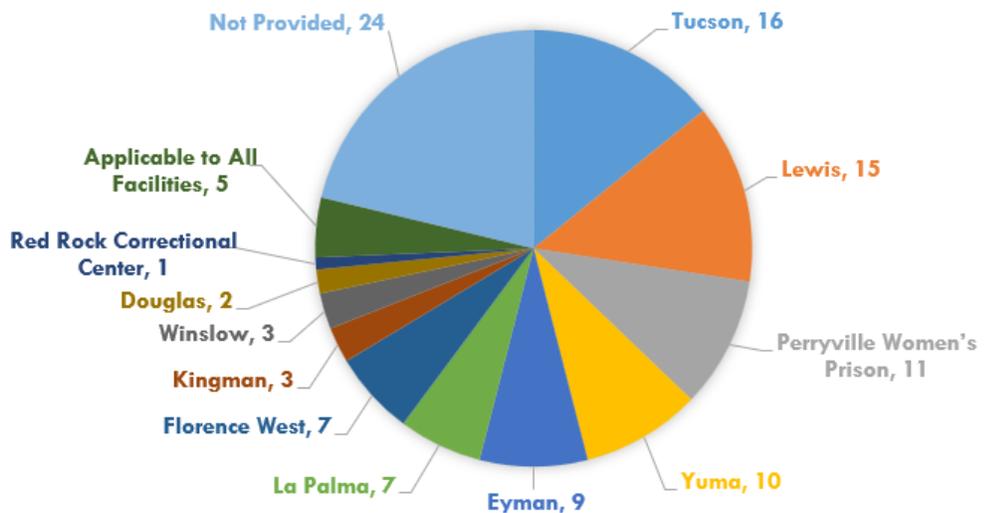
The screenshot shows a web-based form for reporting complaints. It includes dropdown menus for 'Inmate Id', 'Complaint Source', and 'Facility'. A large text area is for the 'Complaint'. Below this are two date fields: 'Date Sent to ADCRR' and 'Date Returned From ADCRR'. A 'Resolution' text area is at the bottom left. On the right, there are three columns of checkboxes under 'Topic Categories': 'Institution Operational' (e.g., Visitation, Personal Property), 'Health Care Services' (e.g., Medical, Mental Health), 'Offender Services' (e.g., Time Computation, Classification), and 'Community Corrections' (e.g., Community Supervision, Parole). Further right is an 'Employee Category' section with checkboxes for 'Benefits and/or Pay', 'Safety Concern', 'Facility Condition', and 'Human Resources', plus an 'Other' field. A 'Handled By' dropdown is at the bottom right.

The ADCRR is responsible for housing inmates and providing legally required services. As of the end of FY25 on June 30, 2025, the ADCRR reported housing over 35,552 inmates (32,183 males and 3,369 females) across 15 facilities. These facilities are distributed throughout Arizona, including the women’s facility in Perryville.

**AZOCA received 113 complaints concerning the following 11 prison facilities:**

Prison	#
Tucson	16
Lewis	15
Perryville Women’s Prison	11
Yuma	10
Eyman	9
La Palma	7
Florence West	7
Kingman	3
Winslow	3
Douglas	2
Red Rock Correctional Center	1
Applicable to All Facilities	5
Not Provided	24

**NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY PRISON**



**If we only consider identified prison facilities, then those with the three highest complaint numbers are:** Tucson - 16, Lewis - 15, Perryville – 11

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Of the 113 ADCRR complaints our office received in FY 2025, the complaint topics are categorized as follows:

<b>Complaint Topic</b>	<b>Received</b>
Medical	27
Discipline	18
Visitation	16
Other Topic	14
Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff	11
Communication (Phone)	10
Treatment	10
Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate	8
Facility Issue	7
Transfer Requests	6
Personal Property	5
Release Eligibility	5
Grievance Process	4
Mental Health	4
Education	3
Fear of	3
Mail	3
Security	3
Classification	2
Parole	2
Population Movement	2
Banking	1
Commissary/Store	1
Conditions of Supervision	1
Interstate Compact	1
Programming Access	1
Religious Services	1
Time Computation	1
Work Pay	1

Thus, the three most common complaint topics are: Medical Care – 27, Discipline – 18, Visitation – 16.

Of the 113 ADCRR complaint sources our office received in FY 2025, they were in the following source categories across all facilities:

Family Member	Friend	Third Party	Inmate	ADCRR Staff	Not Provided	Attorney
74	14	9	7	5	2	2

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**State of Arizona Ombudsman – Citizens’ Aide Office (AZOCA)**  
**A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8) Compliance Report**  
**for the**  
**Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Reentry (ADCRR)**  
**July 01, 2024, to June 30, 2025**

Per A.R.S. 41-1377(D) and A.A.C. R2-16-302, AZOCA does not have the authority to investigate complaints filed by or on behalf of an inmate. However, AZOCA works with ADCRR to address the complaints received by AZOCA.

The information in this segment is provided under A.R.S. § 41-1376(A)(8), which requires AZOCA to report the number of complaints related to ADCRR, the subject of each complaint, and the resolution for each.

Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, AZOCA received a total of 113 complaints regarding ADCRR. Case summaries are available upon request.

- 
1. Case No. 2403628  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Interstate Compact, Transfer Requests  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA’s request to provide further details.
  2. Case No. 2403646  
ADCRR Facility: Applicable to All Facilities  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Records, Religious Services  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by the AZOCA.
  3. Case No. 2403717  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant’s concern.
  4. Case No. 2403731  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women’s Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue: No Air Conditioning  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA’s request to provide further details.
  5. Case No. 2403929  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Mental Health  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
  6. Case No. 2403978

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- ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
7. Case No. 2404111  
ADCRR Facility: Winslow  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
8. Case No. 2404182  
ADCRR Facility: Applicable to All Facilities  
Complaint Topic(s): Education  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
9. Case No. 2404320  
ADCRR Facility: Red Rock Correctional Center  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
10. Case No. 2404650  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Unknown  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
11. Case No. 2404722  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Transfer Requests  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
12. Case No. 2404965  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
13. Case No. 2405005  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
14. Case No. 2405026  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone)  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
15. Case No. 2405127  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison

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- Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: staff complaint  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
16. Case No. 2405286  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Fear of: Retaliation, Grievance Process, Other Topic: Abuse, denying access to grievance process, and retaliation  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
17. Case No. 2405436  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
18. Case No. 2405665  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
19. Case No. 2405689  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Mental Health, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
20. Case No. 2405788  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue: Not enforcing rules, Medical  
Resolution(s): ADCRR cannot provide details to Complainant due to confidentiality or other reason(s).
21. Case No. 2405889  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Mail, Medical, Personal Property, Security, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR cannot provide details to Complainant due to confidentiality or other reason(s).
22. Case No. 2405924  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Grievance Process  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
23. Case No. 2405980  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman

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- Complaint Topic(s): Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
24. Case No. 2406012  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
25. Case No. 2406154  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
26. Case No. 2406172  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
27. Case No. 2406195  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Time Computation  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
28. Case No. 2406229  
ADCRR Facility: Florence West  
Complaint Topic(s): Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
29. Case No. 2406470  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Notification of release?  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
30. Case No. 2406525  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
31. Case No. 2406562  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline

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- Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
32. Case No. 2406571  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
33. Case No. 2406586  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant. ADCRR cannot provide details to Complainant due to confidentiality or other reason(s).
34. Case No. 2406730  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff, Transfer Requests  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
35. Case No. 2406735  
ADCRR Facility: Florence West  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Release concern  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
36. Case No. 2406748  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
37. Case No. 2406773  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Employee matter  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
38. Case No. 2406910  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
39. Case No. 2406985  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Security  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.

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40. Case No. 2407232  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Medical, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
41. Case No. 2407243  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant. ADCRR cannot provide details to Complainant due to confidentiality or other reason(s).
42. Case No. 2407251  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
43. Case No. 2407318  
ADCRR Facility: Winslow  
Complaint Topic(s): Release Eligibility  
Resolution(s): The Complainant did not request any action from AZOCA. Filed for reference.
44. Case No. 2407488  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Classification, Medical  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
45. Case No. 2407506  
ADCRR Facility: Florence West  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
46. Case No. 2500011  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Conditions of Supervision  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
47. Case No. 2500094  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Medical, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
48. Case No. 2500305

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ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Transfer Requests  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.

49. Case No. 2500386  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
50. Case No. 2500412  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue: Second-hand smoke  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
51. Case No. 2500446  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
52. Case No. 2500474  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
53. Case No. 2500522  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
54. Case No. 2500593  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
55. Case No. 2500676  
ADCRR Facility: Douglas  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
56. Case No. 2500739  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Commissary/Store

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- Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
57. Case No. 2500754  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Release Eligibility  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
58. Case No. 2500832  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Work Pay  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
59. Case No. 2500923  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Release Eligibility  
Resolution(s): Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
60. Case No. 2501065  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Mail, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
61. Case No. 2501180  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Employee  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
62. Case No. 2501263  
ADCRR Facility: Kingman  
Complaint Topic(s): Education, Release Eligibility  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
63. Case No. 2501358  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Personal Property  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
64. Case No. 2501394  
ADCRR Facility: Florence West  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Mental Health  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.

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65. Case No. 2501536  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
66. Case No. 2501613  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Classification, Mental Health, Personal Property, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate, Transfer Requests, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR agreed to review the matter further.
67. Case No. 2501810  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Facility Issue: Unfair Confinement, Population Movement  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
68. Case No. 2501945  
ADCRR Facility: Applicable to All Facilities  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Employee  
Resolution(s): The Complainant did not request any action from AZOCA. Filed for reference.
69. Case No. 2501970  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR agreed to review the matter further.
70. Case No. 2502037  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Personal Property  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
71. Case No. 2502044  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Fear of: Health and Safety of Inmate  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
72. Case No. 2502045  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.

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73. Case No. 2502147  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Transfer Requests  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
74. Case No. 2502204  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
75. Case No. 2502260  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
76. Case No. 2502321  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
77. Case No. 2502353  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
78. Case No. 2502369  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
79. Case No. 2502370  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone)  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
80. Case No. 2502506  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Visitation  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
81. Case No. 2502533  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Employee

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	Resolution(s):	Complainant did not respond to AZOCA's request to provide further details.
82.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502565 Eyman Discipline, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff, Visitation ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
83.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502569 Not Provided Other Topic: Employee ADCRR agreed to review the matter further.
84.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502605 La Palma Security ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
85.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502651 Applicable to All Facilities Parole ADCRR agreed to review the matter further. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
86.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502668 Kingman Other Topic: Fear of personal safety and unauthorized credit card use, Parole Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
87.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502774 Tucson Grievance Process, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
88.	Case No. ADCRR Facility: Complaint Topic(s): Resolution(s):	2502853 Tucson Medical ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
89.	Case No.	2502948

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ADCRR Facility: Florence West  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.

90. Case No. 2503073  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue: Unsanitary Kitchen Conditions  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
91. Case No. 2503082  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Mail  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
92. Case No. 2503094  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
93. Case No. 2503107  
ADCRR Facility: Applicable to All Facilities  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: ADCRR Policy  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
94. Case No. 2503175  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone)  
Resolution(s): ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
95. Case No. 2503218  
ADCRR Facility: Yuma  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Treatment  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.
96. Case No. 2503250  
ADCRR Facility: Perryville Women's Prison  
Complaint Topic(s): Medical, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Staff  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
97. Case No. 2503364  
ADCRR Facility: Kingman

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Complaint Topic(s): Population Movement  
Resolution(s): ADCRR addressed the Complainant's concern.

98. Case No. 2503389  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Communication (Phone), Visitation  
Resolution(s): The Complainant did not request any action from AZOCA. Filed for reference.
99. Case No. 2503445  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
100. Case No. 2503457  
ADCRR Facility: Eyman  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action. ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
101. Case No. 2503518  
ADCRR Facility: Lewis  
Complaint Topic(s): Discipline, Fear of: Retaliation, Threats, Abuse, or Assaults by Inmate  
Resolution(s): ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
102. Case No. 2503529  
ADCRR Facility: Not Provided  
Complaint Topic(s): Other Topic: Employee  
Resolution(s): ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
103. Case No. 2503587  
ADCRR Facility: Tucson  
Complaint Topic(s): Banking  
Resolution(s): Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
104. Case No. 2503591  
ADCRR Facility: La Palma  
Complaint Topic(s): Facility Issue  
Resolution(s): Complaint was resolved by AZOCA.
105. Case No. 2503694  
ADCRR Facility: Douglas  
Complaint Topic(s): Release Eligibility

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	Resolution(s):	Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
106.	Case No.	2503743
	ADCRR Facility:	Not Provided
	Complaint Topic(s):	Communication (Phone), Visitation
	Resolution(s):	Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
107.	Case No.	2503780
	ADCRR Facility:	Tucson
	Complaint Topic(s):	Medical, Treatment
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR agreed to review the matter further., ADCRR will accommodate the Complainant.
108.	Case No.	2503792
	ADCRR Facility:	Winslow
	Complaint Topic(s):	Education, Programming Access, Visitation
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR upheld the agency's action., ADCRR provided guidance to the Complainant.
109.	Case No.	2503812
	ADCRR Facility:	Florence West
	Complaint Topic(s):	Discipline
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
110.	Case No.	2503835
	ADCRR Facility:	Not Provided
	Complaint Topic(s):	Visitation
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
111.	Case No.	2503882
	ADCRR Facility:	Not Provided
	Complaint Topic(s):	Grievance Process
	Resolution(s):	Complainant was provided guidance by AZOCA.
112.	Case No.	2503909
	ADCRR Facility:	Lewis
	Complaint Topic(s):	Discipline, Personal Property, Visitation
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR upheld the agency's action.
113.	Case No.	2504012
	ADCRR Facility:	Florence West
	Complaint Topic(s):	Medical
	Resolution(s):	ADCRR upheld the agency's action.

## OMBUDSMAN INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC ACCESS CASES

### Outreach and Education

#### Educational Materials

We distributed hundreds of our office's booklets on the Public Records Law and the Open Meeting Law directly to elected officials, non-elected public officials, public employees, advocacy groups, and members of the public. This year, we updated our comprehensive public records and open meeting law guide booklets to incorporate the statutory changes made in 2024. We also offer digital versions of the booklets on our website. Additionally, we continue to share and assist in developing training materials for public bodies and officials. We keep updating our website with publications, training opportunities, and new developments in the open meeting and public records laws, such as new case law, legislation, and Attorney General Opinions.

#### Trainings

In the 2025 fiscal year, we provided training on the Public Records Law and Open Meeting Law, both in-person and remotely, to public and private entities across the state. Additionally, since the 2020 pandemic, we have developed public records law and open meeting law training videos for those who cannot attend live training sessions. We continually update these videos to reflect changes in the law. Demand for the videos has been high. During the 2025 fiscal year, we held numerous live training sessions and provided training videos. We conducted sessions for public bodies in various locations, including Phoenix, Dewey-Humboldt, Tucson, and San Luis, and distributed training videos to government agencies across the state. We trained a wide range of public officials, including those from Governor's councils, executive agencies, municipalities, community colleges, special taxing districts, and police departments.

Along with general trainings on public access requirements, we tailored and delivered customized trainings to meet the specific needs of public officials upon request.

Lastly, we continue to provide recordings of recent open meeting and public records law trainings conducted for interested elected officials, non-elected public officials, public employees, advocacy groups, and members of the public.

#### Inquiries and Investigations

In the past fiscal year, our office handled 437 cases related to public access issues. Of these calls, 292 were inquiries about public record law, 121 concerned open meeting law inquiries, and 24 involved both public records and open meeting law. Table 1 shows a breakdown of inquiries received from the public, media, and government agencies. Table 2 lists the number of inquiries about state agencies, county agencies, city or town agencies, school districts, and other local jurisdictions.

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**Table 1**

	Public Inquiries	Media Inquiries	Government Agency Inquiries	Unknown
<b>Number of inquiries</b>	315	20	95	7

**Table 2**

	State Agencies	County Agencies	City or town agencies	School Districts	Other Local Jurisdictions
<b>Number of inquiries</b>	153	65	149	49	29

## Public Access Case Examples

### **2502924/2502926. Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Selection Committee / Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide's Office**

A gentleman made a public records request for purchase order records for the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Selection Committee. Several aspects of the request were suspicious and might indicate an attempt and conducting fraud and/or a scam. Nevertheless, we explained that we have no records responsive to the request.

The man returned and requested records from us and several legislative agencies, including the Attorney General, various commissions, and others. He asked for all the agency purchase records. This was a huge request. He wanted the agencies to place the records into his designated storage file. This made everyone uncomfortable. The man's approach seemed unusual to everyone. He first made a public record request to the Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council (AZSILC) on Tuesday, May 13.

The request to AZSILC seemed somewhat suspicious to their staff. They contacted our public records attorney for advice. The request was for copies of all purchase orders and detailed financial records from AZSILC over several years. It instructed them to use the requesting person's link to upload the responsive records into a specific location the requester provided. The link was not described as, for example, Dropbox or similar. We advised AZSILC that it was unnecessary to connect to the entity's system or link, as it could contain malware. He suggested that AZSILC begin by asking the requester for clarification. He recommended explaining that, for security reasons, they would decline to use the mysterious link, and then see how the requester responded. The Council followed this advice.

Meanwhile, our ombudsman email account received a similar email intended for the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Selection Committee and the Ombudsman-Citizens'. The requester asked for purchase order financial records from the committee. When we saw this request, we took note, as it was the third request from the same individual. We checked with other agencies and found additional requests had been made elsewhere. Further investigation revealed the request originated from a questionable domain in Iceland. We consulted with Homeland Security, ADOA, and the Attorney General's Office and passed the matter to them, since it became evident that the requester had an undisclosed commercial motive, which was inappropriate for a public record request.

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## **2403807. Apache County**

An individual contacted our office complaining that the Apache County Recorder was denying them an opportunity to inspect public records for six weeks due to early voting. Our office worked with the Apache County Attorney to instruct the County Recorder regarding the "promptness" requirement under Arizona's public records law. The County Recorder wanted to delay in-person inspection of the public records because the records are kept in the same location as the county's early voting ballots. The County Recorder did not want to compromise the election. Our office worked with the County Attorney and the County Recorder's office to arrange for the individual to make an appointment to inspect records at an alternative location. The individual thanked us for working with the County Recorder and helping them obtain the records for their work.

## **2404207. Payson**

An individual was angry with the Town of Payson regarding its slow response to the individual's public records request. The Town's attorney informed our office that the request was voluminous and required legal review before production. In addition, the Town explained that the Clerk's office is small and has only two staff. Our office worked with the Town and its attorney to devise a plan for responding to the individual's request. This plan involved rolling production of records and frequent communication with the individual. The Town began providing records to the individual.

## **2407273. White Fence Farms Water District #60**

An individual alleged that White Fence Farms Water District violated Arizona's open meeting laws. The individual specifically claimed that the Water District's Board had discussed making amendments to its bylaws outside of an open meeting. Our office reviewed the allegation and evidence. We noticed that there may have been a violation. We brought the possible violation to the Water District's attention. The Water District took measures to correct its errors. We also provided training resources and information to the Water District to help educate the Board Members on Arizona's open meeting laws.

## **2407641. Office of the Governor**

An employee in the Governor's office asked a series of questions about the Arizona open meeting laws, including who qualifies as a "member" versus "staff" or a member of the public. Our office provided information about open meeting law and answered the individual's questions.

## **2500298. Mesa**

A Mesa employee asked questions on behalf of an advisory committee about open meeting laws. Specifically, the employee wanted to know whether a committee must vote before taking action. Our office explained that public bodies likely need to vote before taking formal action.

## **2500399. Scottsdale Unified School District**

An attorney for the Scottsdale Unified School District (SUSD) inquired whether our office believes a public body can require an individual to identify themselves when making a public records request. Our office said that the current public records law does not require proof of identity. Our stance is that although a public body can request identification, it is best practice not to deny a public records request solely for lack of identification, unless the public body has a good reason to believe that the records request is fraudulent.

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## **2500434. Scottsdale**

A journalist contacted our office with a question regarding the Open Meeting Law in the City of Scottsdale. The journalist alleged that three elected, but not yet sworn-in, members of the City Council engaged in substantive discussions via email with an already sworn-in member before the three were sworn in during a public meeting. He said the City Council consists of seven members, meaning four members would constitute a quorum and trigger the open meeting law.

The journalist inquired whether our office would consider this conduct to constitute a violation of the Open Meeting Law. We explained that the open meeting law does not address at what point someone elected or appointed becomes an official subject to the open meeting law. We explained that conduct as he described would almost certainly constitute a violation of the open meeting law if all four had already been sworn in. We stated that it was less clear whether the conduct, as described, would constitute a violation of the open meeting law; however, we suspect that a judge may not look upon it favorably if the conduct were challenged in court.

## **2501067. Gilbert**

An individual contacted our office regarding the difficulty they were having in obtaining a specific record from the Town of Gilbert and the Maricopa County Attorney's Office (MCAO). The individual requested the record via a court motion, but had not made a public records request to the Town of Gilbert or MCAO. Our office suggested that the individual submit written public records requests to the Town of Gilbert and MCAO and provided the individual with information about how to submit those requests.

## **2501070. Yavapai County**

An individual sought our office's assistance with obtaining public records from Yavapai County. The individual had requested several records and, at the County's request, narrowed the scope of their request. The request had been pending for almost two months. Our office contacted the County and helped the individual receive the requested records.

## **2501107. Tucson**

A Tucson employee inquired whether discussing a meeting's time and date constitutes a violation of the open meeting law. Our office opined that choosing a meeting time and date likely would not violate open meeting laws, provided that no other matter was discussed at the same time.

## **2501114. Maricopa County**

An individual sought our office's assistance with obtaining public records from Maricopa County. They alleged they had not received a response to their request for over six months. Our office worked with the County to ensure that records were provided in a timely and appropriate manner in accordance with Arizona's public records laws.

## **2501429. Humboldt Unified School District**

An individual requested help in obtaining public records from the Humboldt School District (HUSD or District). The person had asked for a large number of records, including those related to district hiring practices, financial records, and a specific grant. Specifically, the individual claimed that they had received only a few of the records despite making the initial request over four months earlier. They also alleged, most significantly, that the District was refusing to allow them to inspect the records at no cost, as

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required by the Arizona public records law. Our office spoke with the District's superintendent and attorney to discuss the status of the individual's request and the reasons behind the fees HUSD was charging. HUSD explained that the delay was partly due to the large volume of records involved. The District collaborated with the individual to narrow the scope of the request, making it easier to handle and speeding up the response. The District agreed to let the individual inspect the records at no charge.

## **2502018. Whetstone Fire District**

A representative of a fire district asked questions about what can be discussed during an executive session in accordance with Arizona's open meeting laws. We clarified that our office cannot provide legal advice but can offer education on open meeting laws. Our office explained the laws about executive sessions and provided the representative with resources.

## **2502122. Gila County Sheriff's Office**

A County Attorney asked our office questions about redacting personal identifying information of minors under Arizona's public records laws. Although our office cannot provide legal advice, we directed the attorney to the relevant statutes and court opinions that may influence the county's redaction decisions.

## **2502469. Payson**

An individual alleged that members of the town council violated open meeting laws by speaking at events organized by private organizations that are open to the public. Our office reviewed the concerns and the narrative presented by the individual. We explained that the open meeting laws explicitly permit members of a public body to express opinions in public outside the confines of an open meeting. We informed the individual that we could not find a clear violation of these laws. We answered the individual's questions during an in-person meeting. The individual expressed gratitude for our clarifications. They also highly praised our office and the role we play.

## **2502768. Yuma County**

A reporter asked whether a county sheriff's office can charge a fee for providing electronic records. Our office explained that the law is unclear and undeveloped regarding the costs of delivering records electronically. Our office opined that fees are probably allowed if the sheriff's office can justify what it is charging and why.

## **2502932. Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries**

Council staff asked whether a meeting of a public body can continue without violating open meeting laws if the body loses a quorum partway through the meeting. Our office stated that although the open meeting laws do not directly address the issue, we believe it is best practice to adjourn the meeting if a quorum is no longer present.

## **2503116. Cochise County Sheriff**

An individual contacted our office regarding a public records request they submitted to the Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO). The individual had requested, among other things, to view videos of an incident they were involved in. CCSO was requiring the individual to pay a fee to view the records in person.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Our office reached out to CCSO and confirmed that they were charging for the inspection of video records. CCSO justified this fee by explaining that allowing the inspection involved creating copies of each video, reviewing them, and redacting sensitive information, which was resource-intensive. We explained that the public records law does not permit an agency to charge for inspection, even if doing so involves creating copies for redaction. We also clarified that the statute allowing higher fees for law enforcement video records specifically applies only to requests for copies, not for inspection. CCSO agreed to provide public records inspections at no cost, including video inspections. The individual was able to review the video footage in person without charge, as requested.

**2503482. Arizona Department of Administration**

A journalist requested our office's assistance with obtaining public records from the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA). The individual's public records request had been pending for several months. Our office contacted ADOA. The journalist received the requested records.

**2505630. Mesa Police Department**

An individual asked whether a police department can charge a fee for providing electronic records. Our office explained that the law is unclear and undeveloped with respect to the costs associated with delivering records electronically. Our office opined that reasonable fees are likely permissible if the police department can justify the charges and explain their rationale.

**2505799. Arizona State Retirement System**

A journalist alleged that the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) improperly denied the journalist's request for public records in violation of the Arizona public records laws. Our office reviewed the journalist's requests and ASRS's responses. Our office determined that the grounds on which ASRS denied the journalist's request were reasonable and were not a clear violation of the public records laws.

**2505805. Department of Child Safety**

An attorney requested assistance with obtaining records from the Department of Child Safety. The public records request had been pending for nearly six months. Our office assisted the attorney in obtaining the records.

## Our Cases – Statistics of Note

### INVESTIGATIONS

We managed our investigations in FY2025, as noted in the following tables.

<b>Table 3 – Investigations – July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025</b>	
<b>Investigation Completed</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Declined<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Discontinued<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The complaint was withdrawn or resolved during the investigation<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>4</b>
<b>TOTAL REQUESTS FOR INVESTIGATION</b>	<b>207</b>

<b>Table 4 – Investigative Findings – July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025</b>		
<b>NOT SUPPORTED</b>		<b>79</b>
<b>SUPPORTED/PARTIALLY SUPPORTED<sup>4</sup></b>		<b>32</b>
<b>Requires further consideration by the agency</b>	<b>12</b>	
<b>Other actions by the agency required</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Referred to the legislature for further action</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>The action was arbitrary or capricious</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>The action was an abuse of discretion</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>The administrative act requires modification/cancellation</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>The action was not according to the law</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Reasons for the administrative act required</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>A statute or rule requires an amendment</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Insufficient or no grounds for an administrative act</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>INDETERMINATE<sup>5</sup></b>		<b>3</b>
<b>TOTAL COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS</b>		<b>114</b>

1 “Decline” is marked pursuant to authority in A.R.S. §41-1377(C). In those cases, the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide Office may decline to investigate a complaint if there is another adequate remedy available; the matter is outside the duties of the ombudsman-citizens aide; the complainant has had knowledge of the matter for an unreasonable period; the complainant does not have sufficient personal interest in the subject; the complaint is trivial or made in bad faith; or the resources of the office of the ombudsman-citizen aide are insufficient to investigate the complaint adequately. By law, we must decline an investigation if the complainant comes to us prematurely. In those cases, we coach the complainant about initially proceeding with the agency. Declining to investigate does not mean we decline to help. In most instances, we coach the person and provide resources so they know how to proceed productively.

2 “Discontinued” signifies when the complainant stops responding, and the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide Office cannot proceed with inquiries.

3 “Withdrawn or Resolved During Investigation” is marked when the complainant asks us to cease an investigation

4 The individual count for “total supported or partially supported findings” in the right-side column will always be equal to, or greater than, the left column of specific reasons because each case must have at least one finding but may have multiple “supported” or “partially supported” findings.

5 “Indeterminate” is marked when an investigation is completed, yet there is not enough evidence to discern whether something is “supported,” “partially supported,” or “not supported.” Example: two witnesses with opposite stories and no evidence to tip the balance.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

## OVERALL CASE STATISTICS

As explained on page 1, we respond to citizens' complaints in three ways: coaching, informal assistance, or investigation. Also, as noted earlier in the agency letter introducing this report, the three agencies with the highest number of complaints and inquiries in fiscal year 2025 were the Department of Economic Security, the Department of Child Safety, and ADOT. That said, the analysis of the numbers reveals a different story for each agency.

FY	Total FY Cases	DES	DCS	ADOT incl. MVD
1/2 FY26 *	5254	1,803	556	173
FY25	8007	1,459	1,153	360
FY24	7028	1341	1254	243
FY23	6026	1111	1345	195
FY22	6753	1871	1497	285

Case Count as of close of business December 30, 2025 (the approximate mid-point of FY26)

DES is the agency facing the biggest challenge and has the most complaints. Our office received 1,459 Department of Economic Security (DES) cases in FY25, 1,341 cases in FY24, and 1,111 in FY23. This shows a concerning trend, and the situation has worsened significantly in recent months. In the first half of FY26 (July 1, 2025, to December 30, 2025), we already received over 1,803 DES cases. This means that in just the past six months, the complaint count has exceeded what was recorded in the previous twelve months. If this pace continues for the rest of FY26, public complaints and concerns about DES could surpass 3,600 for the year—doubling previous figures. The main reasons for the increase are difficulties the DES departments face in processing nutrition and medical benefits, unemployment insurance, and related appeals.

In contrast, the Department of Child Safety (DCS) improved its figures. Despite having the second-highest number of case contacts with our office, DCS has maintained a positive trend. As an agency, DCS often faces criticism because of the nature of its work and the requirement to provide those under investigation by DCS with contact information for the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide. The total number of DCS cases with us has decreased compared to the previous year. We handled 101 fewer DCS cases in FY25 than in FY24. Over most of the past decade, the number of DCS cases we've received at AZOCA has steadily declined each year.

The agency with the third-highest number of cases referred to us was ADOT (including MVD). In FY25, we handled 360 ADOT cases, increasing from 243 in FY24 and 195 in FY23.

We have good news about the Department of Revenue (DOR). Last year, in FY24, we observed that DOR had struggled. We handled over 200 cases (76.2%) more involving DOR in FY24 (483) than in FY23 (274). However, DOR has improved in several ways during FY25, with only 217 complaints. This is its best performance in three years, with fewer than half the complaints compared to the previous year.

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

## Contacts by Agency

The Contacts by Agency table shows the distribution of our contacts with an agency for FY25.

## CONTACTS BY AGENCY

Agency	Coaching	Assistance	Investigation	Total
Academy of Building Industries High School	0	1	0	1
Academy of Math and Science	1	0	0	1
Acupuncture, Board of Examiners of	1	5	0	6
Administrative Hearings, Office of	2	0	0	2
ADOA - Administration, Department of	30	10	3	43
Agriculture - Wt. and Measures	5	0	0	5
Agriculture, Department of	2	0	1	3
Agriculture, Pest Mgmt. Office	1	0	0	1
Agua Fria High School	0	2	0	2
AHCCCS	149	20	7	176
Ajo-Lukeville Health Service District	0	2	0	2
Apache County	2	2	0	4
Apache County Board of Supervisors	1	0	0	1
Arizona City Fire District	0	1	0	1
Arts, Arizona Commission on	1	0	0	1
ASU - Arizona State University	5	0	1	6
Attorney General, Office of	44	8	1	53
Auditor General	1	0	0	1
AZ POST - Peace Officer Standards & Training Board	2	0	0	2
AZ Prosecuting Attorney Adv Council -APAAC	1	0	0	1
Barbers, Arizona Board of	22	3	0	25
Basis Charter Schools	0	1	0	1
Behavioral Health Examiners, State Board of	12	3	2	17
Camp Verde	1	0	3	4
Camp Verde School District	0	0	1	1
Canon Elementary School District	1	0	0	1
Cartwright	1	0	0	1
Casa Grande Union HS	2	0	0	2
Central Arizona Project (CAP)	0	1	0	1
Chandler	2	1	0	3
Chandler Police Department	4	1	0	5
Chandler Unified School District	2	0	0	2
Charter Schools, Arizona State Board of	1	1	0	2
Chino Valley	2	0	1	3
Chiropractic Examiners, State Board of	7	3	2	12
Citizens Clean Elections Commission	2	0	1	3
Cochise County	1	0	1	2
Cochise County Attorney	1	0	0	1
Cochise County Sheriff	0	0	1	1
Commerce Authority of Arizona	1	0	0	1
Corporation Commission	10	5	0	15
Corrections, Reentry and Rehabilitation (ADCRR)	45	67	1	113

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Cosmetology, Board of	26	1	0	27
Cottonwood	2	0	0	2
Court - Commission of Judicial Conduct	2	0	0	2
Court - JP, Small Claims, or Municipal	11	0	0	11
Court - Superior	27	0	0	27
Court - Supreme Court	4	0	0	4
DCS - Community Advisory Committee	1	1	0	2
DCS - Department of Child Safety	975	111	55	1141
DCS - Office of Licensing Regulation	2	1	0	3
DCS - Other	7	0	0	7
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Commission	1	0	1	2
Deer Valley Unified School District	2	2	1	5
Dental Examiners, Board of	10	2	0	12
DES - Adult Protective Services	66	10	0	76
DES - Aging & Community Services	37	2	0	39
DES - Benefits and Medical Eligibility	584	72	3	659
DES - Child Support Service	161	33	3	197
DES - Developmental Disabilities	23	6	4	33
DES - Employment and Rehabilitation	233	56	4	293
DES - Other	138	19	5	162
Dewey	0	0	1	1
Dewey-Humboldt	2	0	2	4
Dewey-Humboldt Town Council	4	0	0	4
DIFI - Financial Institutions Department	9	1	0	10
DIFI - Insurance, Department of	17	1	2	20
Douglas	2	2	0	4
DPS - Department of Public Safety	60	9	7	76
Education, Board of	6	0	1	7
Education, Department of (ADE)	125	55	5	185
Elfrida Water District	1	0	0	1
Eloy	0	1	0	1
Emergency & Military Affairs, Department of	4	0	0	4
Environmental Quality, Department of	14	2	1	17
Fingerprinting, Board of	6	1	1	8
Flagstaff	1	1	2	4
Fountain Hills	1	0	0	1
Frye fire district	1	0	0	1
Game and Fish, Department of	5	0	1	6
Gaming, Dept.	2	2	1	5
Gila County Board of Supervisors	1	0	0	1
Gila County Sheriff's Office	1	0	0	1
Gilbert	2	1	2	5
Gilbert Police Department	2	0	0	2
Glendale	1	0	2	3
Glendale Police Department	2	0	0	2
Globe	0	0	1	1
Golder Ranch Fire District	1	1	0	2
Goodyear	0	1	0	1

# OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Governor, Office of	6	1	0	7
Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries	2	0	0	2
Graham County	1	0	0	1
Grand Canyon Unified School District #4	1	0	0	1
Green Valley	0	0	1	1
Health Services, Department of	42	12	2	56
Health Services, Vital Records Office	10	2	0	12
Higley School District	1	1	2	4
Holbrook	1	1	0	2
Housing Dept. -Manufactured Housing Office	1	1	2	4
Housing, Department of	12	2	1	15
Humboldt Unified School District	0	0	1	1
Industrial Commission	79	4	2	85
Judicial Conduct, Commission on	2	0	0	2
La Paz	1	0	0	1
La Paz County Sheriff	1	2	0	3
Lake Havasu City	1	0	1	2
Land, Department of	4	2	1	7
Legislature	9	0	0	9
Liberty Elementary School District #25	0	1	0	1
Liquor Licenses and Control, Department of	5	1	0	6
Litchfield Elementary School District	0	0	1	1
Lottery	2	1	0	3
Marana	1	0	0	1
Maricopa	5	2	3	10
Maricopa City Council	2	0	0	2
Maricopa County Attorney	4	1	3	8
Maricopa County Clerk	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Community College	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Human Services Department	0	1	0	1
Maricopa County Recorder	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Sheriff	0	1	0	1
Maricopa County Superior Court	1	0	0	1
Massage Therapy, State Board of	24	12	2	38
Mayer Water District	1	0	0	1
Medical Board, Arizona	14	4	3	21
Mesa	1	1	0	2
Mesa Police Department	1	0	0	1
Mescal J-6 Fire District	0	0	1	1
Miami	1	0	0	1
Mine Inspector	1	1	1	3
Mohave	2	1	1	4
Mohave County Airport Authority	1	0	0	1
Mohave County Sheriff's Office	1	0	0	1
Mohave Valley School District	0	0	1	1
Mount Lemmon Fire District	1	0	0	1
Naturopathic Physicians Board of Medical Examiners	1	0	0	1
NAU - Northern Arizona University	2	0	0	2

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Navajo	1	2	0	3
Navajo County Community College Dist	0	2	0	2
Nogales	0	0	1	1
Nogales Unified School District	1	0	1	2
Nursing, State Board of	18	4	1	23
Occupational Therapy Examiners, Board of	10	2	0	12
Ombudsman	34	18	0	52
Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Selection Committee	0	1	0	1
Optometry, State Board of	2	0	0	2
Oro Valley	1	0	0	1
Osteopathic Examiners in Medicine and Surgery, Board of	2	2	1	5
Other - Arizona in general	620	3	0	623
Other - Government	129	0	2	131
Other - Government - City or Town	182	0	1	183
Other - Government - County	210	1	0	211
Other - Government - Federal	138	1	0	139
Other - Private	1541	8	2	1551
Page	0	1	0	1
Parks, Department of	0	1	1	2
Payson	1	1	0	2
Payson Police Department	1	0	0	1
Peoria	6	0	0	6
Peoria Unified School District	0	1	0	1
Pharmacy, Board	6	1	2	9
Phoenix	4	0	3	7
Phoenix Police Department	10	3	1	14
Phoenix Union	1	0	0	1
Physical Therapy Examiners, Board of	1	0	0	1
Physician Assistants, AZ Regulatory Board of	1	0	0	1
Pima	3	0	0	3
Pima Community College	0	1	0	1
Pima County Attorney's Office	0	0	2	2
Pima County Sheriff's office	0	0	1	1
Pinal	1	1	1	3
Pinetop Fire District	0	1	0	1
Pioneers' Home	1	0	0	1
Podiatry Examiners, State Board of	0	0	1	1
Prescott	2	0	0	2
Prescott Valley	1	1	0	2
PRIVATE Post-Secondary Education Board	1	0	0	1
Psychologist Examiners, State Board of	7	1	2	10
Public Safety Personnel Retirement System	2	1	0	3
Quartzsite Police Department	0	1	0	1
Quartzsite School District #4	2	1	0	3
Real Estate Dept. - HOAs	4	0	0	4
Real Estate, Department of	6	2	5	13
Regents, Arizona Board of	4	0	0	4
Registrar of Contractors	65	1	7	73

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Respiratory Care Examiners, Board of	1	0	0	1
Retirement System, Arizona State	13	6	1	20
Revenue, Department of	179	36	2	217
Riverbend Preparatory Academy	0	2	0	2
Safford	1	0	0	1
San Luis	2	0	0	2
San Simon Volunteer Fire District	1	1	0	2
Santa Cruz	0	1	0	1
Scottsdale	1	1	0	2
Scottsdale Police Department	1	1	1	3
Scottsdale Unified School District	3	0	0	3
Sec. of State - Library, Archive & Records Dept.	1	0	0	1
Secretary of State	18	4	0	22
Sedona	3	0	0	3
Sedona Fire District	1	0	0	1
Sedona-Oak Creek Unified School District	1	0	0	1
Show Low	1	0	0	1
Snowflake Unified School District	0	0	1	1
St Johns	1	0	0	1
Statewide Independent Living Council	1	0	0	1
Surprise	2	1	2	5
Surprise City Council	2	0	0	2
Surprise Police Department	1	0	0	1
Technical Registration, Board of	3	0	1	4
Telesis Center for Learning, Inc	1	0	0	1
Tempe	1	0	1	2
Tempe Police Department	2	0	0	2
Transportation, Department of	106	9	0	115
Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division	214	30	1	245
Treasurer, Office of	1	0	0	1
Tri-City Regional Sanitary District	2	0	0	2
Tucson	8	2	0	10
Tucson Police Department	2	3	0	5
U of A - University of Arizona	2	0	0	2
unknown	4	1	0	5
unknown city	7	0	0	7
Unknown Hospital District	1	0	0	1
unknown school district	2	0	2	4
Unknown state agency	216	0	0	216
Various Charter Schools	1	0	0	1
Various Cities/Towns	2	0	0	2
Various school districts	1	0	0	1
Veterans' Services, Department of	7	3	0	10
Veterinary Medical Examining Board	4	0	1	5
Water Resources, Department of	2	0	0	2
Whetstone Fire District	1	0	0	1
White Fence Farms Water District #60	0	1	1	2
Wickenburg Unified School District	1	0	0	1

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Wilson Elementary School	0	0	1	1
Yavapai County	2	1	1	4
Yavapai County Community College	0	1	0	1
Yavapai County Sheriff's Office	1	0	0	1
Yuma County	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS</b>	<b>7042</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>8007</b>

Agency Count: 239

## About the Ombudsman and Staff

### **Joanne MacDonnell – Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide**

Joanne became the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide on July 1, 2022, after being confirmed by the Legislature and the Governor. She joined the office as Deputy Ombudsman in 2005, following nearly eight years at the Arizona Corporation Commission, where she served as Director of Corporations. Before her government work, Joanne worked in the private sector at an agribusiness corporation and in real estate, where she held the roles of licensed Realtor associate and real estate appraiser. She holds Bachelor of Science degrees in Business Administration and Real Estate from the University of Arizona, is certified as an investigator by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR), and completed mediation training through South Mountain Community College. Her additional training includes the ADOA Executive Course, Project & Investment Justification Training, the Leadership Module through Rio Salado College and Arizona Government University, as well as ombudsman training prescribed by the U.S. Ombudsman Association (USOA). Joanne is active in the USOA, having served multiple years as a Board Director and Officer, as well as on the Conference and Outreach Committees. She currently serves as USOA's Secretary/Treasurer and was the Chairman of the USOA Children and Family Chapter for four years. She was a member of the Association for Conflict Resolution and qualified in the "Practitioner" category. She also served for seven years on the DCS Citizen Review Panel Committee and participated in the Supreme Court's Special Committees on Parent Representation and Guardian Ad Litem Standards. Since 2011, she has worked with the Arizona Juvenile Court Improvement Committee. For the past fifteen years, she has served as a judge for the Central Arizona Better Business Bureau (BBB) Business Ethics Award.

### **Lane Organ – Deputy Ombudsman**

Lane joined the office as Deputy Ombudsman in July 2022 after nearly seven years serving as the Ombudsman for the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). Before working at DES, Lane worked for Maricopa County and the Governor's Office of Constituent Services. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science, with a minor in Justice Studies and a certificate in Civic Education from Arizona State University. Lane completed the New Ombudsman Training required by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) in 2015, is trained in and uses DCS's case management system, Guardian, and is certified as an Investigator / Inspector by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). She is also certified in Mental Health First Aid and as a Certified Trauma Support Specialist (CTSS).

### **Danee Garone – Senior Staff Attorney (Former)**

Danee was an attorney for the Ombudsman's Office and specialized in open meetings and public records law matters. He joined the Ombudsman's office in 2014 and left in June 2025 to become a city attorney for Avondale. Danee has a Juris Doctor degree from the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law at Arizona State University (ASU) and is a licensed attorney.

### **Melissa Henry – Legal Counsel and Dispute Resolution Specialist**

Melissa Henry joined the Ombudsman’s office in February 2024 as a Legal Counsel and Dispute Resolution Specialist. Before joining the Ombudsman’s office, Melissa spent nearly 25 years working in state and federal government, including roles with the U.S. Senate, the Arizona Attorney General’s Office, and the Arizona Department of Economic Security. She also led the government relations team for a national non-profit organization and practiced privately as a family lawyer. Melissa has broad experience in drafting legislation, rules, regulations, policies, official statements, position papers, and legal documents. She earned an LLM in Dispute Resolution from the Straus Institute at Pepperdine University’s Caruso School of Law. She holds a JD from George Washington University Law School and a Bachelor of Arts in Biological Sciences from Cornell University. Additionally, Melissa earned a degree in Le Cordon Bleu Patisserie and Baking from Scottsdale Culinary Institute. She is admitted to the State Bar of Arizona and authorized to practice before the United States District Court for the District of Arizona. Melissa completed the New Ombudsman Training provided by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and the National Certified Investigator and Inspector Training (NCIT) offered by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR).

### **Whitney Herb – Legal Investigator**

Whitney joined the office as a Legal Investigator Ombudsman in April 2025. Whitney earned her BA in Sociology at the University of Oregon, with a minor in Psychology and graduating Cum Laude from the Robert D. Clark Honors College. She earned her law degree and graduated Cum Laude from Willamette University College of Law with a Certificate in Alternative Dispute Resolution. After five years in commercial real estate lending, helping borrowers avoid bankruptcy and foreclosure after the financial crisis, Whitney owned and managed a multidisciplinary medical practice for 13 years in the Pacific Northwest before moving to Arizona for sunshine and a position with the US Treasury Department Independent Office of Appeals as an Appeals Officer, utilizing her background in business management, accounting, tax, law, and dispute resolution. Whitney completed the New Ombudsman Training prescribed by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is certified as an Investigator/Inspector by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). Whitney is fluent in Spanish.

### **Thomas Driscoll – Senior Investigator and Child Safety Specialist**

Thomas joined the office as a Senior Investigator and Child Safety Specialist in August 2024. Before joining the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide Office, Thomas spent nearly eight years at the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS), where he held various roles including Specialist, Program Specialist, and Unit Supervisor. Most of his time at DCS, including his supervisory role, was with the After-Hours Investigation Team (AHIT), which handles emergency reports and communications during nights and weekends. Thomas was selected as a “super user” for DCS’s case management system, Guardian. He also supported DCS colleagues as part of the Workforce Resilience Team. Throughout his tenure at DCS, Thomas completed Specialist Core, Supervisor Core, and SAFE AZ training. He also received training from John E. Reid and Associates in Emerging Trends in Child Sexual Abuse Investigations, Child Abuse Injury Reconstruction Techniques, and the Reid Technique of Investigative Interviewing. Additionally, Thomas completed Advanced Forensic Interview Training from Prevent Child Abuse Arizona. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Global Security and Intelligence Studies from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University,

focusing on Security Operations Management with a minor in Mathematics. Since joining the team, Thomas has also completed the New Ombudsman Training offered by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA).

**Alicia Nugent – Investigator and Child Safety Specialist**

Alicia started working at the Ombudsman’s Office in January 2020 as an intern. In May 2020, she was promoted to Assistant Intake Ombudsman and later assumed the role of Assistant Ombudsman. She currently works as an Investigator Ombudsman, focusing on DCS matters. Alicia earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Arizona State University (ASU) in 2020. In 2023, she completed her Master’s Degree in Legal Studies at ASU. Alicia also completed the New Ombudsman Training through the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is certified as an Investigator/Inspector by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). She is trained in and utilizes DCS’s case management system, Guardian.

**Tamela West – Investigator and Management Analyst (Former)**

Tamela concluded a 25-year career in public service with the Ombudsmen-Citizens’ Aide Office, where she worked as an investigator and management analyst before moving to a management role in the private sector.

**Frank Rutledge – Senior Investigator and Education Specialist**

Frank joined the Ombudsman team in June 2016 after working almost nine years with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). During his time with DES, Frank worked with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Office of Procurement, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Frank is certified in Arizona State Public Procurement (CASPP) and brings a wealth of knowledge to the team, including DES services, contracting, and procurement. Frank completed the New Ombudsman Training prescribed by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is certified as an Investigator/Inspector by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). Before working in government, Frank worked in the manufacturing and aerospace industry and residential home construction. Frank has resided in Arizona for over 40 years and is a graduate of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

**John Wicus – Senior Investigator**

John joined the Ombudsman’s Office as an intern in January 2018 while earning his master’s degree in Politics at Arizona State University (ASU). He previously worked as a Teacher’s Assistant at ASU, teaching courses such as Political Ideology, Problems of Democracy, and Contemporary Political Theory. He received a Bachelor of Science in Politics (Global Studies) with a minor in European History from ASU. After graduating, John became a full-time staff member at the Ombudsman’s Office. He completed the New Ombudsman training offered by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and the National Certified Investigator and Inspector Training (NCIT) provided by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement, and Regulation (CLEAR). He is proficient in American Sign Language and trained in and uses DCS’s case management system, Guardian.

**Brandon Rosas – Assistant Ombudsman**

Brandon Rosas joined the Ombudsman’s Office in January 2021. He studied at Arizona State University (ASU), earning a Bachelor’s degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice, along with a certificate in Law and Human Behavior. Brandon began as an intern in the Ombudsman’s Office through the ASU Legislative and Government Internship Program (ALIP) and was later promoted to Assistant Intake Ombudsman and then to Assistant Ombudsman. He completed the New Ombudsman Training provided by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is also certified as an Investigator by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement, and Regulation (CLEAR). Brandon is a Spanish speaker.

**Connor Mueller – Assistant Intake Ombudsman (Former)**

Connor Mueller finished a 3.5-year role as an assistant intake ombudsman and transitioned to a private-sector investment position.

**Yvonne Rothblum – Assistant Intake Ombudsman**

Yvonne joined the Ombudsman team in November 2016. Previously, she worked at the Arizona Commerce Authority (formerly the Arizona Department of Commerce) and the Arizona Department of Revenue. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication with a minor in Spanish from Arizona State University. Yvonne completed the New Ombudsman training required by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) and has participated in the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR) training.