



**Governor’s Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment
May 18, 2022, 10:00 AM**

Governor’s 2nd Floor Conference Room

1700 West Washington Street, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007

A general meeting of the Governor’s Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment was convened on **May 18, 2022**, 1700 West Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85007, notice having been duly given.

Members Present (15)	Members Absent (13)
Angela Ducey, Co-Chair	Mark Upton
Maria Cristina Fuentes	Ginger Ward
Berisha Black	Claire Louge
Michael Faust	Darlene G. Newsom
Jeffrey James Taylor	Kate Brophy McGee
Kathryn Ptak	Warren H. Stewart
Richard D. Yarbough (a proxy for Paul Mulligan)	Kathryn A. Pidgeon, Co-Chair
Janet L. Garcia	Colleen A. McNally
Kathie J. O’Dell	Torrie Taj
Rachel Mitchell	Brad Snyder
Zora Manjencich	Lorrie G. Henderson
Terry M. Crist	James D. Molina
Obed Escobar	Leslie Y. Reprogle
Ryan Young	
Guests and Staff Present (3)	
Kim Brooks	Kris Jacober
Kainoa Spenser	

Call to Order

- **Director Maria Cristina Fuentes** called the Governor’s Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. with **15** members and **3** staff and guests present. **Maria Cristina Fuentes** then reviewed the procedures of the Council meeting and welcomed all those joining both in-person and via Zoom.

Opening Remarks

- **Mrs. Angela Ducey, Co-Chair**, welcomed Councilmembers to the meeting and shared that May is National Foster Care Month and June is Family Reunification Month. She also shared that council member **Mrs. Katie Ptak** has recently taken a position with Casey Family Programs, bringing her vast personal and professional experience to help improve child well-being nationwide. **Mrs. Ptak** brings a wealth of experience in child welfare, as a foster and adoptive mom, and recently added birth mom to her resume. **Mrs. Angela Ducey, Co-Chair**, also welcomed a new council member, **Mr. Ryan Young**, who serves as the Vice President of the Department of Child Safety Youth Empowerment Council and the Chair of the Arizona Chapter of the Foster Care Children of America. She expressed her excitement as it is important to the work of the Council to have the voice of someone with Ryan’s experience on the Council.

Roll Call

- **Director Fuentes** conducted a roll call of the Council with a quorum met.

Approval of Minutes

- **Director Fuentes** requested a review of the **March 10, 2022** meeting minutes.
 - **Mr. Terry Crist** moved to accept the **March 10, 2022** minutes.
 - **Mr. Ryan Young** seconded the motion.
 - The motion passed with no dissenting votes at 10:20 a.m.

Special Recognition

- **Mrs. Angela Ducey, Co-Chair**, presented **Kris Jacober** with a Commendation from Governor Doug Ducey. At the last meeting of the Child Safety and Family Empowerment Council, **Ms. Jacober** shared an update on the amazing work being done by the Friends of Foster Children Foundation. **Ms. Jacober** has worked both professionally and personally to support Arizona's foster care community through the Foundation, Arizona's Children Association, and Aid to Adoption of Special Kids. She has had an immeasurable impact on the lives of children and families in our state. **Ms. Jacober** has done all of this while serving in her favorite role - the role of a foster mom. Over the past 15 years, **Ms. Jacober** and her family have provided a safe and supportive home for 17 foster children. Her unwavering commitment to bringing partners together to positively impact Arizona families is greatly moving and inspiring.
- **Kris Jacober** thanked **Mrs. Angela Ducey, Co-Chair**, and the Council for recognition of her service. Kris shared a token for each council member that represented each child that has entered the Arizona foster care system in the last two weeks. Kris shared that it was her wish that each time a Council member looked at that small token, they would remember the impact that they are having on these children's lives.

Update from Department of Child Safety

- **Director Fuentes**, introduced **Director Michael Faust**, the Director for the Arizona Department of Child Safety for an update from the Department..
- **Director Michael Faust** thanked **Director Maria Cristina Fuentes** for her introduction and began his presentation by sharing that his time spent as Director of DCS has been some of the hardest and most rewarding years of his life. **Director Faust** spoke of the importance of honoring Family Reunification month each June. He shared his belief that the state's role is to protect kids from truly unsafe conditions and return them safely back home while it is the community's responsibility to support families to help prevent them from coming into the foster care system.
- Over the last 7 to 8 years, Arizona has seen a drastic change in the makeup of the Foster and Child Protective Services. The positive and negative of that change is that the work is never done. No matter who sits as a member of the council, it is important to stay the course and remember children thrive in family environments. The goal, whenever possible, is to support the family so kids can stay at home. If not, then it is the goal of the Arizona Department of Child Safety to safely return them home at the correct time.
- **Director Faust** stressed that every industry is struggling with employment right now and the Arizona Department of Child Safety is no different. The job is hard, thankless, and underpaid even after great efforts to increase pay and improve working conditions. Recruitment is hard for everyone right now and the Department of Child Safety's staff is down overall. This is most felt in field operation staff when they are unable to work cases as timely as desired due to the increased amount of cases per staff. **Director Faust** said "turnover breeds turnover" and that is felt heavily by this department especially since it is so specialized and the demands of the worker are evolving quicker than the employer can adapt.
- **Director Faust** shared that field specialists go through 22 weeks of training. For the first 12 weeks, there is no caseload for the specialist but in the second half, they slowly get introduced to the process of responding to cases. **Director Faust** shared that some employees haven't received a pay raise in 7 years while frontline case specialists have received raises in three of the last five years, which is positive. He shared his gratitude for the support from the Governor's Office and the Legislature but also shared the challenges of pivoting a state agency the size of DCS to support the needs of staff.
- **Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, asked what is the starting entry-level salary for a field operation specialist. **Director Faust** said an entry-level specialist would enter with a pay of \$40,000 then a pay bump after six months and

pay increases every year for the next two years. The Department of Child Safety is planning on increasing the entry-level pay again and then changing to a 6-month and 12-month pay increase model because at 6 months, state employees start paying into the retirement system which impacts their paycheck. There are certain positions DCS is not currently hiring for because the pay was so low that no one was applying. Inflation is adding another layer of difficulty as pay raises cannot always keep up with inflation. DCS has shifted from asking the employees "why are you leaving" to asking "what can we do to help you stay." The usual answer is that the employee can make more money somewhere else with easier working conditions. **Director Faust** stressed that in this line of service, when the phone rings, the Department cannot say no. This adds another layer of pressure on the workforce and in the hiring process.

- **Director Faust** shared that there is a 40% turnover rate within the agency and this is a reminder of what he observed surrounding this same situation in 2015 when he started with DCS. It had him question what the department can do better to be in alignment with its values. The demands of the stakeholders have changed where a couple of years ago there used to be a big push for separating children from families; there is now more of a push to keep kids together with their families.
- **Director Faust** shared information regarding the number of calls received per month as well as who is making these calls: DCS receives about 4000 calls per month to help kids in potentially unsafe situations in which staff have to go out and conduct a site visit. As school gets out and the summer season comes around, there will be fewer educators reporting instances so there is a drop in reports. Law enforcement and healthcare workers are then the primary reporters but overall this shows that the Department of Child Safety is conducting a lot of site visits each month.
- DCS has made efforts in creating two pieces of training for educators and church leaders on how to report cases correctly. Alongside these two trainings, they also provide one for health and mental health professionals led by Dr. Cara Christ, reviewing mandated reporting in a healthcare environment. There is also a complimentary session that can be provided to educators by partnering with Prevent Child Abuse Arizona. This training is to help the issue of overreporting by teachers as they are more risk-averse and usually assume the Department of Child Safety is the proper agency when there are more appropriate agencies to support the health and welfare of the child and family.
- **Director Faust** shared that DCS commissioned a "Next Event Study" that was codified into law this past year through a bill sponsored by **Senator Nancy Barto**. The mission of this study is to look at every report received over a specific window of time and review the next event and identify what happened. The main hypothesis is that DCS staff are engaging in visits that do not need DCS but the study helped answer which of those visits are unnecessary. **Director Faust** is hopeful that the report helps ease the caseload of the DCS each month and helps create a plan for DCS to hand off the situation to the correct agency or through a service intervention. One of the significant goals of this study is to create continuity and to combat the pendulum swing that takes place in the child safety realm which swings from "removing lots of kids to "keeping all kids at home", neither is the correct way. It is crucial to find the correct balance between the two by creating smart methodical processes and involving programs that are a part of DCS's operations.
- **Ms. Berisha Black** asked if there are ever instances where the Department of Child Safety uses a differential response model when assessing a non-responsive family while a community partner wants to help. **Director Faust** said they do not use differential response theory as their organization was not mature enough to adapt to it. **Director Faust** believes there are alternative pathways but wants the agency to look at each case through the lens of facts and data.
- **Director Faust** said the Department of Child Safety is removing 35-40% fewer kids from their homes each month in a safe and true manner than in the past. He shared that the Department of Child Safety began tackling its massive backlog problem back in 2015-16 when the agency had over 33,000 backlogged cases while receiving 4,000 new calls each month. DCS has approximately 10,000 cases which is high for the current staffing level. **Director Faust** stressed that no matter who is at the head of DCS, this number is incredibly important to watch.
- A child protective agency should have at least a 1:1 ratio of exits and entries for kids coming into the system.

- In 2016, the Department of Child Safety averaged 1,077 entering fostering care, which means on any given day there are up to 40 kids entering the Department of Child Safety care resulting in a peak of 19,044 kids in care at that time (700 kids over 18 and 18,300 under the age of 18).
- Currently, the Department of Child Safety averages 600 kids coming into care each month which **Director Faust** feels is more in line with the state's population.
- Looking at these numbers brings up the question of what model of safety DCS is following. **Director Faust** discusses the three main ways in which different jurisdictions assess risk and safety when responding to a call:
 1. Structured decision-making using an actuary model. Using a standards rubric for a risk assessment, you count up the scores and will remove the child if deemed necessary by the assessment.
 2. Some jurisdictions make up their models and evolve them over time. This is hard because jurisdictions get stuck in a bubble and lose learning.
 - In early 2000, Arizona implemented a plan like many other jurisdictions from Action for Child Protection that was originally funded and supported by the federal government. Over time, the state came to realize it was too much to support the program and its technology and in 2012, the program as it stood, was discontinued
 3. In 2016, as a response to the previous system no longer working, the Department of Child Safety rebranded the old system and recreated it as SAFEAZ. This program is now used widely across many US jurisdictions as a standard.
 - This is a slow and steady methodical approach to safety to help realign the Department of Child Safety. **Director Faust** feels there is still much room to grow and fidelity to this model is difficult.
 - DCS uses a consensus model which has the specialist go out to collect facts and assess the safety of the situation to see if there is a present danger. Next, they do a family assessment to see if there are signs of neglect within the family. Since this is a consensus model, the decision to remove is not on the specialist alone.
- **Terry Crist** asked what the position above a specialist is and role they play. **Director Faust** shared that the on-site specialist must take their report to their supervisor who then elevates it above one of the area program managers. This is because it is easy to remove kids but hard to reunify them. DCS needs to make sure that this stays a methodical approach and that there is no one right answer. From the legislation, this process needs the protection of the Department Child Safety Oversight board when a new Director may come in and make changes. Changes must be made properly and methodically, this space for innovation is necessary so the agency can adapt to future needs.
- **Director Faust** then shared the rate of kids receiving in-home care, stressing the importance of staff having a deep understanding of which kids are good candidates for receiving in-home care. The federal government is working to identify ways to directly fund in-home services.
- **Ms. Berisha Black** asked about the percentage of kids re-entering care in Arizona. **Director Faust** shared that about 10-12% of kids re-enter care after 6 months. **Director Faust** shared that everyone is going to question the decision the department makes, whether it is sending a kid home or taking them away. **Director Faust** told a personal story of being at two different stakeholder meetings from the same community who were saying the Department of Child Safety was intervening too much and the others saying the opposite; showcasing the fine line the Department of Child Safety must operate within.
- **Director Faust** discussed when the Department of Child Safety was sued by Children's Rights on behalf of a group of foster kids for the level of care. **Director Faust** stated it was deserved and the Department of Child Safety has worked hard to achieve its settlement goals that are solidified in the Department of Child Safety strategic plan.
- **Jeffrey James Taylor** asked if children still receive in-home services once a family is reunified. **Director Faust** responded that services are provided but feels they do not last long enough to have an impact.
 - The Department of Child Safety has changed its formulation of a safety plan so it doesn't disrupt the services being provided. The Department of Child Safety changed the array of services offered to

parents by providing Nurturing Parenting and Family Connection programs that provide parenting skills and build up protective capacities for families.

- These services can be provided for kids in-home, out of home, and a mix of both.
- **Terry Crist** asked how to find all this data being presented so the Council members can share it with their stakeholders. **Director Faust** shared that all of this data can be found on the DCS website and they did this so all the data is out there for communities and families, [DCS.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures](https://www.dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures).
- **Director Faust** shared that building up the family is necessary for seeing fewer kids in care as government cannot best solve this issue in the long run. The Department of Child Safety has a role to play in solving this issue by assessing risk and removing kids that need protection but this is not going to be solved by the government alone. **Director Faust** discussed the GCU Foster Care Scholarship event that highlighted the partnership between the non-profit and faith sectors to help serve this community.
- **Director Faust** shifted to explain the three main goals of the Department of Child Safety:
 - Goal 1: Of the 12,543 kids in the foster care system, 57% currently live in kinship care. **Director Faust's** goal is to get at least 65-70% of these kids into kinship care. He believes that is completely possible but there are nuances to this type of care.
 - a. **Ms. Black** shared that a lot of the time kinship family members don't know that those kids would come into their care. **Director Faust** responded that families have much to reconcile such as the love for the family member as well as the cost of raising the kids. There is needed reconciliation between the kinship member, the kid in kinship care, and their birth parents. 57% of kids in care live with family members, 46% live with unlicensed kin and the other 10% live with licensed kin. There has been slow progress in raising the monetary amount kin get to help raise the kids from \$50 to all kin \$75 per kid. **Director Faust** reached out to the Governor and explained why each licensed kin member should receive \$300 to match the parity from the Federal government. The Governor supports this effort and now the legislature needs to codify it. **Director Faust** called on faith leaders to seek out the kinship families in their communities to see how they can be supported so they do not have to enter the Department of Child Safety system. **Mr. Obed Escobar** said a message coming directly from the Department of Child Safety and **Director Faust** would be the best thing to help reach the members of the faith community. **Director Faust** responded that he will show up anywhere that he is asked to help solve this issue. When community and faith walk along the government to help serve this community it will dramatically impact the number of kids being removed from their homes.
 - Goal 2: 25-30% of kids can reside in community foster care systems. These foster care systems include traditional, therapeutic, and child development foster care. As the number of kids in the community foster care system drops so does the number of foster care families. Being a foster parent is one of the hardest jobs as they are 24-hour caretakers so faith leaders, the community, and government need to support these families in different ways.
 - Goal 3: Have 80% of children 18-20 in independent living or a family-like setting. **Director Faust** expressed that all kids need three things, one of them being a safe place to sleep. The goal should always be permanency when placing kids but some kids will age out of foster care no matter what. **Director Faust** is seeking to implement the new concept of "Transitional Independent Living" which is a three-phase model. Phase one is the Department of Child Safety paying the rent of the youth, phase two transitions to paying a portion of the rent based on income, and phase three is coordinating their jobs. Having a safe place to sleep allows them to focus on getting a skill that differentiates them.
- **Director Faust** said that the traditional 4-year university model shouldn't be the only option in today's economy. Trade schools must be pushed as an option as well alongside traditional universities. **Director Faust** again expressed his gratitude and excitement for the scholarship GCU is putting together for foster kids. The youth involved can attend without having to pay for school, room, and board, obtain a job on campus, and access to mentors and tutors. **Director Faust** will be meeting with ASU and NAU to see how they can bring a similar program to their campus and hopes to connect with U of A to introduce this program in Tucson.

- **Mr. Obed Escobar** asked if apartment complexes offer discounts to foster kids or similar programs. **Director Faust** responded no, not as of right now. He is working with private philanthropy to provide the backbone to a housing program, a non-profit to manage and stay mission-driven, and recurring state dollars to help maintain it. These are all needed to create a positive continuous path for the youth entering these programs.
- **Director Faust** shared information on the DCS Welcome Center and its main goal of being a safe and welcoming first space for the kids. DCS recently signed a 10-year lease that will double the footprint of the Welcome Center, slated to be finished by the end of the year. It will include very specific play spaces, and separate sleeping quarters for infants, 2-8-year-olds, 9-12-year-olds, and teenagers under 18. It will also include an industrial kitchen, two playgrounds outside, and one play place inside. It will have an onsite medical emergency center that can complete rapid responses. The goal of this is not to be a shelter but to have a welcome center that makes their first night feel safe and therapeutic.
- **Jeffrey James Taylor** shared the challenges Salvation Army has with fundraising for “brick and mortar” options, convincing the donors they are “not giving into debt.” **Director Faust** responded that this is a challenging situation but in Arizona, there is a large number of people who want to support this issue. Giving can also be through mentorship to the kids who are struggling with this transition.
- **Berisha Black** inquired about the difference between community foster versus traditional foster care. **Director Faust** responded that it is important to be intentional with the separation of community foster care and the difference between kinship foster care because their pathways are different. Additionally, some providers only work with one of the communities and **Director Faust** explained that licensed kinship foster care is currently counted under community foster care. **Director Faust** is seeking to change that reporting metric to better reflect kinship care numbers.
- **Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, asked how the partners recruit mentors or reach out to extended care kids to take advantage of the resources and which organizations do a good job. **Director Faust** responded saying Arizona Children Foundation is doing a good job of connecting with the kids. Another organization that is doing a lot of great work is OCJ Kids whose mission “is to equip foster and at-risk children and youth by providing them tools, resources, and positive role models to succeed and excel in every area of life”. OCJ Kids is one of the main resources for the Department of Child Safety.
 - **Mr. Obed Escobar** asked what OCJ Kids is doing well. **Director Faust** responded that they are connecting each group home to a local church and volunteers to help support them with resources.
 - **Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, asked about the kids in extended care and who is connecting them with mentors. **Director Faust** responded saying they work with Arizona Children’s Association . **Director Faust** said he would like to see every kid over 18 in DCS care have access to a court-appointed special advocate. **Director Maria Cristina Fuentes** shared that Thrive is another great provider and will be speaking at the next council meeting.
- The full presentation can be accessed at <https://goyff.az.gov/meeting/cfse/2022/03/10>.

Workgroup Updates

- **Director Fuentes**, introduced **Katie O’Dell**, Chair of the Outreach Workgroup, for an update on the workgroup. **Katie O’Dell** discussed the progress made on the huge goal of identifying and recruiting 1,000 foster and kinship families, which was launched on 5/17/22.
- **Director Fuentes and Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, shared that tomorrow is the Grand Canyon University Foster care Summit. Through the Summit, the Arizona Department of Child Safety and GCU are bringing together Arizona Qualified Foster Care Charitable Organizations, non-profits, and faith-based organizations to share information and ideas in the areas of kinship care, community foster family recruitment, and retention, and youth transitioning from foster care. Also, Maricopa County’s 2022 Family Reunification Day Celebration will be taking place virtually on June 11th. If stakeholders or Council members have not RSVP’d yet, please visit goyff.az.gov/FRD to do so.

Future Meeting Date

- **Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, reminded Councilmembers that the next meeting will occur on September 8, 2022, at 10 a.m.

Adjournment

- **Mrs. Ducey, Co-Chair**, thanked everyone for being part of the meeting and asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.
 - **Mr. Ryan Young** moved to adjourn.
 - **Ms. Berisha Black** seconded the motion.
 - The motion passed with no dissenting votes and the meeting adjourned at **11:46**

Dated 18 of May 2022
Governor's Council Child Safety and Family Empowerment
Respectfully Submitted By:
Kainoa Spenser
GOYFF

FINAL