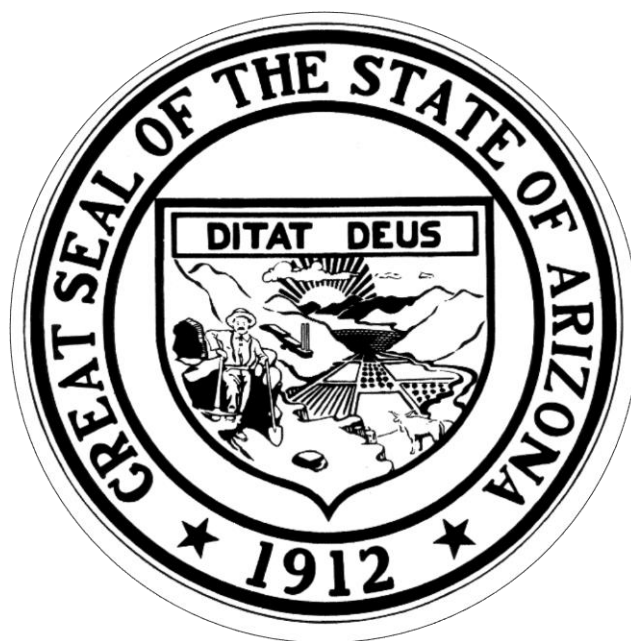


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ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2020: JULY 1, 2019 – JUNE 30, 2020

**Submitted by Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide, Dennis Wells
January 5, 2021**



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OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of state government by receiving public complaints, investigating the administrative acts of state agencies, and recommending a fair and appropriate remedy.

OUR ROLE

The Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide is an independent agency of the Arizona Legislature that was established to make government more responsive to Arizona citizens. It is the office that Arizona citizens can turn to when they feel they have been treated unfairly by a state administrator, agency, department, board or commission. The services of the Ombudsman are free and confidential.

The office is given its authority by Arizona Revised Statute sections 41-1371 through 41-1383 and operates under Arizona Administrative Code Title 2 Chapter 16.

Aiding Citizens

HOW WE HELP

The Arizona Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide office provides a unique service because we offer objectivity to citizens who complain when they think their state government has treated them unfairly. The first thing our experienced investigators do is listen to the person's complaint. For some people, this is the first time they feel that anyone in government actually heard them. Then we determine the nature of the dispute and respond in the most appropriate way to resolve the issue.

We group responses into three categories:

Coaching

Many residents can resolve their concerns when they are aware of the services available. Often a citizen does not have a complaint but is looking for information. We help these residents by educating them on the options available to them based on their specific request or issue.

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

Assistance

Sometimes coaching is not enough and residents need our office to communicate with government agencies directly. Most complaints are the result of a miscommunication or a simple mistake. In these circumstances, we contact the appropriate agency on the citizen's behalf, facilitate communication between the parties, or coordinate action between agencies. Our investigators are working continually to foster relationships with agency personnel in every state agency to enable the efficient resolution of complaints before escalation.

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Assistance complaints are often the result of a miscommunication, a lack of follow-through, or a simple mistake. In these circumstances, we contact the appropriate agency on the citizen's behalf, facilitate communication between the parties, or coordinate action between agencies.

We essentially refer the complaint to the agency, note the allegation and circumstances that brought it to us and ask the agency to work directly with the complainant to resolve the concern. The agency takes the lead in dealing with the matter and lets us know the outcome. We tell the complainant to come back to us if they are not satisfied.

Some assistance cases are those where we do special tasks. We engage in training, perform research, issue ombudsman or public access material, and participate in other tasks. It is more than coaching as we are actively assisting.

Investigation

Complaints about administrative acts of agencies within our jurisdiction may warrant investigations. In those cases, we work with the constituents and agency personnel to ensure that the agency is complying with the law and offering optimal public service. Although we have no authority to compel an agency to follow our recommendations, most administrators are eager to resolve constituent problems and agency mistakes once we bring them to their attention. If the allegations are unsupported, we stand up for the agency and explain our findings to complainants. If necessary, we write investigative reports of our findings and recommendations, sending it to the agencies investigated, the legislature, the governor, and the complainants.

Investigations may be informal or formal. Investigations start with a complaint that an agency in our jurisdiction has performed an administrative act that is contrary to law, unreasonable, unfair, oppressive, arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion or unnecessarily discriminatory, mistake of fact, based on improper or irrelevant grounds, unsupported by an adequate statement of reasons, performed in an inefficient or discourteous manner, or otherwise erroneous. A.R.S. §41-1377.

Arizona Administrative Code R2-16-303 authorizes us to have informal investigations when the complaint can be resolved quickly and by mutual agreement. Most investigations start with an informal process and resolve as such. When situations get more complicated, then the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide may determine that a more formal investigation process and a report is warranted.

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OUTREACH

The Legislature asked the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide (OCA) to note some of our outreach to the community we serve. Below are some of our activities.

- The Ombudsman website (<http://www.azoca.gov/>) – We added a COVID section on our resource “handy links” page to point people to COVID resources. We continued to update our website to provide valuable links to government and charity services available to the public. Additionally, we link to digital versions of our open meeting and public record law booklets. Our website also includes a general “How to file an effective complaint” tutorial, FAQs, and our electronic complaint form. It also includes a tab with suggestions about how to interact effectively with the Department of Child Safety. We explain the difference between our office and the DCS Ombudsman Office. We have found that this is often a point of confusion for the public.
- We distribute our brochures by email or mail to any member of the public who asks for more information. We also make them available at our office, on our website, at meetings and speeches, at trainings, and with various groups who distribute our brochure for us to their clients (i.e., the Family Involvement Center).
- We create comprehensive guide booklets regarding the public record and open meeting law and these distribute public access materials to elected officials and the public throughout the State. The League of Cities and Towns use these booklets in its elected official training.
- Media interactions – Occasional interviews throughout the State.
- Public access newsletter – public access attorney Danee Garone writes a quarterly newsletter, *The Public Record* that we post to our website, and electronically distribute to interested parties. Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records distributes it on our behalf to its extensive listserv.
- Public access training for public officials and the public throughout the State. Our public access attorney, Danee Garone, conducts training sessions and participates in forum discussions regarding lawful practices relating to the public records law and open meeting law. In the 2020 fiscal year, we conducted fourteen training sessions, both in-person and through remote means, for public entities in locations throughout the State. For instance, we conducted trainings for public bodies in Phoenix, Tempe, Pinal County, Pima County, Camp Verde, and Payson. We also conducted a training for irrigation districts throughout the state. At each event, we provide our office’s contact information and website and explain what services we provide regarding 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 trainings. On numerous occasions, new complainants have told us they became aware of our office because of a training. Additionally, we developed a narrated open meeting law training video, of special use when in-person training became impractical during the pandemic.

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- We post our trainings on YouTube.
- We work with DCS to identify and resolve acute and systemic problems in the child safety agency. DCS is required to note OCA on its website, in its Notice of Duty to Inform, in its Temporary Custody Notice, and describes OCA in its parent handbook. Information about our office is on the DCS website as a resource for the public.
- OCA and OCA personnel, such as Ombudsman Dennis Wells as speaker or participant
 - Forums with legislative assistants – orientation meetings and one-on-one.
 - Forums with legislators – orientation meetings and one-on-one.
 - Various speaking engagements – For example, State Archives training, civic groups, Arizona Children’s Association, and various state agencies.
 - DES and DCS leadership individual and team meetings
 - Better Business Bureau – Deputy Joanne MacDonnell serves as an ethics judge for the annual BBB Torch Award Ethics program and as a panelist on Torch Ethics Guidance meetings.
 - Court panels - Arizona Court Improvement Panel, Parent Representation Standards committee – Deputy Joanne MacDonnell serves on these committees. She is on two Sub-Committees for Court Improvement, one on training and the other on safety.
 - Outreach, speeches, open house events via Grand Canyon University, ASU (Main, Downtown & West campuses) work with professors and interns.
 - Participate in State Bar Continuing Legal Education presentations.
- United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) – extensive involvement.
 - Network – We take referrals from other jurisdictions in the USA. We send representation to the national USOA conference.
 - Participate in training –Our staff often teaches seminars.
 - Deputy Joanne MacDonnell serves as an elected Director and is the Secretary/Treasurer of USOA. She is also active in the Children and Family Chapter of USOA.
- We co-host the Arizona Ombudsman Group with the SRP Ombudsman Office. It is a group of government, education, and private ombudsmen in Arizona. We participate in periodic meetings, host seminars, and network with ombudsmen offices who have different constituencies. We refer citizens to one another as jurisdictions dictate.

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- We work with the Attorney General's office as it refers many matters to us when its office cannot take them for whatever reason. We routinely assist their Consumer Division. We provide our expertise regarding open meetings and public access. We also offer general complaint assistance when the Attorney General's Office is not sure where to direct the public.
- The Self-Help Desk at the Maricopa County Courts – We provide information about our office for them to distribute.
- The State of Arizona web directory of state agencies, *AZ Direct*, features the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Office as one of the main tabs for the public.
- Information about our office is featured on State websites where agencies perform 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 present discussions on public records retention discussions at conferences.
- We distribute our Point of Contact Google Doc resource directory to various government agencies.
- We gave the Department of Corrections Ombudsman Office for Staff a free copy of our database programming so they would not have to create it when they opened their internal ombudsman office. This saved the State the cost of creating or purchasing a brand new case management system. The DOC tech programmers simply had to tweak the Microsoft SQL code to meet DOC needs.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

It is important for us to receive feedback from the citizens we help so that we can evaluate our performance, correct shortcomings, and improve our service. One way we get feedback is through our customer satisfaction survey we distribute at the close of cases. The survey measures how well we are accomplishing six standards that we developed in our strategic plan.

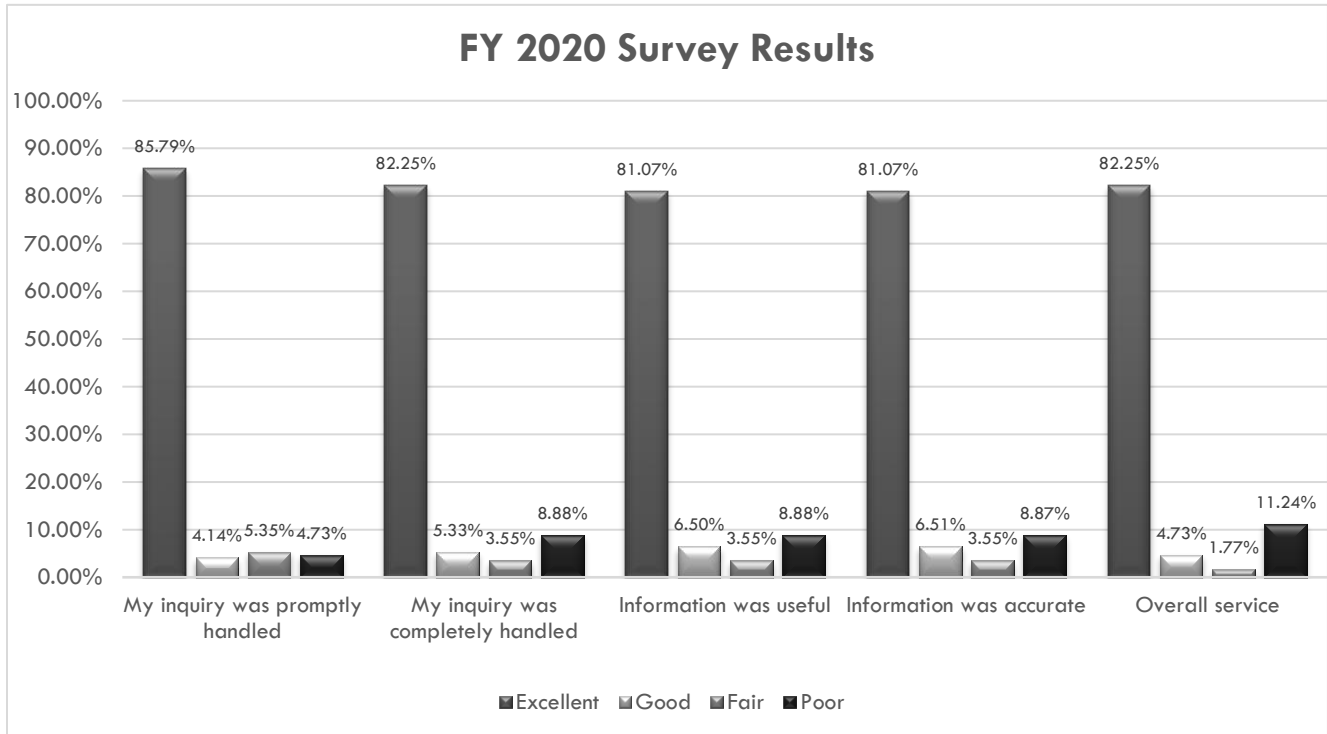
These standards are:

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

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WE WELCOME FEEDBACK

The chart and comments on the following pages summarize the results of the survey for FY2020.



COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS WHO USED OUR SERVICES IN FY2020:

"Thank you for being the only office I've called that gives me honest answers and helpful information."

"I didn't know where to go before talking to you (John), thank you so much!"

"Joanne - You have much better luck getting through the barriers than we the public do. . . Thanks for your help."

"Yvonne, thank you for your prompt reply . . . I will try using these contacts you suggested."

"He was very helpful. Patient and professional. And you can tell him I said so."

"I wanted to thank you for just caring, and truly appreciate your assistance and kindness."

"Thank you (John) so much for your time and patience with me and my situation."

"Thank you for your attention and response"

"Thank you Frank. You are a very kind human. I will keep you posted. I really can't begin to thank you for your kindness and your work ethic in returning my e mails."

"(Keith) I cannot thank you enough for your intervention. None of this process would have happened without your office."

"I was very impressed with the expedited reply!!"

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"I was impressed and happy that my matter was resolved."

"Yvonne, Just wanted to thank you for your efforts and timely response in helping me with my situation regarding the DES/PUA difficulties I was having trouble with. You were definitely a breath of fresh air in a situation I was being smothered by red tape with and it meant the world me for somebody to respond and act. You were quick and informative and I was able to immediately get where I needed to be so I just wanted you to know you made a difference and your help is greatly appreciated by me if nobody else, again thank you."

"Danee, Thanks for speaking to our litigation group about open meetings and public records today. Your talk was well received, and I heard a number of favorable comments about what you said. My favorite was 'That guy knows his stuff.' After your talk, I expect a number of our lawyers will be calling you for advice."

"Just wanted to thank you (Frank) for your help. Unemployment called today and took the disqualification off, retroactive to August 2019. I think it was you who pushed them to action, and I SO appreciate your help."

"I really can't begin to thank you for your kindness and your work ethic in returning my e mails. Being in an industry that deals with people is not easy."

"If you guys (John and Frank) have any sort of rating feedback I can provide, send it my way . . . 5 stars & glowing report will follow from me!"

"Thank you (Joanne) for your help."

"Thank you so much Yvonne. God Bless."

"Wow! (Frank), that was an impressively fast response (at least from you and your office) to my request for help. . . I wanted to thank you for your amazingly quick response and your effort on my behalf. I hope you and the people you know and love remain healthy and financially stable."

"Danee is always professional, helpful and courteous. He provides a great service! Thank you so much!"

"I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for elevating my unemployment claim. today it received attention and was notified of approval. I greatly appreciate your (John) assistance"

"I WOULD VOTE THIS LADY FOR PRESIDENT! COULD SOMEONE ENCOURAGE HER TO RUN PLEASE!"

"Yvonne is a wonderful human being. I've been given the run around all week with a certain medical facility. She took the time necessary to help me understand what my options were and how to proceed going forward. Yvonne is very thorough and most importantly she is very compassionate in regards to her work. I am very grateful for her services."

"I am very grateful to (Keith) in the resolution department. My highest compliments on stellar service."

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“Most of our inquiries are about the Open Meeting Law, which seems to be very blurry in some aspects. Danee has been most helpful.”

“Excellent customer service.”

“It was good work and done very good job. It was very helpful for me, and thanks to all.”

“Very helpful, excellent!”

“I truly appreciate all the help!! Thank you!!!”

“Thank you for helping me out with my questions and providing additional information I did not know about and how to go about it. It was very helpful and useful to help my case. Thank you so much. I really do appreciate it. Bless your heart and have a wonderful day!”

“Great customer service. Very helpful and professional.”

“Thank you so much for getting back to me so quickly. Thank you so much for the information you provided. Very helpful and thank you so much I'm in tears! Thank you!”

“Thank goodness for Carmen. Without her help, I don't know what would have happened. I hope this solves our problems with the ROC. Because of her, we may not have to go to *3 On Your Side*.”

“I did not get my question answered but, I did get information on how to find the answers I'm seeking. (Frank) was very helpful.”

“Danee was polite and interested in my issue. His resolution was complete and useful. I think this is a great service.”

“(Danee) has always answered any questions or concerns I have had in regards to making records request. He responds almost immediately as he is very knowledgeable about the law. He is a great asset to have on your team. . . He is the best!”

“Extremely fast and thorough response to my issue.”

“Thanks so much for your help with my case.”

“Yvonne was amazing. She asked me questions and offered several other resources that could be helpful. She went above and beyond.”

“While I did not receive the resolution I was looking for, (Danee) was thorough, knowledgeable, professional and courteous.”

“In the past, our office has called state agencies and struggled to get accurate and timely responses to our questions. I was astonished at the speed and thoroughness of (Danee) response to my questions. Makes my job so much easier. Thank you. I will use you as a resource in the future.”

“Thank you for taking your time to listen to my concerns yesterday on the phone.”

“I appreciated the quick response. I was partly venting, so appreciated the response and courtesy I received.”

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“The staff members were humane; they provided me service by obligation and not by caution. They were unbelievably attentive and efficient. I have great respect for them.”

“Prompt, informative, and thorough. I could not have asked for a better interaction with the Arizona state government.”

“(Keith), I was able to receive rental assistance after the court hearing based on the information he gave me. Thanks to all of you for your kindness and the willingness to help.”

“Yvonne seemed to really care and was such a valuable resource to me. She was very patient and kind. It was an interaction that really made a difference in my life right now.”

“I can't thank you enough for all your hard work on my behalf and for putting up with my not so "happy" emails.”

If there is anything I can do to tout the extreme importance of your services, please let me know, “(Alicia) and (Frank) were among those who go above and beyond their knowledge of the situation to assist clients in their issues.”

“Genuinely interested in solving the problem.”

“Yvonne was more than helpful! She was kind, polite, and respectful. She answered all my questions honestly and explained everything to me. She gave me additional information and resources. She is the first person who actually listened to me. I believe the office closes at 5:00PM and she stayed on the phone with me until every one of my questions answered - she did not try and hurry me off the phone!!! That is awesome customer service!!! Thank you so very much!!!”

“John was wonderful. He made a phone call and within the hour, my problem was resolved. God bless this organization.”

“I felt disgusted that the DCS department would name me, a victim, as an ‘alleged perpetrator.’ My caseworker never returned my call to discuss her report, and her supervisor was dismissive of how I felt about it. My caseworker victim shamed me, saying ‘[I] failed to see warning signs’ of being in an abusive relationship, as if to say I asked for this. Reaching out to the Ombudsman was the right move for me. Each worker treated me fairly, they listened to my concerns and apologized for how I was treated. DCS workers need more sensitivity training and a better formatted template that doesn’t assume all people in question are perpetrators. This system is just so wrong.”

“I honestly do not know what I would have done without you. You provide a valuable service to our community and I so appreciate what you’ve done. It has been a pleasure communicating with you as you are always right on top of things and so polite and articulate.”

“(Danee) is the model of a devoted public servant. . . He was quick, responsive, took initiative on his own, and was effective.”

“Awesome and Prompt Service.”

“I can't thank the Arizona Ombudsman Citizens Aide enough for getting my situation to the correct people within ADOT. On my own, I tried to get to the Ignition Interlock division within ADOT and was

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told on the phone it was a confidential number and was for internal use only. I was at the end of my ropes until I found the Arizona Ombudsman and saw a glimmer of hope. You put my issue in front of the right person within ADOT and that made all the difference. I firmly believe that the reversal of ADOT's prior decision regarding my license would never have happened for me if it was not for the Arizona Ombudsman - Citizens Aide. My issue was resolved in my favor and I couldn't be happier. Thank you so much for being available to the average citizens of Arizona."

"Very knowledgeable & a great help in the right direction, greatly appreciated."

"They were prompt and answered me quickly. In my time of high stress they have so far been able to get the entity I needed help with to answer immediately. In this scary time it's comforting to know the Ombudsman are here for the people (me)."

"I was very fortunate to have both FRANK & JOHN each intercede on my issue. I received an acknowledgement and great feedback from each within 45 mins of submission! They understood the issue, connected with the right person at DES, kept me informed at every step & resolved the entire matter in less than 48 hrs as evidenced by the phone call I received this afternoon from the lady at DES saying the B of A card they sent will be funded within 24-48 hrs."

"Very useful information."

"Your department is the only department to return my call and give me information. I have placed more than 50-plus call in a week. I only had to call your office once and I got a return phone call. Thank you for the information I now have a direction to obtain my nephews."

"The ombudsman aide office did a great job, specifically Carmen. Everything that could be done, she did, then advised me thru timely emails. I became totally frustrated and worried about paying bills until Carmen Salas told me she would not quit until my DES case was corrected. I do not have one negative word about this office."

"The response was next day, excellent."

"(Frank) replied within 15 minutes of my email regarding an ADES problem I'm having. I'm extremely impressed by his professionalism and responsiveness!"

"Very professional agent. The agent was well spoken and provided helpful guidance."

"So refreshing to dial a government agency to find yourself talking with a live person."

"Alicia was polite, courteous, and helpful."

"First time I was able to speak with a representative of the AZ government after making numerous attempts over a three week period. DES has made it impossible to gain access to a representative to discuss issues/concerns regarding unemployment benefits. Thank you for your assistance!"

"I am happy to receive a response to this matter. I've never had to reach out like this before. So, it is reassuring to know that I am able to get help when needed."

"Was called soon after my complaint. Carmen resolved the question."

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"I wish I could of been able to contact this group several times in the past please keep up the good work."

"Cheers to this young lady!"

"John is the epitome of courteous helpful customer service 5 stars!"

"I was very pleased to be helped by Yvonne. This lady was so helpful with her suggestions, and was very informative as to the process for some resolution. Yvonne went beyond the basics of additional numbers to call, and I almost felt guilty for the 21 minutes that we were connected, only because of the need that others have had a similar lack of getting thru to a human voice, instead of the exact same recorded message that ultimately leaves you with no clue of what is needed to fix the issue!"

"I needed to thank you Alicia for your efforts to forward my correspondence to the appropriate channel, and relief that now at least I will get some response and help to advance my UI claim."

"I needed to thank you Alicia for your efforts to forward my correspondence to the appropriate channel, and relief that now at least I will get some response and help to advance my UI claim."

"Frank helped me with my unemployment insurance when I was at my wits end. I needed to get in contact with someone at ADES to discuss my application and could not get through to any one after trying both by phone calls and e-mails for a month. He responded quickly and was effective. I so appreciate his efforts and the office he holds. Thank you!"

"Yvonne is excellent at her position. She deserves praise for her ability to help others."

"I contacted Alicia on a Friday afternoon. On Monday, she had already forwarded my email to a DES Ombudsman. I had been waiting for two months for my unemployment claim to be settled. Within two days, my claim was settled and my benefits were uploaded on my card! I am SO grateful. . ."

"The rep from the ombudsman's office was able to have someone from MVD contact me almost immediately they are definitely my choice to resolve difficult issues I could not have asked for better prompt personal attention thank you."

"Frank responded immediately to my complaint, made calls, got my complaint resolved the next day. Extremely helpful and courteous, very fast response. Frank was able to take care of an issue I had been trying to resolve for months."

"I am pleased with the outcome and also grateful for your part in initiating contact with DES to respond and assist me."

"Thank you very much for all you've done for me regarding this matter and expediting the process in the return of funds. I really appreciated your quick responses and action as well as, and more importantly the information you and your agency provided to me to help ease the stress during this tough time."

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COMPELLING CASES

The following case summaries are examples taken from the 6,791 cases we handled in FY2020

GENERAL COMPLAINTS ABOUT STATE AGENCIES

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

1903058. Behavioral Health Examiners, State Board of

A man filed with the Board of Behavioral Health Examiners. He was upset they closed his application and thought he should have been given more notice. He also thought his national credential should help him get certified here given a new Arizona law about reciprocal licenses.

We investigated and found the Board had given him a courtesy notice and had even given him an extension. We found the Board eventually closed his application as unsuccessful because he had not finished getting in the material. A rule said the Board must act the way they had proceeded. We explained that rule to the man.

We also found that he had to do additional steps to have his national credential satisfy any state requirements. He needed another state to license him to get the reciprocal deal, not just the national credential.

We explained this to the man and he was satisfied.

2000003. Department of Revenue

A taxpayer contacted our office with a concern that the Department of Revenue (DOR) was not sending her a tax refund she was owed of five hundred and twenty-seven dollars. She alleged that she sent the relevant forms to the Department but that it arrived late due to an error on the part of the postal service. She further alleged that she spoke to two different people at the Department of Revenue who told her that they could not help her.

We reached out to the Department of Revenue to learn more about her case and explained the nature of her concern. The Department looked into the matter and agreed that the complainant should be assisted considering the circumstance. The Department of Revenue reached out to the complainant and provided the full tax refund within one day of receiving word of the concern. We reached out to the Department and commended them for how quickly they addressed the issue.

2000031. Department of Revenue

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A taxpayer contacted our office with a concern that the Department of Revenue (DOR) was sending her conflicting information regarding tax demands. She further alleged that she spoke to two different people at the Department of Revenue who told her that they could not help her.

We reached out to the Department of Revenue to learn more about her case and explained the nature of her concern. Their problem resolution office quickly addressed her questions and cleared up the matter in regards to the precise amount owed. We reached out to the Department and commended them for how quickly they addressed the issue. The complainant thanked us for helping to facilitate such a quick resolution of their issue.

2001495. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A resident contacted our office regarding her benefits not being received and having trouble getting in contact with anyone over at the Department of Economic Security (DES). When the resident did receive a letter from DES, it seemed to not address anything she was asking about. Additionally, although they seemed to identify her correctly, they suggested she did not have a rental obligation. The resident produced a letter from her landlord showing she did indeed have a rental obligation and provided all verification information but to no avail.

Our office reached out to DES ourselves with the information about this case and helped ensure all the material she was trying to submit to them was seen by the DES ombudsman office. After following up with the agency we were able to facilitate contact with DES to the complainant, where she was given information on what they needed to facilitate her benefits. The complainant thanked us for helping to ensure DES was responsive to her and she was finally able to receive her benefits.

2002872. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A resident contacted our office regarding her Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits not being received and having trouble getting in contact with anyone over at the Department of Economic Security (DES). The resident claimed they were stuck in this situation without them being able to receive benefits, and had submitted everything that DES had asked of them, and did not know what the delay was. We helped ensure their claim was submitted correctly and answered the complainant's questions. We followed up with our contacts over at the DES ombudsman office over the next couple of weeks to ensure the complainant was assisted by DES. The complainant said that after we had followed up with DES they had elevated her case, addressed the hold, and gotten her the benefits she was waiting on. She thanked us for our efforts and we closed the case.

Our intervention stopped an unfair financial burden on a citizen as exemplified by:

1902824. Department of Revenue (DOR)

A taxpayer complained he filed his state tax return with the Department of Revenue (DOR) and expected a refund. However, after several months, he still did not have his refund, nor had DOR

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explained.

We reviewed the case with DOR. DOR found the agency had placed the return into a suspense account. DOR corrected the issue and then processed the taxpayer's refund for payment, with interest.

2000040. Department of Revenue

A taxpayer contacted our office with a concern that the Department of Revenue (DOR) was not sending her a tax refund she was owed. The complainant had a concern regarding a refund she alleged DOR still owed her that she had not received.

We reached out to the Department of Revenue to learn more about her case and explained the nature of her concern. The Department looked into the matter and agreed to resolve the problem with the complainant. The Department of Revenue contacted the complainant and provided information regarding why the refund was initially rejected. The parties resolved the problems and the Department issued the refund. We reached out to the Department and commended them for how quickly they addressed the issue. The complainant thanked us for helping to facilitate such a quick resolution of their issue.

2003369. DES - Benefits and Medical Eligibility

A lady suffering from cancer, asthma, and COPD said that her ailments prevented her from working and prevent her from assisting her deaf father or critically ill mother. She had multiple requests into DES for the various types of assistance she was entitled to have, but was not receiving assistance or given a reason why she might fail to qualify. She was now out of medication too. She asked for our help because the agency systems were not working well due to the COVID pandemic.

We contacted DES and asked them to elevate this case to emergency status. We noted the various issues to DES. The DES ombudsman immediately elevated the case and said they would have the agency contact the distressed woman within 48 hours.

We notified the woman to expect communication with the agency. Later, the ill lady contacted us to note that her problems had been figured out. She thanked us for our help.

2003612. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A resident contacted our office regarding his Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits not being received and having trouble getting in contact with anyone over at the Department of Economic

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Security (DES). The individual additionally claimed to have gone 13 weeks without receiving UI benefits, and sent us screenshots showing several weeks of benefits on his UI portal as being ‘in progress’. Additionally, the individual sent us copies of correspondence demonstrating that he had been consistently following up with DES to no avail.

After we gathered all of the relevant documentation, we facilitated contact between the complainant and DES. We followed up to help ensure the case would be seen and properly handled by DES. We helped the complainant send their screenshots to the DES ombudsman and articulate the concern. In the course of this case, the complainant expressed frustration with DES at being so unresponsive but thanked our office for being consistently responsive to his calls and emails. Our office received a response from the DES ombudsman that the complaint had been received, but that due to a high volume of submissions it would take time to get to the issue and they had no approximate time or date for an expected resolution.

Our office continued to periodically follow up with DES as the complainant waited for an additional four weeks. During this period, our office ensured we were always immediately responsive to the complainant’s request for updates and answered his questions as they came up. The DES ombudsman office later informed us that the agency staff had found a technical issue had held up the man’s benefits. They corrected the problem and paid out the benefits. The complainant thanked us for helping to facilitate a response from DES and for helping him to receive his benefits.

We resolved a case involving more than one agency or more than one level of government as exemplified by:

1902551. DES – Benefits and Medical Eligibility

A resident contacted our office with distressed concerns about needing referrals for resources. The complainant made it clear both in her submission and over the phone that she felt lost and the agencies she had reached out to (including DES, DHS, and the Governor’s Office) were unresponsive. We provided them with several options of agencies that may be able to help her, as well as links for more information on other community programs. Throughout our conversation, we helped to coach the complainant in explaining her options, answering her questions about state/local government, and providing the necessary contact information for each resource. By the end of our conversation, the resident had a newfound confidence in her understanding of how the system worked and what help was out there. We encouraged the complainant to ask any questions she might have and feel free to return if she needed additional assistance. We closed the case.

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Our intervention resolved cases that no one else was able to resolve internally.

1903750. Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)

A resident contacted our office with questions regarding the Department of Environmental Quality and with problems getting through to someone to speak to them. We reached out to the agency to ensure it was responsive. The agency apologized for the lack of responsiveness, and the agency then sent a comprehensive response to the complainant.

The resident followed up with our office later to tell us the person was still having trouble getting in communication with ADEQ. We reached out on behalf of the complainant and ADEQ told us that there had been a clerical error that kept the missing communications from this complainant. The agency then followed up with its response to the complainant. We reached out to the complainant to ensure he had received a response. He thanked us for facilitating communication with ADEQ and we later closed the case.

1904030. Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS)

A resident contacted our office concerning the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) and a Social Security benefit question. The complainant was curious under what conditions he was forced to activate his Social Security (SSN) benefits, as he did not want to activate the benefits prematurely. He claimed that nobody was giving a good answer other than that it was "policy" but when the person asked to see the policy, it was not being produced. Additionally, the complainant claimed to have multiple questions about ASRS and their SSN benefits that weren't being answered. The complainant claimed that in reaching out to ASRS about the issue, the agency just redirected them to their insurance company. The complainant wanted the agency to clear up the issue.

We reached out to hear the agency's side of the issue. ASRS told us that it did not have a record of the complainant reaching out to them to discuss the issue as the complainant claimed. However, ASRS ensured us that their staff would be aware of all the relevant information if the complainant did reach out to them. Additionally, it ensured that if the complainant were to contact the department again, they would have a reference sheet to answer all the original questions posed to them.

Upon investigating the case further, we learned who had misdirected the complainant within ASRS and why the complainant had been misinformed when they had been told to address the problem with the insurance company. We reached out to our ASRS contact, who ensured us that the original insurance company contacts who had spoken to the complainant would receive the relevant training. Additionally, ASRS thoroughly answered all of the questions the complainant posed in an email to us and then forwarded that email to all the relevant departments.

Within one day of bringing this case to ASRS, the agency provided us with a list of answers and relative contextual information. Additionally, they outlined all the relevant statutes associated with the answers and explained the steps taken to ensure these questions could be more efficiently addressed in the future.

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The complainant reached out to us to thank us for our prompt response and relaying all the relevant answers to their questions. We reached out to ASRS to thank them for quickly and thoroughly addressing the concern.

2000382. Department of Economic Security

An unemployment benefits applicant said DES would not respond to her. She said she had previously filed for the benefit with the same employer. Her case was now stuck. Upon speaking with DES, the applicant was not allowed to be transferred to a DES supervisor.

We asked DES to address the applicant's concern. DES informed us the previous claims had overlapped causing duplicate review processing. The additional review detected the duplicate claims. The issue was cleared, and funds released.

DES informed the applicant about funds being released and provided their direct phone number for any further needed assistance. DES also informed our office that a supervisor had reviewed concerns about the handling of the matter and training improvement measures were undertaken.

2000686. Corporation Commission, Utilities Division

A resident was upset with a Corporation Commission (ACC) Utilities Division mediation problem. The complainant was upset with a utility company and had gone to the Corporation Commission for mediation. She said the initial ACC staff member never handled her matter and that when she complained that the staff member was not being as neutral as she should be, the upper managers just routed her back to the problem person. Further, the resident complainant had a disability and had asked for accommodations that she did not think she was given.

We contacted the Commission Utility Division and found the matter was as reported. We asked the ACC Utility Division managers to step in. Higher-level managers then stepped in and set up the situation properly. The agency managers apologized for the communication problems.

2000688 Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division

A motorist complained that MVD suspended her license after an interlock device required on her car caused the car to become inoperable. She said that daily for over two weeks she had taken her car to the installer for repairs. The device caused her vehicle to stop while in traffic. She had no way of starting the vehicle when this happened. She had found that the device was not compatible with her car. The installer said he could not assist her and told her to go elsewhere. While scheduling an appointment with an alternative installer, the motorist received letters from MVD. The letters stated that her driver's license was suspended and she was not able to renew her registration.

We reviewed the matter with MVD. MVD looked into the situation further and informed us that problems with the interlock device were not of the motorist's own making. MVD voided the suspension of the motorist's driver license. We let the motorist know the above information, for

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which she expressed her gratitude.

2003748. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A worker contacted our office regarding her Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits not being received and having trouble getting in contact with anyone that could help them over at the Department of Economic Security (DES). The resident claimed they were stuck in this situation without them being able to receive benefits, and had submitted everything that DES had asked of them, and did not know what the delay was. The complainant alleged that every time they got in touch with someone over at the UI Client Advocate they were told that every issue was clear and that they would receive funds in 3-5 days. Each time they were told this, the complainant alleged that after the days would pass nothing would happen.

We helped ensure their claim was submitted correctly and answered the complainant's questions. We followed up with our contacts over at the DES ombudsman office over the next month and then the complainant informed us they had been assisted. The complainant thanked us for helping to facilitate a resolution.

2004017. Department of Transportation, Motor Vehicle Division

A motorist contacted our office regarding a traffic ticket she paid for, followed by a letter from the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) that claimed her license would be withdrawn. In attempting to reach out to receive a hearing on this issue, the complainant had not received a response and she had concerns about the approaching deadline regarding the status of her license.

The motorist expressed additional concerns in having to go in and take traffic school due to her medical history and wanted information on having the class fee waived.

We reached out to ADOT to ensure that the complainant would receive a prompt response. Additionally, in reaching out to ADOT we able to forward a request to extend her hearing request filing date. The ADOT ombudsman responded to address the complainant's concerns, and the motorist was provided information about how they could participate in Traffic School virtually and avoid the medical disability concerns. The complainant thanked us for being able to secure them a response and helping them to obtain an extended deadline.

Our intervention identified a field practice that was not in accordance with the agency's stated policy/procedure, statutes, or case law and corrected a systemic problem as exemplified by:

1903443. Corporation Commission, Corporations Division

A Limited Liability Company (LLC) filer at the Corporation Commission was upset that the Corporations Division did not efficiently handle his case.

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We asked the director to investigate. She did and she confirmed that the agency did not properly handle the filing matter. The initial investigators did not explain the filing problems to the complainant sufficiently. The agency workers also failed to identify all the issues initially. We asked the director to contact the filer and explain the situation.

She did so.

1904344. Board of Fingerprinting

A resident contacted our office with a problem needing to contact the Board of Fingerprinting. However, the resident stated he did not have easy access to a computer to reach out to the Board, and in attempting to call them; he could not leave a message, as their voicemail was full.

We reached out to the Board and they thanked us for pointing out the issue. The Board claimed it was full because of the state holiday on Monday, and that they had not noticed the issue before. They then increased the size of their voicemail capacity to allow constituents to reach out and leave a message. Additionally, the Board contacted the original complainant and resolved their issue within one day of our office reaching out to them. The Board was thankful to our office for notifying them of the issue, and the complainant thanked us for helping them get through to have their questions answered.

1904452. Industrial Commission

A pilot contacted us with a concern regarding the Industrial Commission (ICA), claiming he had submitted a complaint against two airlines without hearing back. Additionally, the complainant expressed with frustration that he was having trouble getting in contact with the ICA to verify if their case was even being investigated. We reached out to the ICA on our end were able to confirm that both cases were taken with the case against one airline still being open and under investigation. Additionally, it noted a technical issue that meant it was not receiving the complainant's messages. The ICA thanked us for reaching out to them and fixed the technical issue. The agency reached out to the complainant to update him on the case and ensured they would be responsive to future communications.

We received a follow up from the complainant that the ICA was still reviewing the case. We reached out to ICA and received a full report as to what it was doing to help the complainant and what parts of the complaint fell within their jurisdiction. We found that ICA was acting administratively appropriately in the review of the material. We informed the complainant about our findings. He thanked us for our review and assistance.

2000166. Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division

A motorist complained another resident with his same name and birthday had been issued his driver license number by MVD. He said the person had a criminal record which caused him problems with background, employment and volunteer activities.

We asked MVD to respond. MVD informed us an employee made a data entry error at a call center,

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due to another person in their database having the same full name and birthday. Information was entered into the incorrect record and a duplicate credential was ordered for the incorrect account.

MVD said the matter was corrected and the customer service representative involved would be informed by their manager of the data entry error and be provided additional training so that it did not happen again. As a preventative measure, notes were added to the customer's record stating that the two subject customers were not one and the same.

We let the motorist know the above information and that MVD would contact them directly with their findings.

2000266 Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division

A motorist complained he called MVD a year ago and changed his address. He believed his title, tab and registration were sent to his ex-wife, who threw it away.

We informed MVD of the allegation. MVD reviewed and confirmed they had sent the material to the old address. MVD contacted the motorist, confirmed his new address, and processed a no fee duplicate title, tab and registration. The motorist was happy we helped him resolve his problem with MVD.

2000339. Corporation Commission, Corporations Division

A businessperson was upset that he could not get through to Corporation Commission staff about the trouble he was having filing his annual report. He reported that he could not file his entity's annual reports electronically. He noted that he tried to resolve the matter with Corporation Commission Corporations Division staff, but they were unresponsive. He said that managers do not make themselves available and line staff has not resolved the problem despite several attempts. He said he had similar filing problems last year once the new computer system had been rolled out. He noted that he had filed for many years using the old computer system and it had been very easy. He said the phone system is an additional barrier. He said he then tried sending emails, but the staff did not respond to those either. He said the new computer system operates in a problematic manner and the password process is another complicating factor. His password does not work properly.

We contacted the Director of Corporations and reviewed the problems. She confirmed the new computer system still has problems. She said the Commission's Executive Director had investigated and posted a docketed report for the Commissioners to review within the past year. A company that operates from out of state operates the computer system and the internal technical staff must defer to them. Her staff must submit help requests and wait for the out of state technologists to get to their problems. She noted the division is slowly, but surely working out the issues and things have improved overall. She said she would have a section manager work with the businessperson and assist him in filing his current annual report.

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We informed the complainant and told him to expect the call. The complainant later reported that the commission manager had indeed gotten with him and assisted him with filing the annual reports. He thanked us for getting "through the barriers."

2000587 Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division

A motorist complained he was forced into the median to avoid debris falling from the vehicle in front of him, only to be processed for driving under the influence. He said all tests proved negative, and a court dismissed the case, but he received a letter his driver license would be suspended within days.

We asked MVD to review the matter. MVD agreed the man had not tested positive for impairment and that this was a mistake. The agency attributed it to a faulty system of handling the agency's Admin Per Se Form. The Arizona Department of Transportation, on our recommendation, made changes to the Admin Per Se Form. The new form was reviewed, tested and deployed by Information Management Bureau. The changes to the form now include the ability for the user to select a menu during the suspension process to include the following: Yes, No, or Temporary Agency Hold. If No or Temporary Agency Hold is selected, the form is no longer transmitted to ADOT, and can be completed and verified by the DPS supervisor. This will eliminate such problems in the future.

2002654. Pioneers' Home

A former healthcare administrator for the military relayed that she is a personal consultant for a senior citizen who believes her mentally impaired sister is being taken advantage of. The sister resides at the Arizona Pioneer Home. The impaired sister got married in 2018 but was recently removed as the guardian.

We reviewed the case with the consultant. We informed her that the Pioneer Home was set up in the Arizona Enabling Act, so the legislature has little authority over it. We told her it is the domain of the Governor, so we have little to say about it as it is largely out of our jurisdiction. We discussed the facts of the case and told the consultant why the Pioneer Home was not in a position to contradict the court. The consultant had many questions. We answered them and told her where to find more information. She contacted us again with questions after reading the material we pointed to. We answered those questions and she thanked us saying that she was not happy with the answer, but was happy with our explanation.

2003618. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A resident contacted our office regarding her Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits not being received and having trouble getting in contact with anyone over at the Department of Economic Security (DES). The resident claimed they were stuck in this situation without them being able to

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receive benefits, and had submitted everything that DES had asked of them and didn't know what the delay was. We helped ensure their claim seemed to be submitted correctly and answered the complainant's questions. We followed up with our contacts over at the DES ombudsman office over the next couple of weeks. The complainant informed us the agency had then assisted her. DES informed the applicant that she had misfiled for her benefits when attempting to receive both PUA and UI at the same time. However, the agency said that she was eligible for the back pay she was missing. The complainant thanked us for looking into the matter, shining a spotlight on her case, and facilitating her receiving the back pay.

2003730 **Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division**

A motorist complained MVD sent a renewal notice that was more than ten times the amount he had paid in registration fees compared to the prior three years. We reviewed the matter with MVD. MVD confirmed the error. The agency informed us that due to a change of their computer system, some information did not transfer over properly. MVD now had to manually update it.

We let the motorist know the above information and asked him to let us know if he needed further assistance.

Our intervention identified a trend as exemplified by:

2000266. **Department of Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division**

A motorist complained that a local MVD office would not refund a license plate transaction after he sold his vehicle. He said the plate was for a handicapped veteran plate. The motorist believed MVD should refund fees to motorists for the unexpired term of license plates.

We asked MVD to review and address the matter. MVD informed us a refund was processed on the subject plate for the remaining registration months. We provided the information to the motorist.

The motorist received a refund check. The motorist then asked for an accounting. We got an accounting from MVD and provided it to the motorist. We identified a systemic problem regarding this sort of communication. We suggested MVD provide a description of its accounting and a short explanation of fees should accompany refunds sent to motorists.

MVD informed us they would send the suggestion to ADOT's Financial Management Services.

2000892. **Department of Real Estate**

A licensee from the Department of Real Estate said that he was away at ministry school when his real estate license expired several years ago. Back then, the law was that if one wanted to renew late, they had to comply with requirements and agree to a consent order that required them to pay a fine.

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The man agreed that he submitted to the consent order, but said the law requiring the consent order has since been rescinded. The licensee said that it appeared on his record and people assume it is for something substantive instead of just a late registration. He wants the department to remove it from his record because the law is no longer the same.

We spoke to the Department and they said that while true the law causing the consent agreement is no longer in place, they have no law that would allow them to remove the consent agreement. They said that they think public record laws require they keep it up because it shows what they did and why. We asked them to verify. They did so.

Meanwhile, we contacted the licensee and explained that the department was going to look into it. We explained that public record law requires agencies to record why they take actions when they take actions. We explained that the agency was going to consult with their legal advisors and see if they have independent authority to waive notices of consent orders because the law was changed. We told him we thought an explicit law would have to be in place, so we doubted the agency could do as he requested.

We independently looked and did not see the authority to change the public record and remove the notice.

The agency got back in touch with us and said they confirmed they do not have the legal authority to remove the notice.

We contacted the complainant and explained the agency confirmed they would need to have explicit authority to do what he requests and they do not. We suggested that he could approach his legislators about getting a law put in place instructing the agency to remove consent orders (or some variation thereof) if they are based on rescinded laws.

2004159. DES – Employment and Rehabilitation

A resident contacted our office regarding her not receiving Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits she believed she was entitled to. The unemployed worker had trouble contacting the Department of Economic Security (DES) staff. The worker claimed she was stuck in this situation without being able to receive benefits. We helped ensure their claim was submitted correctly and answered the complainant's questions. We provided the complainant with relevant resource information and then began to follow up on our end when the agency was proving to be unresponsive. We followed up several times over the next couple of weeks and then the complainant informed us that DES had now assisted them. They thanked us and we closed the case.

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OMBUDSMAN INTERVENTION IN DCS CASES

The Ombudsman Office looks into complaints people have against the Department of Child Safety (DCS). Parents, grandparents, and other relatives of the child seek help from our office when believe DCS has treated them unfairly. Other sources of complaints include foster parents, adoptive parents, community service providers, and members of the state legislature.

The majority of the coaching and assistance inquiries we receive involve clarification of DCS recommended services, explanation of the DCS and dependency processes, facilitation of communication by the caseworker and legal counsel, and explanations about visitation or placement issues.

Our Department of Child Safety cases were 28.79% of our total caseload in FY2020.

We contact DCS to gather agency administrators' perspectives on assistance and investigation complaints. Typically, a phone call or e-mail message to DCS staff can resolve frequently received complaints such as caseworker assignment problems, copies of case plans, failure to receive notification of staff meetings, requests for the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB), or court hearing dates. Case managers, supervisors, or upper DCS management may provide clarity as to events, laws, or policies and procedures. We facilitate clear communication between families, our office, and the various points of contact within the Department of Child Safety.

Additionally, some of the complaints we receive require an in-depth review of the case and direct contact with the caseworker or agency representative. These are often complaints where residents feel that the agency violated their rights or failed to provide adequate services. With these complaints, our office may initiate full-file reviews, request documents and other supporting data, and/or meet with DCS staff. We review case correspondence, therapeutic reports, and the DCS CHILDS database as sources of information to help facilitate the resolution of disputes.

Many of the complaints that we address are fairly isolated or case-specific. However, for some issues, we identify patterns among multiple complaints that indicate systemic issues or deficiencies regarding DCS actions. In these situations, resolving one particular complaint is not enough. Instead, we identify the recurring issues and bring them to the attention of DCS management for systemic resolution.

OMBUDSMAN DCS CASE LOG FY 2020 KEY CATEGORIES

The following chart shows who and where some of our DCS calls come from as well as the type of complaints.

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DCS Complainant Information Chart –July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020	
DCS Complaint Source Relationship	
Parent/Guardian	1393
Kin/Significant Contact	436
Service Provider	1
Child	3
Foster	67
Attorney	19
Agency Worker	2
Other	50
Unknown/NA	6
Type of Complaint	
Removal Issues	162
Service Issues	48
Visitation Issues	116
Communication Issues	325
Record Issues	118
Placement Problems	184
Investigation Issues	347
Inadequate efforts towards case plan goal	19
False Allegations	133
DCS Process Questions	842
Adoption	14
Caseworker	480
Other	338
Unknown/NA	69
Judicial Issues	59
Attorney Issues	7
Reporting Abuse	14

The Legislature instructs us in our budget note to emphasize the Department of Child Safety cases. During the FY2020 period, 28.79% of our total cases were about DCS. We noticed that the COVID-19 Pandemic seemed to reduce our DCS cases in the initial few months of the outbreak. DCS itself reported reduced hotline calls and they reduced the number of children in care overall for FY2020.

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Below are some examples where our intervention helped resolve concerns with DCS.

Our intervention identified a field practice that was not in accordance with the agency's stated policy/procedure, statutes, or case law

1903821. Department of Child Safety (DCS)

A foster couple was upset that a Department of Child Safety (DCS) caseworker was not properly communicating or assisting them with the next stage of their matter. The couple said DCS had put the child at issue into a proposed adoption status with this foster family, but the DCS worker was not completing the paperwork to finish the matter in time for court deadlines. The family was worried this would cause delays. Further, the couple said the caseworker had not shown up for a pre-scheduled meeting. The family said it sent emails to DCS about the problems, but DCS workers had failed to respond to the emails. The foster parents claimed the caseworker had not visited the child in over 40 days and that the caseworker was supposed to see them once a month. The family also noted that their calls to the caseworker and supervisor went unreturned.

We reviewed the situation with the DCS Ombudsman Office. The DCS Ombudsman Office then contacted the DCS supervisor assigned to the matter. The supervisor stated she had returned the call to the foster family earlier that day. The supervisor essentially confirmed the allegations against the worker regarding the lack of contact and preparation of adoption paperwork. The supervisor explained the caseworker was justified in not responding to the email because it was not directed to him. Instead, the supervisor said the foster family had directed the email to the attention of the Attorney General's Office and copied the caseworker. We confirmed that the DCS caseworker had failed to communicate effectively with the family and had not provided them with some of the paperwork necessary for the adoption process.

We also pressed the DCS Ombudsman Office regarding how long it had been since the worker had seen the child. The DCS Ombudsman Office disagreed that it was improper and explained how the agency interpreted the relevant law. The office said that while the caseworker had not seen the child in over 40 days, the caseworker had seen the child on the first day of month 1. DCS said the law gave the worker until the last day of month 2 to see the child as the law only said: "once a month." DCS interprets the relevant law to mean that a caseworker must see a child at least once within a month named in the 12-month calendar, not approximately every thirty days. Despite this policy, the DCS Ombudsman Office said it had the supervisor caution the caseworker to respond within 24 hours and to visit the child.

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1905254. Department of Child Safety (DCS)

A father who had questions regarding a case the Department of Child Safety (DCS) had opened on him contacted our office. We answered the father's questions and learned in the discussion that he was not aware of the allegations brought against him. We informed him that a summary of the basic allegations against him should be on the Notice of Duty to Inform form that DCS was required by law to provide to him. The father said DCS had given him the form but had not told him the allegations. We asked him to provide us a copy of the form. Upon review, we confirmed the father was correct. The DCS investigator had only written a series of numbers on the form. We understood that the number was a reference number to a database the father would not be privy to, so he could never look up the number to see what it referred to in order to understand the allegation(s) against him.

Arizona Revised Statutes §8-803(A), requires that,

On initial contact with a parent, guardian, or custodian under investigation pursuant to this article, a child safety worker shall inform the family, both verbally and in writing, making reasonable efforts to receive written acknowledgment from the parent, guardian, or custodian, of receipt of all of the following information:

1. That the family is under investigation by the department.
2. The specific complaint or allegation made against that person.

We reviewed the case with the DCS Ombudsman Office and asked them to explain the discrepancy between what the law requires and the fact that the investigator had seemingly only provided the father with a form showing a number instead of the specific complaint or allegation. We also asked that the agency ensure the father was made aware of the allegation made against him. DCS admitted the Notice of Duty to Inform given to the father in the field was incorrect. The agency agreed with that finding and recommendation to train the investigator on this point. The agency said it would ensure the caseworker in question was made aware of that.

We also recommended that the complainant be issued a new Notice of Duty to Inform. DCS disagreed with this recommendation and stated this was unnecessary, as the father had since been told by the agency that the allegation was "neglect." DCS thought that the one-word "neglect" allegation was sufficient. We discussed the nature of what constitutes being told a "specific" allegation in statute and under what circumstances DCS can withhold certain information from someone under investigation about such an allegation. DCS claimed that sharing any more information about their allegation was problematic in this case, according to Arizona Revised Statutes § 8-471(E)(8) which states,

On initial contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian of a child who is the subject of an investigation according to this section, provide the parent, guardian, or custodian with the allegation received by the department. This paragraph does not require the department to disclose

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details or information that would compromise an ongoing criminal investigation.

1903595. DCS - Department of Child Safety

A great grandmother said her adult child died and shortly thereafter, her teen grandson became a father. The great grandmother said that DCS stepped in and took custody of the infant because the birth parents were too young and immature. The great grandmother said that DCS staff told her this was just temporary, but they would contact her if that changed or if the court wanted to move to a permanent solution. The great grandmother said that DCS later had the court sever the teens from their child, but instead of involving the family, the Department asked the foster family to adopt the infant without contacting the kin. The great grandmother thought this was wrong. She thought DCS should have contacted her before moving ahead with the severance.

We informed the great grandmother that DCS is obliged by Federal and State laws to inform the family of any child who comes into care. However, we also told her that other laws require her to bring the matter to the attention of DCS managers before we will address it. We provided her with guidance about the process, the laws, and the policies DCS is supposed to use. We told her she was welcome to return to us if she was unsatisfied with the DCS response. The great-grandmother thanked us.

Our intervention resolved a grievance against the Department that had not been corrected yet by internal workers from DCS as exemplified by:

2000976. DCS – Department of Child Safety.

A father contacted our office concerning a request for records he said he made to the Department of Child Safety (DCS) about six weeks earlier. He said he needed the records in preparation for a court proceeding scheduled about two weeks away. He said he had not heard from DCS about the request.

We asked the father if he had spoken to the DCS Ombudsman office about the matter. He said he had not. We told him he had to do so before we would look into the matter. The father said he would.

Six days later, the father followed up with us. He said he reached out to a woman at our office about the matter. From what we could tell, he was confused and had actually spoken to the DCS Ombudsman office. He said the woman had promised to look into the status of the request, but he had not heard back from her. We reached out to the DCS employee. She confirmed she spoke to the father three days earlier. She said she explained to him that DCS's records office is backed up from a large number of requests. She said she told him she would try to ascertain the status of his request.

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Four days later, the DCS employee followed up with us to say that DCS had sent the requested records to the father via secure email one day after we initially inquired.

We reached out to confirm with the father; however, he did not answer. We left him a message to follow up with us if he did not receive the records. He did not follow up with us.

2003427. DCS – Department of Child Safety

A former guardian said that DCS staff had given inaccurate information to the court and had reversed itself improperly. He said that a new DCS caseworker was tainting the case. He said DCS sent him a letter saying they were proposing he be added to the Central Registry but were deferring to the court. He noted he was no longer a party in the current Court case, so the court would not make a finding and he was not being consulted further. He provided documents from previous court interactions with multiple witnesses saying that his ex-wife was falsely coaching the child and no evidence exists that he abused the child, but there is evidence the ex-wife is coaching.

He had not yet gone to the DCS Ombudsman Office, so we referred him there to comply with laws requiring the primary agency management must be contacted before we may investigate. We gave him extensive suggestions about how to approach the situation with DCS. For example, we suggested he make an executive summary type of document to cover his allegations and then supply a collection of all his exhibits to support his contentions.

The man followed our advice. He put together the allegation document and the exhibits and sent them to DCS. We told him he could come back if he was not satisfied with the DCS managers or their internal ombudsman office.

2003519. DCS - Department of Child Safety

A Kinship Family Specialist from a private service company complained that her organization was having difficulties communicating with the Department of Child Safety (DCS). This was the second time within a month this specialist had come to our office seeking help with communication. Previously, DCS informed us that they would communicate with the organization regarding this case.

Our office spoke with DCS again regarding this concern. The DCS Ombudsman Office said they would look into the concern and resolve it. Shortly thereafter, DCS informed us that they reached out to both the foster and the specialist to ensure communication. They said the current issues had been resolved. They also explained to us that the assigned caseworker was out of the office for a week. They relayed that this could explain some of the delays.

We asked the specialist from the company to contact us again if communication became a problem in the future. The specialist agreed to do so but has not contacted us again.

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Our intervention resulted in better service to citizens as exemplified by:

2000957. DCS - Department of Child Safety

A kin placement stated she had a concern with the Department of Child Safety (DCS). The kinship foster parent explained that she had two children in her care, but DCS had failed to provide the required payments or stipends since December. The placement had started in December when the children were placed with her. The kin said she needed the funds to adequately care for the children.

We spoke with the DCS Ombudsman Office and reviewed the case with them. DCS managers agreed to make sure the caseworker addressed these concerns with the kin placement.

OMBUDSMAN INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC ACCESS CASES

Outreach and Education

Educational Materials

We provided many of our office's booklets on the Public Records Law and the Open Meeting Law booklets directly to elected officials, non-elected public officials, public employees, advocacy groups, and members of the public. We also provide digital versions of the booklets on our website (and directly to interested parties), which were especially useful and easy to distribute during the ongoing pandemic. In addition, we continue to share and help develop training materials for public bodies and officials. During the pandemic, we developed a narrated open meeting law training video, which was especially useful when in-person training became impractical. We continue to update our website with publications, training opportunities, and new developments in the open meeting and public records law, such as new case law, legislation, and Attorney General Opinions.

Trainings

There is a significant demand for training throughout the State, although many had to be canceled or put on hold because of the pandemic. In the 2020 fiscal year, we conducted fourteen training sessions, both in-person and through remote means, for public entities in locations throughout the State. For instance, we conducted trainings for public bodies in Phoenix, Tempe, Pinal County, Pima County, Camp Verde, and Payson. We also conducted a training for irrigation districts throughout the state.

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In addition to general trainings in which we discuss public access requirements, we developed and presented customized training to address the specific needs of public officials upon request.

We continue to provide recordings of recent open meetings and public records law training we conducted to interested elected officials, non-elected public officials, public employees, advocacy groups, and members of the public. And, as noted above, we developed a narrated open meeting law training video, which was especially useful when in-person training became impractical.

Newsletters

We continued to publish a public access newsletter on about a quarterly basis. Our newsletter *The Public Record* touches on interesting and timely open meeting and public records law issues that are relevant to the duties and responsibilities of public bodies and officials throughout the State. For example, we addressed whether the public has a right to speak at public meetings, recording votes in meeting minutes, the open meeting law and committees and subcommittees, public records request forms and methods, how/whether public access laws apply to non-profit entities, public attendance at meetings during a pandemic, and open meeting notice posting locations during a pandemic. We also provided up-to-date summaries and analysis of pending Arizona public access legislation.

Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records send our newsletter to a listserv of public officials and employees throughout the State. Additionally, we also send our newsletter to our list of public officials and employees who have contacted our office directly to receive our newsletter.

Inquiries and Investigations

In the fiscal year 2020, our office handled 469 cases regarding matters related to public access. Of those calls, 246 were public record law inquiries, 188 were open meeting law inquiries, and 35 concerned with both public records and open meeting law. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of inquiries received from the public, the media, and government agencies. Table 2 provides the number of inquiries received about state agencies, county agencies, city or town agencies, school districts, and other local jurisdictions.

Table 1			
	Public Inquiries	Media Inquiries	Government Agency Inquiries
Number of inquiries	263	24	182

Table 2					
	State	County	City or	School	Other Local

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	Agencies	Agencies	town agencies	Districts	Jurisdictions
Number of inquiries	182	71	114	41	61

Public Access Case Examples

1903321. Higley School District.

A resident contacted our office about a public record request she said she made to the Higley Unified School District. She said she was a former employee of the District.

She said she had asked for records related to breaches of contract by district teachers. She said the district would not provide her with the records because of federal health care law. She did not understand why the District could not provide the records with the names redacted.

The resident suspected that the district was lying about why certain teachers had breached their contracts so that the teachers would not have to pay fines.

She said the district provided summaries of the various reasons why teachers breached their contracts. She forwarded us the communications from the district. The district provided her with blank contracts and a summary that explained which teachers had breached their contracts and whether the breaches were permitted under the terms of the contracts. The document also included a list of the various reasons teachers had for the breaches but did not identify which reason was given by which teacher.

We reached out to the District. We spoke with the District's attorney about the matter. She said the resident had not made it clear what sorts of records she had sought. This was strange in light of an email the resident showed us that she sent to the District along with two completed records request forms that specified that she wanted emails, letters of resignation, text messages, and other kinds of records.

The attorney said the District would provide additional records, likely including redacted letters of recommendation. She said it was unlikely that there would be many emails to provide because the District's email archives had been affected by a cyberattack. She also said there were no text messages relevant to the requests.

We told the resident what the attorney told us. She disputed what the District's attorney said. First, she said she had specified with her requests what types of records she sought. She said that up until nearly the end of July she had had no trouble accessing her emails. She did not seem to believe that the District's email archives were affected. Lastly, she said she was aware of at least some text messages between District employees related to a teacher's breach of contract.

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We asked the attorney some follow up questions. We asked if the District had received the resident's email, which appeared to indicate which types of records she wanted. We also asked her to better explain the damage done by the cyberattack and for what time period emails were affected. Lastly, we asked what type of searches the District conducted for the requested records, especially text messages.

Almost two weeks later, the resident said she had not heard anything from the District. We had also not heard back from the District's attorney. We reached back out to the District's attorney. She responded and explained that the resident's email had been misplaced with the wrong department. She further explained issues the district had had with its email system. She also provided us with information from the District's IT staff. It sounded reasonable. She said, "The Human Resources department is researching their e-mails to see if there are any messages to or from the other employees identified. They tell me the search and any redaction necessary will be completed next week."

The District's attorney later said, "there are no text messages related to resignation/release from contracts." She said, "[C]ontacts come by email or in person." She then acknowledged that "[t]he responsive documents have not yet been provided. . . ." She said, "The emails and other documents in HR have been located and redacted; they are ready to be scanned. The volume of documents is too large to send as an attachment to emails, so we are going to create a CD of .pdf files, which will be able to be picked up or mailed."

The following day, a District employee included us in an email to the resident in which she told the resident a CD of records was available to pick up. The resident did not follow up with us further about any issues, and she did not provide any evidence of missing responsive text messages.

1903416. Yavapai County Sheriff's Office.

A Yavapai County resident contacted our office concerning a request for records she said she made to the Yavapai County Sheriff's office.

She said she requested copies of records regarding an agreement between the County and an animal control entity. She said the Sheriff's office quoted her \$560 for copies of the records, which she thought was unreasonable. She said the Sheriff's office did not explain how the cost was determined.

We reached out to the Sheriff's office about the matter. We received contact from the Yavapai County attorney's office. The attorney said he thought some "wires were crossed" and would look into the matter. He followed up with us and said the agency would make the records available on a disc to the resident for \$20.

The resident confirmed and thanked us.

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1903655. Colorado River Union High School District.

The public information officer for the Colorado River Union High School District in Bullhead City contacted our office about an open meeting law issue. Essentially, he said the Superintendent wanted to know if the District could post a blanket, standing notice for social events at which a quorum of the governing board might gather.

We explained what does and does not trigger the open meeting law. We said that the District could post such a blanket notice if it wanted without violating the open meeting law; however, we explained that it is not required and it might not be especially effective. We suggested considering, instead, posting courtesy notices on an event-by-event basis.

He asked us to review some proposed blanket notice language. We reviewed it and said we saw nothing in the language that would conflict with the open meeting law.

1904128. San Luis.

A City of San Luis employee contacted our office with an open meeting law question. She asked whether she, as an employee of the City Council, could create meeting minutes for an executive session at which she was not present.

We explained that, if one reads the law literally and narrowly, it sounds like it would be a violation of the open meeting law for someone who was at the executive session to share with her; however, if one reads the law more logically, as the Attorney General seemed to do when creating its open meeting law agency handbook chapter, it would be reasonable to conclude that the board could share with her what is necessary to craft the minutes. We cautioned that the safest course would be for her to attend the executive sessions and craft the minutes based on her firsthand experience. We suggested that her public body would have to weigh the risks and decide how to proceed with this issue.

She thanked us.

1904184. Santa Cruz County.

A Rio Rico resident contacted our office about the Santa Cruz County Recorder. He said the Recorder's office was requiring him (and others) to complete written forms with personal information, such as name and address, to obtain public records. He made it sound like the Recorder's office also shared this information with third parties.

We contacted the Recorder about the matter. We explained the essence of the complaint. We asked her to confirm the alleged facts, and, if true, to explain the legal basis for her office's request requirements. The Recorder confirmed the alleged facts. She said she could not find a legal basis for the office's request requirements, and she said it was standard for her office.

We explained why we thought it was likely unlawful for her office to require the use of a particular form and submission of unnecessary personal information to obtain records. She

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followed up with us to say she consulted with the county attorney. She said the county attorney agreed that her office could not require the use of a form. She said her office would not require the use of a form going forward.

We relayed what the Recorder said to the resident. He was thankful to our office, but he remained upset at the actions of the Recorder's office, including issues outside of our jurisdiction.

1904623. Bisbee.

A former Bisbee resident contacted our office about various issues concerning the city. Most of his complaints regarded his belief that the city's building inspector falsified information in two building permits and failed to properly inspect the properties. He also asserted that the city did not fulfill his request for a copy of a building inspection form.

We explained that the first issue is outside of our authority and expertise. We suggested he considered filing a criminal complaint with the Attorney General or the County Attorney. We told him we could look into the issue of whether the city properly handled his request for a record. He sent us a copy of the request.

We contacted the City Clerk about the request. The city's attorney followed up with us. He said the city had provided the record to the former resident twice, but it would provide it again. We told the attorney that the former resident seemed to believe there might be a new version of the record. The city's attorney said this could be the case.

The City's attorney provided us with over 100 pages of records, some of which were communications between the city and the former resident and some of which were records it had allegedly provided to the former resident. Additionally, there was a new version of the record the former resident had requested. The City's attorney said this record was created after the former resident made his request. We forwarded it along to the former resident.

The resident was grateful to receive the record; however, he was still unhappy with the City over the other issues. He thanked us.

1904961. Kyrene Unified School District.

A resident contacted our office about the difficulty she said she was having in obtaining public records from the Kyrene Unified School District (hereinafter, "the District").

The resident said the District's governing board had been considering a potential change to District policy. She said the Arizona School Board Association (hereinafter, "the Association") recommended some minor changes to the District's policy. She said she did not understand the need for the changes.

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She said she requested a variety of records related to the proposed changes, such as communications between District employees and the Association and communications between District board members/staff and the District's attorney. She made it sound like the District said it would not produce records because of attorney-client privilege. We explained attorney-client privilege to the resident and explained why at least some of the records she requested would likely be covered by the privilege and thus exempt from disclosure. We told her we would contact the District.

We reached out to the District's attorney. He said the District never denied her entire request, particularly for communications between the District and the Association. He said the District only denied her access to communications between the District and its attorney and other records covered by the attorney-client privilege. He said the District was in the process of reviewing and producing hundreds of responsive records.

We relayed to the resident what the District's attorney said. She was delighted that she would be receiving records.

Eventually, both the District's attorney and the resident confirmed that the District had begun producing records. The resident thanked us.

1904999. Tucson.

A Tucson resident contacted our office with a public records law question concerning a public record request he said he made to the Tucson Department of Transportation.

The resident made it sound like the agency was insisting that it produce records to him in hard copy despite maintaining the records electronically. He said this would greatly increase the cost to him. He wanted to know if an agency must provide records electronically when the agency maintains them electronically. We explained that, in that scenario, an agency would likely have to provide the records electronically.

The resident asked us to provide him with any legal material in support of our explanation. We agreed to provide it to him. We researched the matter and provided him with applicable language from an Arizona Supreme Court opinion that addressed the issue. He thanked us.

1905142. Unknown.

An attorney for a political subdivision public body contacted our office with a variety of public records law questions concerning requests for records the public body had received.

For instance, she wanted advice on how to handle requests for government-provided cell phone records and salary records. We discussed the issues with her and recommended for and against certain courses of action. She thanked us.

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1905157. Sonoita Elgin Fire District.

A Sonoita Elgin Fire District employee contacted our office about an open meeting law matter. Essentially, she was confused about meeting recording and minutes retention in light of web posting requirements.

We explained that the recording/minutes web posting requirements in the open meeting law do not apply to special taxing districts. This seemed to be news to her, and she was delighted as this solved her issues. We also generally explained the relevant retention period.

She thanked us.

1905389. Paradise Valley School District.

The superintendent of the Paradise Valley Unified School District contacted our office about a public records law issue. He said the District received a variety of public records requests from a particular requester. He said the requests are involved and consume significant District resources. He said the requester never pays for or picks up the records.

He then asked, "[A]t what point does it become harassment and a waste of taxpayer money to process the requests when we know, based on the pattern of behavior, the requestor has no intention of picking up those materials or paying for copies that have been made?"

We researched the issue and provided a bevy of relevant information and analysis, including a court case that addressed a similar matter. We said that legitimate public records requests likely never rise to the level of harassment. We said the District might be able to make reasonable arguments in support of denying the requester's requests because they are unduly burdensome because of the resources they consume and the fact that the requester does not pick them up. We also suggested that the District could likely make a reasonable argument that it can condition its fulfillment of future requests from the requester on him paying for a portion of the copy fees upfront.

The Superintendent thanked us.

2000089. Valleywise Health.

A resident contacted our office about a request for public records he said he made to Valleywise Health about two months earlier. He said he had requested various contracts between the agency and a third party.

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The resident said the agency had said it located the responsive records and reviewed them. He said, however, that the agency said it was having its outside legal counsel review the records. He believed the agency had not promptly provided him with the records, as required by the public records law.

We contacted the agency about the matter. An agency employee said the agency expected to have responsive records to the resident by the end of the week. She provided reasonable explanations for why the request had taken as long as it had. She said the resident had initially provided incorrect identifying numbers for the contracts he sought. She also asserted that the agency did not think it was unreasonable to have the agency's attorney(s) review the records. We agreed.

We relayed to the resident that the agency would respond to his request by the end of the week. He was very thankful.

2000160. Santa Cruz.

A resident contacted our office about several issues concerning Santa Cruz County. All but one of the issues was outside of our jurisdiction. The remaining issue was about a public record request she said she made to the County on 9/27/2019.

The resident said she requested "a document reflecting how the county is complying with A.R.S. 36-183 appointing a Board of Health for the County or if not, why not." We told her we would look into this matter, but we cautioned her that public records law only entitles her to records, not to answers to questions.

We contacted the County Manager. She confirmed that the County had received the request. She said she thought the County had "answered the request," but she would check and follow up with us. About two weeks later, the County Manager had still yet to follow up with us. We reached back out to her.

Additionally, at the resident's request, we provided some guidance as to how she might pursue the issues that are outside of our office's jurisdiction.

The County Manager followed up with us. She said the County had not yet responded to the request. She said, "We have no such document that she is requesting but we will be responding to her today." The resident confirmed that the agency followed up with her. The County Manager did not explain why the County took months to tell the resident that there were no records responsive to her request or why the County only seemed to respond after repeated prodding from our office. We saw no evidence to contradict what the County said.

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2000248. Prescott Police Department.

A records specialist for the Prescott Police Department (PPD) contacted our office with public records law questions.

She said her agency received a request for a copy of a police report. She made it sound like the requester said she was entitled to the record at no charge due to her low-income level. The records specialist said she had never heard of such a thing. She wanted to know if the public records law entitles people to free copies of police reports based on their income level. She also asked for advice about how she and her staff could approach a similar situation in the future.

We researched the matter a bit and told the records specialist that we are aware of no statutes laying out the principle stated by the requester. We suggested her staff confront similar situations going forward by telling the requester that the agency is unaware of the legal basis for providing free records due to low income and that if the requester would provide the legal basis, the agency would review and consider it.

The records specialist thanked us.

2000761. Phoenix Fire Department.

A California attorney contacted our office about a public record request he made to the City of Phoenix Fire Department (PFD).

The attorney said he submitted his initial request for records on October 28, 2019. He said he followed up with the agency several times over the next few months. He said PFD responded once indicating that it received his request and it was "in process." He provided copies of each communication to our office.

The attorney asked us to investigate. We reached out to the PFD records office about the request but did not hear back. We then reached out to the Phoenix city attorney who works with the PFD.

The Phoenix city attorney said he would look into it. He followed up and said, "It looks like there was an internal miscommunication with this request which resulted in the dropped follow-up." He said the agency was working on it, would follow up with the California attorney, and would have the records to the California attorney by Friday.

Soon after, the California attorney said he had heard from the agency and received the records. He thanked us.

2000976. DCS – Department of Child Safety.

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A father contacted our office concerning a request for records he said he made to the Department of Child Safety (DCS) about six weeks earlier. He said he needed the records in preparation for a court proceeding scheduled about two weeks away. He said he had not heard from DCS about the request.

We asked the father if he had spoken to the DCS Ombudsman office about the matter. He said he had not. We told him he had to do so before we would look into the matter. The father said he would.

Six days later, the father followed up with us. He said he reached out to a woman at our office about the matter. From what we could tell, he was confused and had actually spoken to the DCS Ombudsman office. He said the woman had promised to look into the status of the request, but he had not heard back from her. We reached out to the DCS employee. She confirmed she spoke to the father three days earlier. She said she explained to him that DCS's records office is backed up from a large number of requests. She said she told him she would try to ascertain the status of his request.

Four days later, the DCS employee followed up with us to say that DCS had sent the requested records to the father via secure email one day after we initially inquired.

We reached out to confirm with the father; however, he did not answer. We left him a message to follow up with us if he did not receive the records. He did not follow up with us.

2001197. Department of Land.

A Colorado reporter contacted our office about a public record request he said he submitted to the Arizona Land Department. He said he made his request, but he did not receive a response or the records despite multiple attempts to follow up with the Department.

We asked the reporter to provide us with a copy of the request and his follow up attempts. He provided us with copies.

We reached out to the agency. An agency employee followed up with us. He acknowledged that the agency was not as quick as it could have been. He said he recently told the reporter the agency was working on it. Then, the agency employee contacted the reporter directly and CC-ed us. He attached the relevant records he said the agency had.

The reporter seemed satisfied.

2001200. Maricopa Police Department.

A resident contacted our office about the difficulty he said he was having obtaining records from the Maricopa Police Department (MPD). He made it sound like he went in person but the

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agency would not let him view the records he wanted unless he came back between 6 and 8 PM on specific weekdays, which he thought was unreasonable.

We spoke to the agency's legal counsel. She disputed what the resident said. She said he was unreasonable and the agency could have the records ready for him on a CD for \$5 on Monday or that he could schedule a time to meet her and view records. Communication between the resident and the agency seemed poisoned at this point. We mediated a time and place for the two sides to meet and for the agency to provide records.

The resident did not follow up with any additional issues after this.

2001476. Other – Private.

A resident contacted our office regarding a homeowners association ("HOA"). He said he is the president of his HOA. He said the HOA is having difficulty holding proper meetings because of building closures due to the ongoing virus pandemic.

The resident asked for advice about how to properly hold a meeting under the circumstances. We cautioned him that such matters are outside our jurisdiction and generally outside of our expertise. Because we had, however, dealt with some similar issues in the open meeting law context, we did some additional research and provided him some guidance as to how, arguably, his HOA could lawfully hold meetings to which it only allowed remote, technological attendance of HOA members. We shared with him an Attorney General opinion on a similar issue in the open meeting law context.

2001584. Great Heart Academies Charter School.

An employee for Great Hearts Academies charter schools contacted our office with a question concerning the open meeting law. She said, "As a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, is it possible for schools to post their public meeting notice and agenda electronically only? We will be holding a meeting next week and I'm unsure how we can meet the physical posting requirements with the school closures."

We explained what the open meeting law requires for posting meeting notices and the related online notice statement requirement. We explained that if the charter school public body amends its online notice statement to reflect that it will only be posting meeting notices online, it can likely limit itself to posting meeting notices online.

We further explained that posting meeting notices exclusively online is arguably defensible in most situations, but is especially defensible in light of the ongoing pandemic and the open meeting requiring the posting of additional notice as is "reasonable and practicable."

She thanked us.

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2001805. ADOA - Administration, Department of.

An employee of the Arizona Department of Administration contacted our office to discuss the open meeting law notice/agenda posting requirements in light of the ongoing pandemic. We discussed what is required and what to do if the agency wants to modify how it posts meeting notices.

He thanked us.

2002414. Board of Pharmacy.

A doctor contacted our office about the Board of Pharmacy. He asserted that the agency "refuse[d]" to comply with his public records requests.

The doctor said, "I have ask [sic] them to clarify the specific guidelines and laws required when issuing multiple schedule II scripts to patients. They are required by law to provide me with documentation and references for my records." The doctor also said, "Instead of cooperating, the executive director has been belligerent and contemptuous engaging in nine emails without providing an answer. Instead, he attempted to draw me into a conference call which I not going to do. He will either answer the question and provide documentation or he won't."

The doctor also alluded to other improper actions on the part of the agency. He said, "We believe that this organization grossly abuses their authority and powers without any justification what so ever."

We asked him to provide the requests and subsequent agency responses. He provided us with a string of emails between him, an agency employee, and the Executive Director. From what we could tell, the agency was very polite toward him and provided him with the federal regulation that addressed the issue he brought to the agency's attention. Additionally, the agency offered to set up a conference call to discuss the matter further with him. Inexplicably, the doctor seemed to get enraged and lash out at the conference call offer. We reviewed the federal regulation and concluded that the agency's interpretation was reasonable.

We reached out to the agency to make sure our understanding of what agency staff provided to the doctor was correct. The Executive Director confirmed our understanding of the agency's position. We explained to the doctor our understanding of the agency's position on the issue raised by the doctor, that the agency confirmed it to us, and that we believed it was based on a reasonable interpretation of federal law.

Over several additional emails, the doctor continued, without reasonable explanation, to claim the agency had abdicated its duties and failed to provide the clarification he sought. Additionally, he claimed that hundreds of other pharmacists and professionals in the country provided sworn statements to him that the agency's interpretation of federal law was wrong.

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He also continued to claim other general/vague wrongdoing by the agency. Despite our requests for specifics and evidence to support any of his assertions, including the alleged sworn statements, he provided us with nothing but more vague assertions. As a result, we concluded that there was no evidence to show the agency acted improperly and closed the case.

2002451. Golden Valley Fire District.

A resident contacted our office about the Golden Valley Fire District. She said the district's governing board had discussed her possible appointment to the board in an executive session.

First, she said the district, via the Fire Chief, improperly denied her request for the executive session minutes because she is not an actual appointee or employee of the district. Second, she said the district had improperly denied her request to discuss her possible appointment in public.

We reviewed what the Chief had said to her, the applicable law, and the meeting agenda and minutes. The agenda and minutes supported the facts she asserted. The provision that discussed access to executive session minutes used the same language as the provision cited for the executive session; therefore, if it was legitimate to discuss the possible appointment in the executive session, the board must provide access to the minutes. Additionally, the open meeting law entitled the resident to have the discussion in public.

We shared the nature of the complaint and our preliminary findings on the matter with the Fire Chief. We recommended the district provide the resident with the minutes and honor similar requests for personnel discussions to occur in public going forward. Five days later, we followed up with the Fire Chief. The next day, he said he brought the matter to the district's legal counsel and would follow up with us once he heard back from the legal counsel.

Eventually, the Chief wrote back to our office and the resident explaining that the agency would make the executive session minutes available to her.

2002601. Transportation, Department of.

A gentleman contacted our office about the difficulty he was having in obtaining public records from the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).

The gentleman said made a commercial request for a little over 2000 records from ADOT. Specifically, he wanted locations of billboards. He said ADOT was quoting him at \$3 per record. He thought this was unreasonable, particularly in light of what other states have charged him.

The gentleman sent us emails between him and an ADOT employee. He seemed to want the latitude and longitude of each billboard, while ADOT seemed to say it only has addresses in its records.

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We contacted ADOT. At our request, the ADOT employee said she would research and explain the basis for the \$3 per billboard address fee. The gentleman followed up with us and said he received an email from the ADOT employee in which she said, "In reviewing your original request below and discussions with the billboard permit unit, a report can be generated with the permit number, route, milepost, latitude and longitude coordinates for Arizona billboard locations. Would that be the record you request?"

He seemed satisfied and was very thankful.

2002883. Registrar of Contractors.

An employee for the Registrar of Contractors (ROC) contacted our office regarding a public records law question.

He wanted to know on what legal basis the ROC might be able to deny a request from a contractor for records related to the ROC's denial of the contractor's application for a license. He said the ROC was conducting a "criminal investigation" of the contractor.

We said it was unclear whether the ROC could make a winning argument in favor of denying the request; however, we explained that the ROC's best argument would likely be that disclosing the records would damage a state interest. Specifically, it could harm the investigation. We provided more explanation and details.

The employee also asked how the situation changes if the requester is a litigant. We explained that it really does not change anything and why. He thanked us.

2008560. Payson.

A Payson resident contacted our office regarding a request for records he said he made to Payson.

He requested thousands of pages of records from the town that were to be delivered to him via flash drive. He said the town quoted him about \$250 for the records. He thought this was unreasonable because the records were being provided electronically.

The resident followed up with us. He said he went to the town to pay the quoted \$250 and obtain the flash drive of records despite thinking it unreasonable. He said that the town then said the cost would be \$4,768. He said he refused to pay.

We contacted the town. The town's attorney reached out to us. He said, "We have evaluated the matter and have determined that this was in error, and we are remedying the issue and will correct the Town's fee schedule." We asked him how much the town would be charging. The attorney said the town would not be charging because it was providing the records electronically.

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The resident thanked us.

2008609. Maricopa County Constables.

A resident contacted our office concerning the difficulty he was having in obtaining public records from a Maricopa County Constable's office. He said it had been about two months since he made his request.

The resident said he had received some of the records he requested from the Maricopa County Attorney's Office (MCAO); however, he had not received most of what he requested. He said he pressed an MCAO attorney (who had provided some of the records) about the outstanding records, but she said that she was not the correct party to be asking. He provided us with emails from the MCAO attorney supporting what he said. The resident also provided us with an email from the MCAO attorney in which she indicated that she is the attorney for the Maricopa County Constables.

We reached out to the Constable's office. The MCAO attorney reached out to us. She said some of the requested records do not exist; however, the agency was working on providing the rest.

Soon after, the agency emailed the records to the resident. The resident thanked us.

2008692. Industrial Commission.

A resident contacted our office regarding the difficulty he was having in obtaining claim records from the Industrial Commission.

Essentially, it sounded like the agency tried to give him the records electronically; however, he does not have a computer. He said the agency then said it would cost more to provide them in hard copy.

We contacted the agency. Our agency contact asked us to have the resident call him. We put the resident in touch with him. Our contact then said that the agency provided him with the claim records, and we received no further complaints or contact from the resident.

OPTIMIZING OUR STATE GOVERNMENT

Our Cases – Statistics of Note

INVESTIGATIONS

We managed our investigations in FY2020 as noted in the following tables.

Table 3 – Investigations – July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020	
Discontinued ¹	149
Declined ²	696
The complaint was withdrawn or resolved during the investigation ³	11
Investigation Completed	146
Ongoing	31
TOTAL REQUESTS FOR INVESTIGATION	1033

Table 4 – Investigative Findings – July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020		
SUPPORTED/PARTIALLY SUPPORTED⁴		32
Requires further consideration by the agency	11	
Other action by the agency required	14	
Referred to the legislature for further action	0	
Action was arbitrary or capricious	0	
Action was abuse of discretion	0	
Administrative act requires modification/cancellation	0	
Action was not according to law	11	
Reasons for administrative act required	0	
Statute or Rule requires an amendment	0	
Insufficient or no grounds for an administrative act	0	
INDETERMINATE⁵		20
NOT SUPPORTED		94
TOTAL COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS		146

¹ “Discontinued” is marked when the complainant stops responding and the Ombudsman-Citizens’ Aide Office is unable to proceed with inquiries.

² “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 time 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 adequately investigate the complaint. By law, we must decline an investigation if we find the complainant is coming to us prematurely. In those cases, we coach the complainant about how to initially proceed with the agency.

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” count 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 2 of this report, we respond to citizens' complaints in three ways: coaching, informal assistance, or investigation.

Contacts by Agency

Between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, our office handled 6,791 cases involving 249 agencies. This is 806 more cases than the prior fiscal year. Further, it is the most cases our office has handled in a single year in our twenty-three-year history. Four months in this fiscal year were during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The following table shows the distribution of our contacts with an agency. Cases involving Child Protective Services comprised 28.78% of our total for FY2020 with 1,955 total cases. This was 291 fewer cases than FY2019.

Also of note were two other agencies trending in the wrong direction. The Department of Economic Security (DES) Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division only had 55 cases in FY2019. Just four months of the COVID-19 Pandemic saw the case count increase to 933 DES UI cases for FY2020. We looked deeper into the source of DES complaints and found the following.

DES Unemployment Insurance Complaints – July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020	
DES - Type of Complaint	
Phones are not answered or DES hangs up on me	352
DES staff are unable to clear problems and do not promptly elevate	128
Password problem	5
No one gets back to me in a reasonable time	141
I never got a card	9
I never got money put in the card account, yet I was approved	33
DES removed money from the card	1
DES froze my account over "an issue" but they do not communicate with me	81
I was told I need an adjudicator	5
I was told I do not qualify, but the reason is not true	38
Fraud concern about my claim	7
The person is sent a card or funds for no reason	3
Funds are incorrect	24
LWA account problem	1
PUA account is pending and unresolved	123
Regular UI is pending and unresolved	24
Other	32

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ADOT's Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) was also hit by the Pandemic. However, a problematic computer system change also contributed to the MVD increase in caseload. MVD had 169 cases in FY2019, and 335 cases in FY2020.

CONTACTS BY AGENCY

Agency	Coaching	Assistance	Investigation	Total
Academia del Pueblo School	1	0	0	1
Academy of Math and Science	3	1	0	4
Accountancy Board	4	2	1	7
Administrative Hearings, Office of	5	3	0	8
ADOA - Administration, Department of	28	3	3	34
Agriculture - Wt. and Measures	4	0	1	5
Agriculture, Department of	8	1	2	11
Agriculture, Pest Mgmt. Office	2	1	1	4
Agua Fria High School	0	0	1	1
AHCCCS	64	16	6	86
Alpine Fire District	1	0	0	1
American Leadership Academy	0	0	1	1
Apache County Sheriff's Office	1	0	0	1
Apache Junction	1	0	1	2
ASU -Arizona State University	3	0	1	4
Attorney General, Office of	25	7	3	35
Auditor General	3	3	0	6
Avondale	0	0	1	1
AZ POST - Peace Officer Standards & Training Board	2	0	1	3
Barbers, Arizona Board of	1	0	0	1
Behavioral Health Examiners, State Board of	4	2	1	7
Benson	0	0	1	1
Bisbee	2	0	4	6
Buckeye	3	0	0	3
Buckeye Police Department	2	0	1	3
Camp Verde	2	0	0	2
Casa Grand Police Department	0	0	1	1
Central Arizona Project	1	1	0	2
Chandler	1	0	0	1
Chandler Police Department	0	0	1	1
Chandler Unified School District	0	0	1	1
Charter Schools, Arizona State Board of	6	1	2	9

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Chiropractic Examiners, State Board of	1	1	1	3
Choice Academies, Inc. Governing Board	1	0	0	1
Christopher-Kohls Fire District	3	2	1	6
City Center for Collaborative Learning	1	0	0	1
Clarkdale	2	1	0	3
Clay Springs Pinedale Fire Department	1	0	0	1
Cochise County	0	3	0	3
Cochise County Attorney	0	1	0	1
Cochise County Board of Supervisors	0	0	1	1
Colorado River Union High School District	2	0	0	2
Commerce Authority of Arizona	6	0	0	6
Commission of African American Affairs	1	0	0	1
Commission of Judicial Conduct	2	0	0	2
Constable Ethics, Standards & Training	3	0	0	3
Copper Canyon Fire and Medical District	1	0	0	1
Corporation Commission	16	4	5	25
Corrections, Department of	83	4	6	93
Cosmetology, Board of	62	1	2	65
DCS - Community Advisory Committee	3	0	1	4
DCS - Department of Child Safety	1158	172	610	1940
DCS - Office of Licensing Certification Regulation	3	0	3	6
DCS - Other	4	1	0	5
Deaf and Blind, Arizona School for the	2	0	1	3
Deer Valley Unified School District	1	0	0	1
Dental Examiners, Board of	10	2	3	15
DES - Aging & Community Services	285	8	5	298
DES - Benefits and Medical Eligibility	209	74	44	327
DES - Child Support Service	51	38	12	101
DES - Developmental Disabilities	10	8	6	24
DES - Employment and Rehabilitation	621	275	37	933
DES - Other	28	6	5	39
DES- Adult Protective Services	16	0	4	20
Desert Marigold School	3	2	0	5
Dispensing Opticians	1	1	1	3
Douglas	1	0	0	1
DPS - Department of Public Safety	30	14	7	51
Dysart School District	1	0	0	1
Education, Board of	4	1	1	6
Education, Department of	27	1	6	34
El Mirage	1	0	0	1
Emergency & Military Affairs, Department of	4	2	0	6
Environmental Quality, Department of	23	6	1	30

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Executive Clemency, Board of	0	1	0	1
Financial Institutions Department	14	0	1	15
Fingerprinting, Board of	7	1	0	8
Forestry & Fire Mgmt.(formerly Dept. FBLs)	2	0	0	2
Fort Mojave Mesa Fire Department	1	0	0	1
Fountain Hills	0	0	2	2
Funeral Directors & Embalmers, State Board of	1	1	1	3
Game and Fish, Department of	5	1	1	7
Gaming, Dept.	4	0	0	4
Gaming, Racing Department	0	0	2	2
George Gervin Prep Academy	1	0	0	1
Gilbert	0	0	1	1
Golden Valley Fire District	0	0	3	3
Goodyear	1	0	1	2
Goodyear Police Department	1	0	0	1
Governor, Office of	11	0	2	13
Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries	1	0	0	1
Graham County	1	0	0	1
Great Heart Academies	0	1	0	1
Green Valley Water District	1	0	0	1
Greenlee County	0	0	1	1
Health Services, Department of	99	4	10	113
Health Services, Vital Records Office	8	1	1	10
High Knoll Ranchers RIMD	1	0	0	1
Higley School District	0	0	1	1
Historical Society, Arizona	1	0	0	1
Homeland Security, Department of	2	0	0	2
Housing Dept. -Manufactured Housing Office	10	0	0	10
Housing, Department of	52	0	1	53
Industrial Commission	66	5	4	75
Inscription Canyon Ranch Sanitary District	3	0	0	3
Insurance, Department of	40	1	1	42
J.O. Combs Unified School District	0	0	1	1
Jerome	1	0	1	2
Judicial Conduct, Commission on	1	0	0	1
Juvenile Corrections, Department of	1	1	0	2
Kyrene Unified School District	0	0	2	2
La Paz	1	0	0	1
La Paz County Attorney	1	0	0	1
La Paz County Sheriff	1	0	1	2
Lake Mohave Ranchos Fire District	0	0	4	4
Land, Department of	3	1	4	8

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Legislature	13	2	0	15
Liberty Elementary School District #25	1	0	0	1
Liquor Licenses and Control, Department of	12	1	0	13
Litchfield Park	0	0	1	1
Littlefield Unified School District	1	0	0	1
Lottery	1	1	1	3
Marana Drainage and Water Improvement District	2	0	0	2
Maricopa	3	1	3	7
Maricopa Air Quality	0	1	0	1
Maricopa County Attorney	0	0	2	2
Maricopa County Community Colleges	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Constables	1	0	1	2
Maricopa County Head Start	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Human Services Workforce Dev.	6	1	0	7
Maricopa County Medical Examiner	1	0	0	1
Maricopa County Planning and Development	0	0	1	1
Maricopa County School Superintendent	0	0	1	1
Maricopa County Sheriff	0	0	1	1
Maricopa Institute of Technology	0	0	1	1
Maricopa Police Department	0	0	1	1
Massage Therapy, State Board of	1	0	1	2
Mayer Fire District	1	0	0	1
Mayer Water District	2	0	1	3
Medical Board, Arizona	36	3	4	43
Mesa Police Department	1	2	1	4
Mescal J-6 Fire District	1	0	0	1
Mine Inspector	1	1	1	3
Naco Sanitary District	0	0	1	1
Navajo	2	0	0	2
Northern Arizona Consolidated Fire District #1	1	0	1	2
Northwest Fire District	1	0	0	1
Nursing Care Institution Administrators & Assisted Living Managers Examiners Board	2	0	0	2
Nursing, State Board of	14	2	1	17
Ombudsman	57	12	1	70
Optometry, State Board of	1	1	0	2
Oro Valley	1	0	2	3
Osteopathic Examiners in Medicine and Surgery, Board of	3	0	1	4
Other - Arizona in general	49	3	0	52
Other - Federal	91	0	2	93
Other - Government	366	3	20	389

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Other - Private	350	9	8	367
PAG/RTA Citizens Advisory Committee	1	0	0	1
Page	2	0	0	2
Paradise Valley	1	0	0	1
Paradise Valley School District	1	1	0	2
Parks, Department of	1	1	0	2
Payson	2	0	3	5
Peoria	0	0	1	1
Peoria Police Department	1	1	0	2
Pharmacy, Board	8	4	3	15
Phoenix	3	0	1	4
Phoenix Fire Department	0	0	1	1
Phoenix Municipal Court	1	0	0	1
Phoenix Police Department	1	0	6	7
Physical Therapy Examiners, Board of	2	1	0	3
Physician Assistants, AZ Regulatory Board of	2	0	0	2
Pima	6	0	1	7
Pima County Attorney's Office	1	0	0	1
Pima County Recorder	0	0	1	1
Pioneers' Home	1	0	1	2
Ponderosa Park Domestic Water Improvement District	0	0	1	1
Prescott	1	0	0	1
Prescott Police Department	1	0	1	2
Prescott Unified School District	1	0	0	1
Prescott Valley	2	0	0	2
PRIVATE Post-Secondary Education Board	8	0	0	8
Psychologist Examiners, State Board of	5	1	3	9
PUBLIC Post-Secondary Education Commission	2	0	0	2
Public Safety Personnel Retirement System	4	2	2	8
Quartzsite	1	0	0	1
Real Estate Dept. - HOAs	11	0	0	11
Real Estate, Department of	11	2	2	15
Regents, Arizona Board of	2	1	0	3
Registrar of Contractors	35	7	10	52
Respiratory Care Examiners, Board of	0	1	0	1
Retirement System, Arizona State	6	4	2	12
Revenue, Department of	72	42	14	128
Rim Trail Domestic Water Improvement District	1	0	0	1
RUCO-Residential Utility Consumer Office	1	0	0	1
Sahuarita	0	0	1	1
San Luis	1	0	0	1

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Santa Cruz	0	0	6	6
Scottsdale	0	0	2	2
Scottsdale Unified School District	2	1	0	3
Sec. of State -Library, Archive & Records Dept.	2	0	0	2
Secretary of State, Office of	6	3	0	9
Sedona	0	1	1	2
Seligman Fire District	1	0	0	1
Show Low	0	1	0	1
Show Low Police Department	1	0	0	1
Sierra Vista Police Department	0	0	1	1
Sonoita Elgin Fire District	1	0	0	1
South Tucson	0	0	1	1
St Johns	2	0	0	2
Superior Court	1	0	1	2
Supreme Court	1	0	0	1
Surprise	2	0	0	2
Surprise Police Department	1	0	0	1
Technical Registration, Board of	8	0	1	9
Tempe	0	5	2	7
Tempe Police Department	1	0	2	3
Tolleson	1	0	0	1
Transportation, Department of	51	9	4	64
Transportation-Motor Vehicle Division	187	110	38	335
Tubac Fire District	1	0	0	1
Tucson	0	1	1	2
Tucson Police Department	0	0	1	1
U of A - University of Arizona	2	1	1	4
unknown	17	0	0	17
unknown charter school	1	1	0	2
unknown city	5	0	3	8
unknown fire district	1	0	0	1
unknown school district	3	0	1	4
Unknown state agency	63	0	1	64
Valleywise Health	0	0	1	1
Various school districts	1	0	0	1
Verde Valley Fire District	0	0	1	1
Vernon Fire District	1	0	0	1
Veterans Home	0	1	1	2
Veterans' Services, Department of	14	0	2	16
Veterinary Medical Examining Board	1	1	0	2
Water Resources, Department of	4	0	0	4
Wickenburg	1	0	1	2

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Williams	1	0	0	1
Workforce Arizona Council	2	1	0	3
Yavapai County	1	1	0	2
Yavapai County Attorney's Office	0	0	1	1
Yavapai County School Superintendent	1	0	0	1
Yavapai County Sheriff's Office	1	0	1	2
Yucca Fire District	2	0	1	3
Yuma County	3	0	0	3
Yuma County Sheriff's Office	0	0	1	1
Yuma County, Workforce Development Board of	6	0	0	6
TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS	4823	935	1033	6791

Agency Count: 249

About the Ombudsman and Staff

Dennis Wells – Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide.

Dennis became the Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide on July 2, 2012, following confirmation by the Legislature and Governor in 2012, and was re-appointed for a second five-year term during the legislative session of 2017. Dennis holds a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Northern Arizona University and a Bachelor of Science in Geology. His educational background also includes a fellowship at Harvard regarding studies in State and Local Government. He has ombudsman training by the U.S. Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is an investigator certified by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR). In the public sector, Dennis was an elected supervisor and chair of the Coconino County Board of Supervisors, State Land Commissioner for Arizona, a member of the Arizona State Parks Board, and served as City Manager for Williams, Arizona. Dennis' public service also includes serving on the Board of Directors, Foundation for Flagstaff Medical Center and as a board member of the Arizona City and County Managers Association. In the private sector, Dennis began his career working in the family business, The Williams Grand Canyon News, which was continuously published by the Wells' family for 100 years. Following graduation from NAU, Dennis worked for firms in oil exploration and drilling in Texas, Louisiana, and overseas (Africa and the Middle East). Dennis has experience in public management, intergovernmental relations, public planning, and dispute resolution.

Joanne MacDonnell – Deputy Ombudsman.

Joanne joined the office as Deputy Ombudsman in 2005 after serving nearly eight years as the Arizona Corporation Commission, Director of Corporations. Before working in government, Joanne worked in the private sector at FCC Investors, Inc. serving on the Board of Directors and as an accountant. She also worked in real estate as a licensed Realtor associate and real estate appraiser. Joanne has Bachelor of Science degrees in Business Administration and Real Estate from the University of Arizona, is an investigator certified by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR), and completed mediation training through South Mountain Community College. She has additional training including the Executive Course, Project & Investment Justification Training, the Leadership Module through Rio Salado College and Arizona Government University; and ombudsman training prescribed by the U.S. Ombudsman Association (USOA). She is active in the U.S. Ombudsman Association, having served multiple years as a Board Director/Officer and as a Conference Committee and Outreach Committee Member. She is currently USOA's Secretary/Treasurer. She was Chairman of the USOA Children and Family Chapter for four years. She was a member of the Association for Conflict Resolution, qualified in the "Practitioner" category. She was a member of the DCS Citizen Review Panel Committee and the Court Parent Representation Committee. She has served on the Arizona Juvenile Court Improvement Committee since 2011. She has served as a judge for the Central Arizona Better Business Bureau (BBB) Business Ethics Award for the past nine years.

Danee Garone – Staff Attorney.

Danee is a staff attorney for the Ombudsman's office and specializes in open meetings and public records law matters. He joined the Ombudsman's office in 2014. Before joining the Ombudsman's office, Danee completed a legal internship with the Arizona House of Representatives. Additionally, he completed a legal externship with the United States District Court for the District of Arizona and interned for the United States Small Business Administration.

Danee has a Juris Doctor degree from the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law at Arizona State University and is a licensed attorney. Additionally, he graduated from Arizona State University summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism and a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science.

Keith Meyer – Senior Investigator/Writer Ombudsman.

Keith joined the Office of the Ombudsman in 2014. He has 20 years of public experience in Arizona State and County governments. He served in the Arizona Department of Corrections Director's Office, the Arizona Department of Agriculture, the Arizona State Land Department, and Arizona State University. In the Maricopa County government, he worked at the County Attorney's Office coordinating restitution issues with citizen victims of crime. Other service included volunteering on several homeowner association boards. He has ombudsman training prescribed by the U.S. Ombudsman Association (USOA) and is an investigator certified by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR). Keith earned a Master's degree in Public Administration and a Bachelor of Science degree in Agribusiness, with a minor in Sociology, from Arizona State University.

Frank Rutledge – Investigator/Writer Ombudsman.

Frank joined the Ombudsman team in June 2016 after working for almost nine years with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). During his time at DES, Frank worked in the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the DES Office of Procurement, and most recently with the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Frank brings a wealth of knowledge including contracting, procurement, and DES services to the team. Frank has 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, and certified in Arizona State Public Procurement. Frank has resided in Arizona for over 35 years, and is a graduate of Northern Arizona University's School of Communication, with an emphasis in Journalism.

Carmen Salas – Assistant Ombudsman.

Carmen joined the Ombudsman's office in 2005. She previously worked at the Arizona Corporation Commission for nine years as a management analyst and supervisor. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from the University of Phoenix. She has completed additional training including ethics and various risk management courses through Arizona Government University. She has completed the Leadership Module through AZGU, is an investigator certified by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR), has ombudsman training prescribed by the U.S. Ombudsman Association (USOA), and

has completed mediation training. She has also completed training with the Child Welfare Training Institution and Department of Economic Security to obtain clearance for the Children's Information Library & Data Source (CHILDS). Carmen is fluent in Spanish.

Jennifer Olonan – Assistant Ombudsman.

Jennifer began working for the Ombudsman office in 2014. She has completed ombudsman training prescribed by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA). She previously worked in the medical field as a team lead and manager, where she obtained extensive clinical experience. She has received a Bachelor's of Science degree in Health Science (Healthcare Policy) from Arizona State University. She has a Master's of Public Administration with an Emphasis in Government and Policy, from Grand Canyon University. She has completed training with the Child Welfare Training Institution and Department of Economic Security to obtain clearance for the Children's Information Library & Data Source (CHILDS). Jennifer is proficient in American Sign Language.

John Wicus – Assistant Ombudsman.

John joined the office as an intern in January of 2018 while completing his Masters in Politics at Arizona State University. He previously worked as a Teacher's Assistant at ASU and taught the courses of Political Ideology, Problems of Democracy, and Contemporary Political Theory. He received a Bachelor's of Science in Politics (Global Studies) and a minor in European History from ASU. John attended ASU and then went to work for the State Ombudsman-Citizens' Aide Office after graduation. John completed the New Ombudsman Training offered by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA). He is proficient in American Sign Language.

Yvonne Rothblum – Assistant Intake Ombudsman.

Yvonne joined the Ombudsman team in November 2016. Yvonne has worked in both the public and private sectors. She worked in the Arizona Commerce Authority (previously known as the Arizona Department of Commerce) and the Arizona Department of Revenue. In the private sector, Yvonne worked in retail. Yvonne has an Associate in Liberal Arts from Glendale Community College (GCC). While at GCC, she was inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. Yvonne continued her education and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Communication with a minor in Spanish from Arizona State University. Yvonne completed the New Ombudsman training by the United States Ombudsman Association (USOA). She has also completed the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (CLEAR) training.

Alicia Nugent – Assistant Intake Ombudsman.

Alicia began working at the Ombudsman's Office in January 2020 as an intern. After the internship ended in May of 2020, she stayed on as an assistant intake ombudsman. She has received a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from ASU.