



PIMA COUNTY



JUVENILE COURT
OPERATIONAL REVIEW
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PIMA COUNTY COURT ADMINISTRATOR:

RON OVERHOLT

NATIONAL CENTER FOR STATE COURTS:

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Executive Summary

Pima County Juvenile Court (“PCJC”) is a court known nationally for innovation and service to families. Named a Model Court in dependency matters in 1996 and delinquency several years later, Pima has sustained energy for innovation that is tangible at all levels of the court. Pima County Judicial leaders, court leaders, and community leaders have continued to reflect on the processes of the court, best practices, family drug court, trauma-informed efforts, evidence-based services to find ways to improve case outcomes for children and families. The Pima Courts sought out this operational review of the Juvenile Court by the National Center for State Courts (“NCSC”) to ensure that the court is operating in a manner that makes the best use of court resources when providing service to the community. Specifically, the PCJC asked NCSC to consider:

- How judicial resources impact the quality of outcomes and any potential efficiencies.
- The impact of judicial rotation on the outcomes in court.
- The Court’s ability to sustain, advance, and achieve the goals of Model Court for both delinquency and dependency.

Judges with experience in court leadership and in Model Court reform efforts formed part of the NCSC team. Since August 2016, NCSC worked with PCJC to review documentation including operational reviews, statistics and outcomes data, observe court proceedings and interview a broad array of stakeholders. The NCSC team met with the PCJC team in August 2017 to review preliminary recommendations and gather additional data.

As a result of this effort, NCSC concludes that the PCJC is a highly performing court. Statewide data in Arizona shows that Pima meets timeline standards to an exemplary degree. PCJC’s judicial programs demonstrate high functioning in terms of efficiency, productivity, and customer satisfaction. PCJC has implemented numerous initiatives intended to meet the needs of Pima County’s children and families. These include dependency and delinquency programs such as the Dependency Alternative Program, Family Drug Court, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Family Navigators, Juvenile Delinquency Alternatives

Initiative, an active probation department, and Alternative Community Engagement Services among others.

In terms of improvement, the greatest challenge ahead is that of sustainability: how to keep this high functioning court operating optimally now and in the future. Towards this end, NCSC recommends consideration of the following:

The Impact of Judicial Resources on Quality of Outcomes

- The Court and Clerk's Office should engage in a process to expedite the provision of charging documents and orders.
- PCJC should work with Arizona's Court Improvement Program Director to make Arizona's *Fostering Court Improvement* data available.

Rotation Policies

Assessment of the Current System:

- The Court should re-establish a committee to consider feedback given regarding the current commissioner rotation schedule and make recommendations. The Court should consider the various viewpoints and some of the ideas suggested to see if they could be piloted in a way that would support judicial expertise across benches, infuse energy into the juvenile bench and prevent burnout.
- The Court should consider how the impact of rotation on committee work can be ameliorated.

Training and Mentoring:

- PCJC should provide additional training and mentoring to new judges when they rotate in. PCJC should consider retooling of the Judge Mentorship program to allow for in court observation. The Court should consider timing rotations to coincide with dependency and delinquency trainings, either with Dependency and Delinquency 101, or one of the many other trainings available from various outlets in Arizona and nationally.

Sustainability

- PCJC should prioritize the identification of alternate funding for the continuation of Family Drug Court operations and recovery support specialists.
- PCJC should expand the use of data analytics.
- PCJC judges and commissioners should receive regular reports summarizing their pending caseload and the degree to which their cases are meeting time standards.
- PCJC should publish an annual report card to be shared with the community.
- The Court should continue to promote the ACES program in schools and in other community outreach.
- The Court should continue to seek funding and support for CASA while recruiting for CASA volunteers in the community.
- The Court should study the Family Navigators to evaluate their impact and to determine how they can best support parents in navigating processes.
- The Court should continue to study DAP to determine its impact on decreasing the filing of petitions and longer range outcomes.
- Contract attorneys should have increased access to their cases in AGAVE/AGAVE Web.
- The Court should meet with court appointed attorneys to consider their role and vision in the future. The Court should investigate funding for Attorney and Stakeholder training and mentoring.
- Public Defense Services should adopt a training program where new attorneys can shadow experienced attorneys when they have smaller caseloads. Public Defense Services should work with the Court to strengthen the attorney mentorship program.

By considering the recommendations above, PCJC is poised to continue to provide excellent service to the children, youth and families in Pima County now and for years to come.