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## AzAAP Statement on Arizona's Child Protective Services System: Challenges and Recommendations from Arizona's Pediatricians

The recent discovery of thousands of never-investigated reports to Arizona Child Protective Services highlights an unacceptable reality for Arizona's vulnerable children – the child protection system that is supposed to keep them safe has failed them. Pediatricians play a major role in identifying and caring for children who have been victims of abuse or neglect. For these reasons, the Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which represents over 900 pediatricians and allied health professionals in Arizona, urges the Governor, the Department of Economic Security, and our state Legislators to act quickly to address this gravely serious issue and makes the following recommendations for action.

### Background:

Most CPS cases have their roots in poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence or a combination of those factors. About two-thirds of CPS reports – including those that lead to children being removed from their families – involve neglect, rather than abuse. Helping these families by providing services is the most effective and cost-efficient way of keeping children in their own homes safely.

Since 2008, Arizona lawmakers have cut more than \$300 million from programs that help struggling families before they reach the point where they abandon, abuse or neglect their children. Cuts to DES family support services including child care assistance, housing assistance, substance-abuse treatment and job training for families as resulted in a 40% increase in the number of children who needed to be placed in foster care since 2009 and these children are staying in foster care longer because their parents are not provided with the services they need.

There is ample evidence that funding prevention programs not only prevents abuse and neglect but saves money. For example, for every \$1 spent on early-childhood and family-support services, the state could save from \$4 to \$25 on incarceration and public assistance later in life.

### Recommendations:

- Restore funding for prevention programs such as Healthy Families and the Family Builders program and increase funding for counseling, family support and domestic violence services.
- Restore child-care subsidies for working parents so that parents are not forced to use unsafe child care which puts their child at risk for abuse and neglect.
- Restore temporary cash assistance for needy families so that parents can afford safe housing, food and the basic needs for their child.

- Increase funding so that a sufficient number of caseworkers are available to investigate and monitor the families they are assigned.
- Increase funding for support staff that can reduce the administrative workload for caseworkers and their supervisors so that more time is available to assist and monitor the families. Additional support staff can reduce turnover and improve recruitment of caseworkers and supervisors.
- Implement a two-tiered approach to investigation which has been used successfully in 30 other states where low-level cases are diverted to contracted service providers whose aim is to determine what families need to remain safely together.
- Provide funding for substance abuse treatment services for parents of vulnerable kids. Since drugs and alcohol abuse are contributing factors in over 60% of all cases of abuse and neglect, these programs are vitally important because without treatment children who are in foster care cannot be safely returned home. These programs should also be available to all parents whose children are at risk due to parental substance abuse.
- Improve timely access to behavioral health services for children at risk in order to prevent the need for CPS involvement and improve outcomes for children in the CPS system.

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The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AzAAP) is an organization of over 900 primary care pediatricians, pediatric specialists, nurses and other pediatric healthcare providers dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. The mission of the AzAAP is to improve the health of Arizona children and support the pediatric professionals who care for them.