



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
**Administration on Children, Youth and Families**  
1250 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024

Mr. Erwin McEwen  
Director  
Illinois Department of Children  
and Family Services  
406 East Monroe  
Springfield, Illinois 62701-1498

Dear Mr. McEwen:

The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), completed a review of Illinois' Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data during the week of August 16, 2010. The final report on the AFCARS Assessment Review (AAR) is enclosed, which includes the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP). We appreciate the amount of time and effort that your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review.

The AAR evaluates two areas: the AFCARS general requirements (reporting populations and technical standards) and the data elements (foster care and adoption). Information collected on these areas is combined and based on an analysis of the findings a rating factor is assigned to each of the general requirements and each data element. The rating factors are: "1," the system is not collecting the AFCARS data elements and the data are not transmitted to ACF; "2," technical corrections are required; "3," improvement in data quality is needed; and "4," the State fully meets the AFCARS standards. The enclosed report provides a more detailed explanation of each of the rating factors, as well as, charts that summarize the State's rating factors for the General Requirements and the Data Elements. As part of the post-site visit analysis, the State's documents, the data, the case file review findings, and the onsite notes were assessed to make the final determination of findings. The State team should carefully review all the findings in each document as there have been some changes from the onsite findings. Below is a chart depicting the State's rating factors.

### **General Requirements (22)**

Rating Factor	Foster Care (8)	Adoption (3)	Technical (11)
4	4	2	10
3	1	1	0
2	3	0	1
1	0	0	0

**Data Elements (103)**

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	6 (9%)	6 (16%)	12 (12%)
3	8 (12%)	4 (11%)	12 (12%)
2	37 (56%)	19 (51%)	56 (54%)
1	15 (23%)	8 (22%)	23 (22%)

The most significant issue identified in the AAR is the lack of data for many of the AFCARS elements. As summarized in the chart above, the State is non-compliant with 22% of the AFCARS elements (rating factor of “1”) because the information is not collected either on forms or in the State’s information systems. One example of data that are not collected are the elements that pertain to the reasons children enter foster care. The extraction code defaults these elements to “does not apply,” thus masking underlying issues beyond the lack of data collection. The State must immediately begin to report the data elements noted in the attached report as blanks. Defaulting missing data to a valid AFCARS value is not permissible and is non-compliant with the AFCARS regulation.

Another issue is the manner in which the State collects the data. The collection and recording of information on child welfare cases in Illinois is accomplished through a combination of filling out forms and data entry into two information systems. The forms do not contain all of the information that is required for AFCARS reporting. Also, there is an issue with caseworkers not completing the forms with updated information and so the data are not entered into the information systems. The two information systems are the Child and Youth Centered Information System (CYCIS) and the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). (Although referred to as “SACWIS,” the system does not meet the Federal definition of a SACWIS and is not funded as a Federally approved SACWIS.) The CYCIS is an older system that has been in existence for many years and is used by all counties in Illinois. Field staff in most counties also use the SACWIS system. The AFCARS data is extracted primarily from CYCIS. The SACWIS system’s use for purposes of AFCARS is limited to the collection of some demographic data.

There are other changes that need to be made to the systems, as well. AFCARS data are to be reflective of the information regarding a child for the report period being submitted. As part of data clean-up and as a task in the AFCARS Improvement Plans, data must be resubmitted for prior report periods. The Illinois information systems need to be modified to add history tables for many of the AFCARS data elements to ensure that resubmitted data reflect the time period of the report. One example of data elements that need a history table are the diagnosed conditions of a child (foster care elements #10 -15). If in the first report period there is no diagnosed condition but a condition is diagnosed within the next report period, when the State re-submits data for the first report period it will incorrectly show the child as having a diagnosed condition in that earlier time period. The State’s E-Health system may be a good way to accurately collect these data for AFCARS, and the extraction code will have to check the start and end dates of a diagnosis in relation to the report period that is transmitted to the Children’s Bureau.

There are several other changes that require modifications to the screens in the information systems in order to collect more accurate data for Federal reporting and for the State's use in program evaluation. Since extensive changes must be made at a minimum to CYCIS, the State should take this opportunity to reconsider its information technology solutions to having an electronic case file. The State should consider consolidating its data collection into one single statewide system that is used by all counties.

Due to corrections that are needed for the foster care elements, the State will have to resubmit AFCARS data for past report periods. The State and the Children's Bureau will discuss which reports will be required for resubmission, taking into consideration those used for the State's current Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AIP, the State staff must submit the AIP electronically to the Children's Bureau with estimated due dates for completing the tasks in the AIP. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. Additionally, the State's plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the State's title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required by 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5). The Regional Office will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AIP. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's Network of Training and Technical Assistance Centers.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff who participated in the review for their hard work and their commitment to collecting accurate and reliable AFCARS data. If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact Angelina Palmiero at (202) 205-7240.

Sincerely,

/s/

Joseph J. Bock  
Acting Associate Commissioner  
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc: Joan Nelson-Phillips, Deputy Director of Quality Assurance, IL DCFS  
William Wolfe, Deputy Director of Planning and Performance Management, IL DCFS  
Carolyn Wilson-Hurey, Child Welfare Program Manger, Children's Bureau, Region V  
Division of Program Implementation, Children's Bureau  
Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau  
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