

JAN 23, 2009

Judge James W. Payne
Director
Indiana Department of Child Services
Room W392-MS03
402 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2739

Dear Judge Payne:

The Children's Bureau in collaboration with the Indiana Department of Child Services recently completed a review of Indiana's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS). This review was conducted June 16 - 20, 2008. The final report on the AFCARS Review is enclosed.

We appreciate the amount of time and effort that you and your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review. We would especially like to thank Sharalie Harcourt and Carol Ryan, your State Coordinators for the AFCARS Review.

Based on the review, we determined that the State is in compliance with most of the AFCARS General Requirements (foster care and adoption populations, and technical specifications). The significant area requiring a technical correction is in the methodology used by the State to transmit an AFCARS report for a previous report period. The State's current methodology results in information being reported for the wrong time frame. If a State resubmits data for a prior report period, the data in that file must reflect the circumstances for each child during the specified report period and must not include information reflecting events that occurred after the specified report period.

There is one significant system modification that must be made to ICWIS. This relates to the collection of diagnosed disability information. The State's data for the 2007B report period indicates that 89 percent of the children reported have been seen by a health professional but had no diagnosed conditions that would be reported to AFCARS. The State team indicated they thought this number was not reflective of the children in foster care and that more children should be reported as having a clinically diagnosed condition that should be reported to AFCARS. As a result of the review of the cases pulled for the site-visit, the findings indicate that of the 59 cases reviewed, 23 (40%) were found to have errors. In each of these cases the AFCARS data indicated "no," but the reviewer found a diagnosed condition that is reportable in AFCARS.

There are several contributing factors for the underreporting of information. One is that the State has two sections of its system where medical information can be recorded (duplicative data entry). This is most likely contributing to confusion by workers on what information should be entered on which screen, and what is required to be entered. The collection of health and mental health related diagnosed conditions needs to be consolidated into one section of ICWIS. Duplicative data entry is also a concern in regard to finding a State's SACWIS system compliant.

Additionally, there are no start and end dates associated with the diagnosed conditions that are entered into ICWIS. Data submitted for each report period, or prior report periods, must reflect the information on the child at that time. Date fields need to be added in order to determine when the diagnosis occurs and, if applicable, when the condition no longer exists.

Once the technical corrections are completed, underlying issues may surface providing a more accurate reflection of the experiences of a child in foster care, or the need for better data entry. As a result, the AFCARS data submissions may fail the compliance standards used to determine compliance on the six-month reports. In order to ensure the data are complete, the agency must increase supervisory oversight and require workers to enter the data in a timely manner. The State can also assess the validity of the data prior to submitting it to the Children's Bureau. To do so, the State may utilize the management reports created by the agency, as well as the Data Quality Utility and the Frequency Utility posted on the Children's Bureau's website. It is important that the AFCARS data accurately reflect the circumstances of children in foster care and under the agency's responsibility.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report, the State staff must submit the AFCARS Improvement Plan electronically to the Children's Bureau with estimated due dates for completing the tasks identified in the Improvement Plan. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. The State must provide electronic quarterly updates of its progress to the Children's Bureau. Once the Children's Bureau and the State agree that the quality of the data is acceptable, the AFCARS Improvement Plan will be considered finished, and a letter will be sent to the State from the Children's Bureau confirming this fact. The letter will include a summary of the actions taken by the State and the completed AFCARS Improvement Plan. 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 Children's Bureau's Regional Office in Chicago will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available to implement the AFCARS Improvement Plan. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). If you wish to request on-site technical assistance from the NRC-CWDT, please contact your Regional Office.

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/

Christine M. Calpin
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc:

Tony Bender, Chief Information Officer, IN DCS
Carolyn Wilson-Hurey, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager, Children's Bureau,
Region V
Electronic Copy - Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau
Electronic Copy - Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau