



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. Ronald J. Levy
Director
Missouri Department of Social Services
211 West High Street
PO Box 1527
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-1527

Dear Mr. Levy:

The Children's Bureau in collaboration with the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS), Children's Division completed a review of Missouri's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). This review was conducted March 2 - 6, 2009. The final report on the AFCARS Review is enclosed, which includes the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP). The data used for this review were from the report period April 1, 2008 - September 30, 2008 (2008B).

We appreciate the amount of time and effort that your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review. We would especially like to thank Meliny Staysa, Leanne Leason, and Linda Halbert for their time and input for the AFCARS Review.

The AFCARS Assessment Review (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. Below is a frequency table of your ratings.

General Requirements (24)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (8)	Adoption (3)	Technical (13)
4	3	1	8
3	3	1	4
2	2	1	1
1	0	0	0

Data Elements (103)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	9 (14%)	7 (19%)	16 (16%)
3	30 (45%)	15 (41%)	44 (43%)
2	27 (41%)	15 (41%)	42 (41%)
1	0	0	0

Many of the rating factors changed in the final analysis from those given onsite due to technical corrections completed by the State during the post site-visit phase. The corrections were of a technical nature and so the rating was changed from a “2” to a “3.” For these elements the State will need to review and monitor the accuracy of the data to ensure there are no additional issues that may be related to timely data entry or require training.

As noted in the enclosed report the more significant areas that need improving are:

- The foster care and adoption reporting populations need to be complete.
- The data need to be reflective of the report period being submitted.
- Information on the start and end dates of a foster care episode and the reason for discharge from foster care need to be entered accurately.
- Information on placement start and end dates, as well as placement counts and the physical location where the child is placed needs to be entered accurately.
- Information on the number of children diagnosed with a health or mental health condition needs to be complete and accurate.

As was discussed during the onsite review, States’ Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) are to be comprehensive case management systems and must reflect the child’s official record. Information in Missouri’s system often relates to payment dates and functions, rather than to the actual experiences of children. For instance, if a child is placed in a new placement setting, the start date recorded in the system is not the actual date the child was placed, but the next day. Also, information recorded in the system on the location of the child is often incomplete. It is imperative that for every child who is the agency’s responsibility for placement and care, the system record the specific location where a child is living, so that the system contains a complete history of the child’s placements, regardless of the type of setting.

The State also needs to ensure that all parties involved in a case take ownership for the accuracy of the data. This includes not only the State staff but the private provider staff that are also associated with each case. The State needs to incorporate into its quality assurance process the review of information entered by private provider staff to ensure that these data are entered in a timely and accurate manner.

There are several areas identified in the AIP that require additional training. One of the findings from the case file review is the inconsistent use of some fields and dates (e.g., hearing dates, filing dates, etc.). The agency needs to ensure that all data fields are used consistently in order to have reliable and comparable data.

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: Rosalyn Wilson, Program Manager, CB Region VII
Electronic Copy - Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau
Electronic Copy - Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau