

Mr. Lanier M. Cansler
Secretary
North Carolina Department of Health
and Human Services
2001 Mail Service Center,
Raleigh, NC 27699-2001

Dr. Mr. Cansler:

The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Social Services (DSS), Department for Health and Human Services, completed a review of North Carolina's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). This review was conducted September 22 - 26, 2008. The AFCARS data used for the review was from the report period October 1, 2007 - March 31, 2008 (2008A). The final report on the AFCARS Assessment 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 Assessment Review.

A summary of the significant findings is included in the report, and detailed findings can be found in the "Detailed Findings" matrices for the general requirements and the foster care and adoption data elements (Tab A). The minimum tasks that are required to correct the State's reporting of the AFCARS data are included in the AFCARS Improvement Plan (Tab B).

Two very significant issues were identified as part of the review. It is important to note that these issues also have implications for the accuracy of the State's Child and Family Services Data Profile. The first issue is in regard to record numbers. Children that enter North Carolina's foster care system are assigned unique, county specific identification numbers (ID). These IDs do not cross county boundaries. A child who entered and was discharged from foster care in one county agency will be given a new, different ID if she/he reenters foster care in a different county. Consequently, when the State submits the child's record it will not contain the information on the earlier foster care episode. The AFCARS file will only contain information on one removal episode not two. The State has been working on a process to remedy this problem but as of the date of the review had not completed the project. It is our understanding that this project has been on hold for the past couple of years. The State must address this issue as soon as possible by implementing a single record number for children in the State's foster care system for AFCARS reporting purposes.

The other significant issue is the methodology used by case workers when a case is closed in one county and is transferred to another county. Case workers are entering these cases as discharges from foster care with the discharge reason "transfer to another agency." However, the child was never legally discharged from the State's responsibility for care and placement. The State needs

to address its method of transferring cases and instruct workers that the above situation is to be recorded as a change in placement and not a discharge from foster care. For the purposes of AFCARS reporting, the court jurisdiction changes but the State's responsibility for care and placement does not change. The record is to reflect a continuous removal episode.

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. The State should also incorporate the review of the AFCARS data as part of its ongoing quality assurance processes.

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.

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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: Sherry Bradsher, Director, DSS
Ruth Walker, Regional Program Manager; Children's Bureau, Region IV, Atlanta, GA
Electronic Copy - Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau
Electronic Copy - Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau