



**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

September 14, 2010

Mr. Kerry Winterer  
Chief Executive Officer  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
P.O. Box 95026  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

Dear Mr. Winterer:

The Children’s Bureau, in collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Children and Family Services, completed a review of Nebraska’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data during the week of April 19, 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. We would especially like to thank Sherri Haber and Lori Koenig for their time and input for the AFCARS Assessment 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 (23)**

Rating Factor	Foster Care (8)	Adoption (3)	Technical (12)
4	6	2	11
3	1	0	1
2	1	1	0
1	0	0	0

**Data Elements (103)**

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	14 (21%)	13 (35%)	27 (26%)
3	24 (36%)	6 (16%)	30 (29%)
2	28 (42%)	18 (48%)	46 (45%)
1	0	0	0

The findings matrices in Tab A of the report include the final findings for the General Requirements and the data elements. Tab B includes the AFCARS Improvement Plans (AIP). As noted in the above chart, 45% of the data elements require some type of technical correction. Many of these corrections require modifications to the extraction code to set the AFCARS element to blank if the data are missing in the child’s electronic case file. These “default” settings are masking underlying data entry issues that the State will need to address through training and supervisory oversight.

Some of the technical corrections require modifications to screens in the Nebraska Family On-line Client User System (N-FOCUS). One significant area to be addressed is the manner in which information on a child’s diagnosed conditions are recorded. The collection method is complex and requires the case worker to address each diagnosed condition. Based on the frequency report for the 2009B report period (April 1 - September 30, 2009) and the review of case files, the data for the AFCARS element “has the child been diagnosed with a disability” appears under-reported. Another change that is required for this information is the start and end dates of a diagnosed condition. AFCARS data are to reflect the specific report period being submitted. When the State resubmits an AFCARS file for a prior report period the State’s data does not accurately reflect the child’s circumstances for that report period. In order for the diagnosed conditions to be correctly reported the start and end dates of the diagnosis need to be used to extract the data.

In regard to the AFCARS reporting population, the State needs to address two areas. The first is that the State’s AFCARS foster care file does not include children on runaway status at the time the Department is given responsibility for care and placement of the child. These children are to be included in the reporting population and their removal episode start date is the date the Department is given care and placement responsibility. The other area the State needs to address is the adoption reporting population. The State may be underreporting its number of adoptions. The State is not including the records of children who are adopted through a private agency from another State and on whose behalf Nebraska is paying a title IV-E subsidy. The State must include all adoptions in which the agency has involvement due to an adoption agreement for subsidy or services.

Currently the State is correctly reporting children to AFCARS up to the State’s age of majority (19 years old). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351) amended title IV-E by allowing States the option to define the age of a

“child” up to the age of 21. States are required to submit amended title IV-E plans by December 31, 2010 that includes the State’s definition of a child. If Nebraska’s Department of Health and Human Services chooses to exercise the option to extend title IV-E beyond the age of 18 when it submits the amended title IV-E plan, or at any time in the future, then youth meeting the revised definition of a child must be included in the AFCARS foster care reporting population.

The corrections made to the system and the extraction code will require the State to resubmit AFCARS data for past report periods. The State and the Children’s Bureau will have to discuss which report periods will be required for resubmission. Among the factors to be considered will be the report periods needed 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: Todd Reckling, Director, Division of Children and Family Services, NE DHHs  
Rosalyn Wilson, Program Manager, CB Region VII  
Division of Program Implementation, Children’s Bureau  
Division of State Systems, Children’s Bureau

Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau