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#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Inspector General Office of Audit Services

REGION IV 61 Forsyth Street, S.W., Suite 3T41 Atlanta, Georgia 30303

APR 6 2006

Report Number: A-04-06-03505

Mark D. Birdwhistell, Secretary Cabinet for Health and Family Services 275 East Main Street, 5W-A Frankfort, Kentucky 40621

Dear Mr. Birdwhistell:

Enclosed are two copies of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of Inspector General (OIG) final report entitled "Audit of Kentucky's Title IV-E Administrative Costs." A copy of this report will be forwarded to the action official below for her review and any action deemed necessary.

Final determination as to actions taken on all matters reported will be made by the HHS action official. We request that you respond to the HHS action official within 30 days from the date of this letter. Your response should present any comments or additional information that you believe may have a bearing on the final determination.

In accordance with the principles of the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended by Public Law 104-231), OIG reports are made available to members of the public to the extent the information is not subject to exemptions in the Act that the Department chooses to exercise (see 45 CFR part 5).

If you have any questions or comments about this report, please do not hesitate to call me or John Drake, Audit Manager, at (404) 562-7755 or through e-mail at john.drake@oig.hhs.gov. To facilitate identification, please refer to report number A-04-06-03505 in all correspondence.

Sincerely,

Lori S. Pilcher

Regional Inspector General for Audit Services, Region IV

Enclosures

Page 2 – Mark D. Birdwhistell

#### **Direct Reply to HHS Action Official:**

Carlis V. Williams Regional Administrator Administration for Children and Families Region IV

# Department of Health and Human Services OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

## AUDIT OF KENTUCKY'S TITLE IV-E ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS



Daniel R. Levinson Inspector General

> APRIL 2006 A-04-06-03505

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http://oig.hhs.gov

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#### OAS FINDINGS AND OPINIONS

The designation of financial or management practices as questionable or a recommendation for the disallowance of costs incurred or claimed, as well as other conclusions and recommendations in this report, represent the findings and opinions of the HHS/OIG/OAS. Authorized officials of the HHS divisions will make final determination on these matters.



#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, as amended, authorizes Federal funds for States to provide foster care and adoption assistance for children under an approved State plan. The Federal Government, through the Administration for Children and Families, provides funding at a 50-percent rate for State administrative expenditures. In Kentucky, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services<sup>1</sup> (State agency) administers the Title IV-E program.

The State agency used its time study results to allocate 76 percent of the administrative costs charged to the Title IV-E program. A random moment time study (RMS) is a statistical sampling technique that allows States to equitably allocate costs among the benefiting public assistance programs. The remaining 24 percent of the administrative costs charged to Title IV-E represented State agency payments to various outside agencies and operating costs of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

During the 2-year audit period from April 1, 2001, through March 31, 2003, the State agency claimed \$64.8 million (\$32.4 million Federal share) in Title IV-E administrative costs. Our audit covered \$49.1 million (\$24.5 million Federal share) in administrative costs the State agency allocated to Title IV-E through its time study.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

Our objective was to determine whether the State agency equitably allocated administrative costs to the Title IV-E program for the period from April 1, 2001, through March 31, 2003.

#### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The State agency's RMS methodology may not have equitably allocated administrative costs to the Title IV-E program. Federal cost principles allow the use of an RMS to allocate administrative costs to Federal awards. The sampling method must meet acceptable statistical sampling standards (Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87, Attachment B, 11.h(6)).

However, the State agency undermined the statistical validity of the RMS in the following ways:

• The State agency altered the date or time of the random moment for employees with nontraditional work schedules that did not meet the standard workday defined in the State agency's cost allocation plan.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Prior to December 2003, the Cabinet for Families and Children was the Title IV-E State agency. In December 2003, the Cabinet for Families and Children was combined with the Cabinet for Health Services to create the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

• The State agency included unapproved positions such as accountants and attorneys in the sampling universe. Approved positions should have only included employees who were directly involved in Title IV-E activities.

The alteration of the random moment and the addition of unapproved positions may have skewed the results of the RMS, resulting in either an understated or overstated percentage of time charged to Title IV-E activities.

These conditions occurred because the State agency failed to design an RMS that complied with Federal guidelines and statistical sampling standards. As a result, the State agency may not have equitably allocated \$49.1 million (\$24.5 million Federal share) in administrative costs to the Title IV-E program.

As described in the Other Matters section of this report, the State agency also claimed SACWIS development costs based on projections, rather than based on actual costs as Federal regulations require (45 CFR § 95.4).

#### RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the State agency continue to work with the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Cost Allocation to ensure that the time study methodology equitably allocates costs to the benefiting programs.

#### **State Agency Comments**

In written comments to the draft report, State agency officials agreed with our findings and recommendation. The complete text of the State's comments is included in the appendix.

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#### INTRODUCTION

#### **BACKGROUND**

#### Federal Funding of the Title IV-E Program

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, as amended, authorizes Federal funds for States to provide foster care and adoption assistance for children under an approved State plan. At the Federal level, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) administers the Title IV-E program.

For children who meet Title IV-E program requirements, Federal funds are available to States for maintenance, training, and administrative costs. Administrative costs cover staff activities such as case management and supervision of children placed in foster care and children considered to be candidates for foster care, preparation for and participation in court hearings, placements of children, recruitment and licensing for foster homes and institutions, and rate setting. Also reimbursable under this category is a proportionate share of overhead costs. The Federal share of administrative costs allocable to the Title IV-E program is 50 percent.

Administrative costs are to be allocated to the Title IV-E program in accordance with a public assistance cost allocation plan approved by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Cost Allocation (DCA). States must amend their cost allocation plans if material changes would make the allocation basis or procedures in the approved cost allocation plan invalid (45 CFR § 95.509).

Federal regulations require that cost allocation plans conform to the accounting principles and standards in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87, "Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments" and other pertinent Department regulations and instructions (45 CFR § 95.507(a)(2)). OMB Circular A-87 states that costs are allocable to particular cost objectives, such as public assistance programs, only up to the amount of the benefits received by such objectives and only allocable costs are allowable. The Circular also states that costs must be reasonable and necessary for proper administration of the program (OMB Circular A-87, Attachment A, C.3.a. and C.2.a).

#### Kentucky's Process for Allocating Administrative Costs to the Title IV-E Program

In Kentucky, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services<sup>1</sup> (State agency) administers the foster care and adoption assistance program. Kentucky's public assistance cost allocation plan describes the procedures used to identify, measure, and allocate administrative costs among benefiting Federal and State programs. These procedures included a random moment time study (RMS) to allocate the 76 percent of the Title IV-E administrative costs charged to the Title IV-E program during the period from April 1, 2001, through March 31, 2003. The remaining 24 percent of administrative costs charged to Title IV-E was for State agency payments to various

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Prior to December 2003, the Cabinet for Families and Children was the Title IV-E State agency. In December 2003, the Cabinet for Families and Children was combined with the Cabinet for Health Services to create the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

outside agencies and for the operating costs of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

The sampling universe for the RMS included State agency and Department of Juvenile Justice employees. The State agency defined the RMS standard workday in its cost allocation plan as 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The State agency used cluster sampling for its sampling methodology. Each cluster consisted of a team of employees with like duties and responsibilities; however, in small regions within the State, a cluster may have consisted of participants with varying responsibilities. Generally, clusters consisted of 15 or less participants. A single random moment was selected for all participants within a cluster. The cost allocation plan did not include employees with work schedules that did not fall within the State agency's RMS time frame.

The RMS focuses on specific activities within programs, such as case management or training, and provides a basis for allocating time to the appropriate categories. On the selected date and time, an observer documented the activities being performed for the sampled employees. The results were tallied and used to determine the percentage of time employees spent on Title IV-E activities. This percentage was used to allocate administrative costs to the Title IV-E program, which was subsequently claimed for Federal reimbursement.

During the 2-year period ending March 31, 2003, the State agency claimed Title IV-E administrative costs totaling \$64.8 million (\$32.4 million Federal share). Of this amount, the State agency used its RMS to allocate \$49.1 million (\$24.5 million Federal share) to the Title IV-E program. The remaining \$15.7 million (\$7.9 million Federal share) of Title IV-E costs claimed by the State agency represented payments to vendors and SACWIS operating costs.

#### Division of Cost Allocation's Approval Process for Public Assistance Cost Allocation Plans

DCA utilizes the "Review Guide for Public Assistance Cost Allocation Plans" (the Review Guide) and "The Guide for State Agencies-Establishing Cost Allocation Plans for Public Assistance Programs" (the State Guide) to determine whether cost allocation plans submitted by State public assistance agencies comply with the cost principles in OMB Circular A-87 and other Federal regulations. The Review Guide includes factors that should be considered by DCA staff in their reviews. Appendix C of the State Guide includes more specific information on the design and implementation of random moment sampling. The Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget, Office of Procurement, Assistance and Logistics drafted the State Guide to assist State public assistance agencies in the preparation, submission, and approval of State agency allocation plans used in computing and documenting claims for Federal reimbursement.

DCA approved the State agency's public assistance cost allocation plan effective July 1998. On May 20, 2004, the State agency submitted an amendment to its approved plan proposing to replace its current time study methodology. As of September 20, 2005, the State agency had not implemented its proposed changes to the time study because the DCA had not yet approved the amendment.

#### **OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Objective**

Our objective was to determine whether the State agency equitably allocated administrative costs to the Title IV-E program for the period from April 1, 2001, through March 31, 2003.

#### **Scope**

Our audit covered \$49.1 million (\$24.5 million Federal share) in administrative costs the State agency allocated to Title IV-E through its RMS for the period from April 1, 2001, through March 31, 2003. We did not review the overall internal control structure of the State agency. Our review of internal controls was limited to obtaining an understanding of the State agency's procedures regarding its Title IV-E claims and time studies. We performed fieldwork at the State agency in Frankfort, KY and the ACF regional office in Atlanta, GA.

#### Methodology

To accomplish our audit objective, we:

- reviewed applicable Federal regulations, policies, and procedures related to the Title IV-E program;
- reviewed applicable working papers prepared by the Kentucky Auditor of Public Accounts;
- reviewed the public assistance cost allocation plan and the State agency's methodology for the allocation of administrative costs;
- interviewed regional ACF, DCA, and State agency officials;
- verified that the Title IV-E administrative costs claimed were supported by the State agency's records;
- analyzed the current RMS methodology as well as the proposed revisions;
- verified the application of the Title IV-E saturation rate, which is the ratio of children eligible for Title IV-E foster care to the total number of children in foster care; and
- performed a systems walk-through by tracing the State agency's Title IV-E administrative costs claimed for the quarter that ended March 31, 2003, to the State agency's detailed documentation.

We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

#### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The State agency's RMS methodology may not have equitably allocated administrative costs to the Title IV-E program. Federal cost principles allow the use of an RMS to allocate administrative costs to Federal awards. The sampling method must meet acceptable statistical sampling standards (OMB Circular A-87, Attachment B, 11.h(6)).

However, the State agency undermined the statistical validity of the RMS in the following ways:

- The State agency altered the date or time of the random moment for employees with nontraditional work schedules that did not meet the standard workday defined in the State agency's cost allocation plan.
- The State agency included unapproved positions such as accountants and attorneys in the sampling universe. Approved positions should have only included employees who were directly involved in Title IV-E activities.

The alteration of the random moment and the addition of unapproved positions may have skewed the results of the RMS, resulting in either an understated or overstated percentage of time charged to Title IV-E activities.

These conditions occurred because the State agency failed to design an RMS that complied with Federal guidelines and statistical sampling standards. As a result, the State agency may not have equitably allocated \$49.1 million (\$24.5 million Federal share) in administrative costs to the Title IV-E program.

#### ALTERING RANDOM MOMENTS TO MEET THE SAMPLE DESIGN

#### **Federal Requirements**

OMB Circular A-87 states that when employees work on multiple activities or cost objectives, a distribution of their salaries or wages will be supported by monthly personnel activity reports or equivalent documentation unless a statistical sampling system or other substitute system has been approved by the cognizant Federal agency (OMB Circular A-87, Attachment B, 11.h (4)). Such systems may include random moment sampling, which must meet acceptable statistical sampling standards (OMB Circular A-87, Attachment B, 11.h (6)).

The State Guide states that it is imperative that a sample design, once developed, is strictly adhered to, and violations in the application of the sample design will introduce a bias that can invalidate the sample (State Guide, Appendix C, General Concepts). To ensure that all employees have the same probability of being included in the sample, a standard workday for all employees should be used (State Guide, Appendix C, Identification of the Universe).

#### The State Agency Altered Work Schedules to Meet The Sample Design

The State agency altered the random moments for employees with nontraditional work schedules that did not meet the standard workday defined in the sample design. The State agency's standard workday, as defined in the sample design, was 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The sample design did not consider those employees who did not work a standard workday. However, the sampling universe included two clusters of employees with work schedules that did not completely fall within the standard workday. For example: (1) the workday for one of the clusters began at 4 p.m. and ended at 12:30 a.m. and (2) the workweek for the second cluster began on Wednesday and ended on Sunday.

The State agency arbitrarily changed the date or time of the computer-generated random moments for the two clusters that were not present during the standard workday when the RMS was performed. By doing so, the State agency introduced a bias that invalidated the randomness of the random moment and violated the sample design. This bias may have skewed the results of the RMS, resulting in either an understated or overstated percentage of time employees spent on Title IV-E activities.

## INCLUDING UNAPPROVED POSITIONS IN THE RANDOM MOMENT SAMPLE UNIVERSE

#### **Federal Requirements**

Circular A-87, Attachment B, provides principles to be applied in establishing the allowability of certain costs, including the allocation of salaries and wages to Federal awards. The State Guide indicates that when identifying the universe, the RMS should consist of:

...(1) all employees at the county or district level who are directly involved in eligibility determinations, redeterminations, and/or case maintenance, or (2) employees who are directly involved in the provision of social services and/or case maintenance.

#### The State Agency Included Unapproved Positions in Sample Universe

Employees in unapproved positions who were included in the sampling universe performed 24 percent of the Title IV-E activity for the quarter that ended March 2003. These positions included accountants, network analysts, attorneys, division directors, regional administrators, internal policy analysts, secretaries, and clerical staff.

The State agency's May 20, 2004, proposed revisions to its time study procedures eliminated these unapproved positions from the sampling universe, with the exception of the internal policy analyst. The internal policy analyst performs primarily analytical and financial duties. This position is not directly involved with eligibility determinations, re-determinations, and/or case maintenance or directly involved in the provision of social services and/or case maintenance. As a result, we believe this position does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the RMS sampling universe.

By including these unapproved positions in its sampling universe, the State agency may have skewed the results of the RMS, resulting in either an understated or overstated percentage of time that employees spent on Title IV-E activities.

#### INEQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF COSTS

The Federal and State Governments could have received an inequitable share of foster care and adoption assistance administrative costs. As a result, we have concerns regarding the validity of the \$49.1 million (\$24.5 Federal share) claimed by the State agency for Title IV-E administrative costs.

#### RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the State agency continue to work with the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Cost Allocation to ensure that the time study methodology equitably allocates costs to the benefiting programs.

#### **State Agency Comments**

In written comments to the draft report, State agency officials agreed with our findings and recommendation. State agency officials said that by April 30, 2006, Kentucky plans to have a revised cost allocation plan to the Division of Cost Allocation for approval. The State agency also plans to implement a new time study on October 1, 2006. The complete text of the State's comments is included in the appendix.

#### **OTHER MATTERS**

## STATEWIDE AUTOMATED CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT COSTS CLAIMED BASED ON PROJECTIONS

For the quarters that ended December 31, 2001, through September 30, 2003, the State agency inappropriately claimed SACWIS development costs based on projected costs. Federal regulations require that amounts claimed must be for actual expenditures made under the State's approved Title IV-E plan.

#### **Federal Requirements**

Federal regulations (45 CFR § 95.4) define a claim as "... a request for Federal financial participation in the manner and format required by our program regulations, and instructions or directives issued thereunder." The general instructions for completing the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Financial Report (Form ACF-IV-E-1) state in part:

All amounts reported . . . must be for actual expenditures made under the State's approved IV-E plan and in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations . . . .

According to the ACF Child Welfare Manual, claims must be supported by accounting records and source documentation at the time they are submitted. Estimates of quarterly expenditures do not represent a claim as defined by 45 CFR § 95.4 and, as such, may not be reported on the Form ACF-IV-E-1 for the purpose of claiming Federal Financial Participation.

## The State Agency Inappropriately Claimed Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System Development Costs

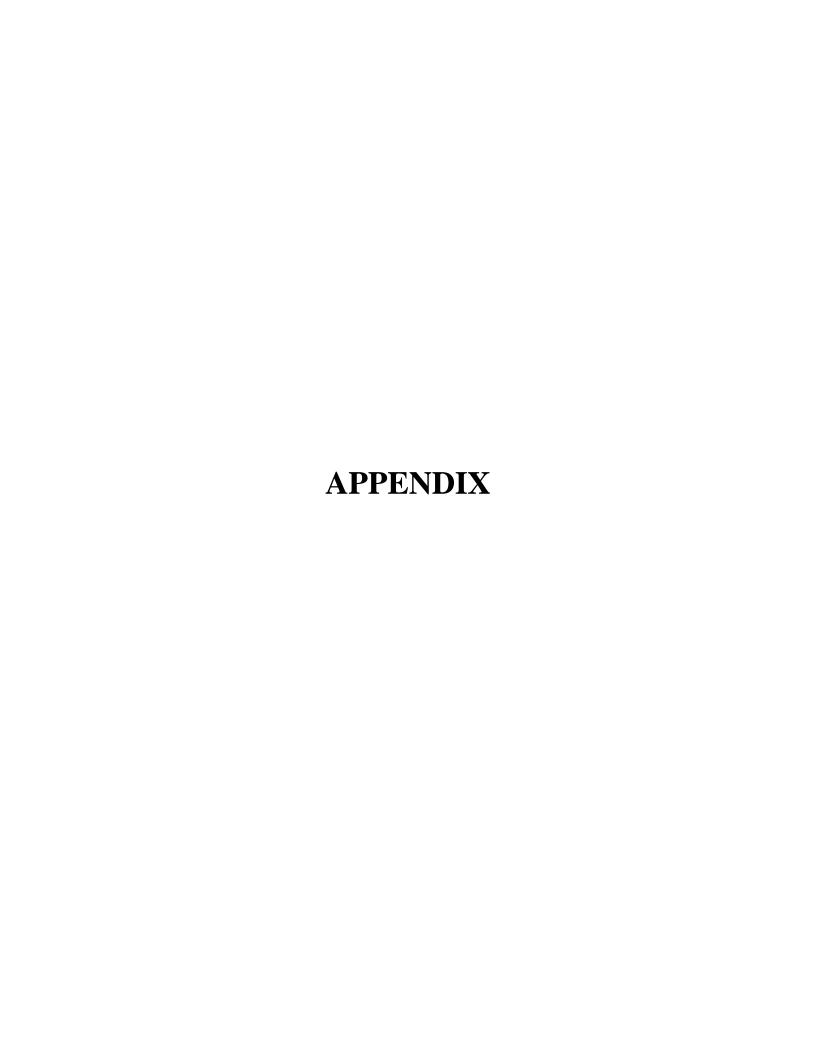
For the 8 quarters that ended September 30, 2003, the State agency inappropriately claimed SACWIS development costs based on projected costs. The State's Office of Technology Services, responsible for SACWIS project testing, provided the State agency with projected SACWIS development costs, rather than actual costs incurred for each of the quarters.

#### The State Agency Was Unaware That It Used Estimated Costs

The State agency was not aware that the Office of Technology Services provided estimated rather than actual costs because the State agency did not adequately monitor its Title IV-E billing processes.

#### **The State Agency Under Claimed Costs**

The actual SACWIS development costs exceeded the projected amounts claimed. As a result, the SACWIS development costs increased the Federal share by \$192,204 and the SACWIS operating costs decreased the Federal share by \$136,434. The net effect of the adjustments to the Title IV-E claim was an increase of the Federal share by \$55,770. The State agency made the necessary corrections to its Title IV-E claim.





## CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES Division of Administration and Financial Management COA ACCREDITED AGENCY

Ernie Fletcher Governor 275 E. Main Street, 3W-A Frankfort, Kentucky 40621 502-564-7463 502-564-4477 www.chfs.ky.gov

Mark D. Birdwhistell Secretary

March 31, 2006

Report Number: A-04-06-03505

Ms. Lori S. Pilcher Regional Inspector General For Audit Services, Region IV 61 Forsyth Street, S.W., Suite 3T41 Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Ms. Pilcher:

Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Audit of Kentucky's Title IV-E Administrative Cost report.

Kentucky is in agreement with the findings in the draft report. The OIG's sole recommendation is for Kentucky to continue to work with the Division of Cost Allocation in DHHS to implement a time study that meets federal standards. Kentucky is on target to have a revised version of our proposed Cost Allocation Plan to the DCA by April 30, 2006. Our planned date for implementation of a new time study is October 1, 2006.

I was intricately involved in the audit and must say it was a very positive experience. Kentucky was fortunate to have someone of Ms. Loraine Forrest's skills and knowledge on site to conduct the audit and share her insights with us. Kentucky learned in many areas that will assist us for years to come.



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In closing, DCBS will continue to work with the DCA and ACF to fulfill the recommendation made by the Inspector General.

Sincerely,

Renee L. Close Director

#### Attachments

cc: Mark Birdwhistell, Secretary
Mike Burnside, Deputy Secretary
Dr. Eugene Foster, Undersecretary
Tom Emberton, Jr., Commissioner
Kelli Hill
File