



Highlights of [GAO-03-646](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

D.C. CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Better Policy Implementation and Documentation of Related Activities Would Help Improve Performance

Why GAO Did This Study

The District of Columbia (D.C.) Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is responsible for protecting children at risk of abuse and neglect and ensuring that services are provided for them and their families. GAO was asked to discuss the extent to which CFSA has (1) met requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and other selected performance criteria, (2) adopted and implemented child protection and foster care placement policies, and (3) enhanced its working relationship with the D.C. Family Court.

To address these questions, GAO analyzed data from CFSA's child welfare information system, known as FACES; reviewed laws, regulations, and reports; examined case files; and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

To improve CFSA's performance GAO recommends that the Mayor require the Director of CFSA to (1) develop plans to fully implement all ASFA requirements, (2) establish procedures to ensure caseworkers consistently implement all foster care policies, and (3) document in FACES all activities related to active foster care cases.

In commenting on the draft, the Director of CFSA generally agreed with our findings. Although she did not directly address the recommendations, she generally agreed with the areas we identified for continued improvement.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-646.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby at (202) 512-8403 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

CFSA's performance relative to three sets of measures—nine ASFA requirements, eight selected performance criteria and six of the agency's foster care policies—has been mixed. The agency took actions to implement six of the nine ASFA requirements related to the safety and well-being of foster children and met or exceeded four of the eight selected foster care performance criteria, but its plans did not address all requirements not fully implemented and unmet performance criteria. CFSA has established many foster care policies, but caseworkers did not consistently implement the six GAO examined. In addition, FACES lacked data related to four of the policies reviewed for at least 70 percent of its active foster care cases. The following table summarizes the percentage of cases for which the data indicated the policy was implemented.

Implementation of Selected CFSA Foster Care Policies as Documented in FACES

CFSA policy	Foster care cases for which the policy was implemented ^{a, b}
Initiate face-to-face investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect within 24 hours of receiving an allegation on CFSA's child abuse hotline.	26%
Complete a safety assessment within 24 hours of face-to-face contact with the child.	13%
Complete a risk assessment within 30 days of receiving an allegation on the hotline.	73%
Complete an initial case plan within 30 days of a child's entry into foster care.	9%
Arrange needed services for foster care children or their families.	83%

Source: FACES and GAO analysis.

^aWith the exception of the policy to arrange needed services, the analysis is based on 943 foster care cases that were at least 6 months old, as of Nov. 30, 2002. These cases were initiated after FACES came on-line in Oct. 1999. The analysis of the policy to arrange for needed services is based on 1,837 foster care cases and includes cases that pre-dated FACES but for which services were provided after FACES came on-line. Data show the percentage of cases for which caseworkers arranged at least one service.

^bCFSA counted cases that had missing data as instances of caseworker noncompliance with the applicable policy.

CFSA has enhanced its working relationship with the D.C. Family Court, but several factors hindered this relationship. For example, CFSA's top management and Family Court judges talk frequently about foster care case issues. However, differing opinions among CFSA caseworkers and judges about their responsibilities have hindered the relationships. CFSA officials and Family Court judges have been working together to address these hindrances.