

Texas Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review Period Under Review: October 1, 2002-March 31, 2003

Introduction

During August 18-22, 2003 Administration for Children and Families (ACF) staff from the Dallas Regional and Central Offices and State of Texas staff conducted an eligibility review of the Texas title IV-E foster care program in Austin, Texas.

The purpose of the title IV-E foster care eligibility review was (1) to determine if Texas was in compliance with the child and provider eligibility requirements as outlined in 45 CFR 1356.71 and Section 472 of the Social Security Act; and (2) to validate the basis of financial claims to ensure that appropriate payments were made on behalf of eligible children and to eligible homes and institutions.

Scope of the Review

The Texas title IV-E foster care review encompassed a sample of all of the title IV-E foster care cases that received a foster care maintenance payment during the period of 10-1-02/3-31-03. A computerized statistical sample of 80 plus over sample cases was drawn from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data which was transmitted by the State agency to the ACF for the period under review. The child's case file was reviewed for the determination of title IV-E eligibility and the provider's file was reviewed to ensure that the foster home or childcare institution in which the child was placed was licensed or approved for the period of the review.

During this subsequent primary review, 80 cases were reviewed. There were no cases determined to be in error for either part or all of the review period. Since the number of error cases was fewer than five, the ACF has determined Texas to be in substantial compliance.

Case Record Summary and Areas of Improvement

No Program Improvement Plan is required since there were no error cases. The following are some review team recommendations for improvement:

- Continue to strengthen case record documentation of source of families' support for cases showing "zero income" related to initial eligibility determinations. It is recognized that September 1, 2003 enhancement of the information system will improve documentation of such cases, but ongoing attention is encouraged.
- Improve eligibility documentation including narrative and court order copies. Some court order copies were carbonized paper, which were difficult to read.
- Consider changing the designation of the first year provider license from "provisional license" to "time-limited" or "initial license."
- Continue to strengthen "child specificity" in court orders.

Strengths and Model Practices

- Collaborative state/federal teamwork preparing for and during the title IV-E foster care eligibility review provided positive experiences for the reviewers.
- Reviews and court orders are timely and more frequent than required.
- Court orders are improving since the initial primary review conducted in fiscal year 2000, e.g., more child-specific and generally well written.

Other factors contributing to success of the review and the lack of errors include:

- The sophisticated CLASS licensing data system
- The robust SACWIS system, upgraded with enhanced title IV-E eligibility determination functionality
- Close coordination between the Court Improvement Program, State Agency and Judiciary, dissemination of suggested legal formats and expansion of specialized “Cluster Courts”
- Well trained, tenured regional title IV-E eligibility specialists.