Department of Health and Human Services

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

STATE STANDARDS AND CAPACITY TO TRACK FREQUENCY OF CASEWORKER VISITS WITH CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General

December 2005
OEI-04-03-00350

Office of Inspector General

http://oig.hhs.gov

The mission of the Office of Inspector General (OIG), as mandated by Public Law 95-452, as amended, is to protect the integrity of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs, as well as the health and welfare of beneficiaries served by those programs. This statutory mission is carried out through a nationwide network of audits, investigations, and inspections conducted by the following operating components:

Office of Audit Services

The Office of Audit Services provides all auditing services for HHS, either by conducting audits with its own audit resources or by overseeing audit work done by others. Audits examine the performance of HHS programs and/or its grantees and contractors in carrying out their respective responsibilities and are intended to provide independent assessments of HHS programs and operations in order to reduce waste, abuse, and mismanagement and to promote economy and efficiency throughout HHS.

Office of Evaluation and Inspections

The Office of Evaluation and Inspections (OEI) conducts management and program evaluations (called inspections) that focus on issues of concern to HHS, Congress, and the public. The findings and recommendations contained in the inspections generate rapid, accurate, and up-to-date information on the efficiency, vulnerability, and effectiveness of departmental programs. OEI also oversees State Medicaid Fraud Control Units which investigate and prosecute fraud and patient abuse in the Medicaid program.

Office of Investigations

The Office of Investigations (OI) conducts criminal, civil, and administrative investigations of allegations of wrongdoing in HHS programs or to HHS beneficiaries and of unjust enrichment by providers. The investigative efforts of OI lead to criminal convictions, administrative sanctions, or civil monetary penalties.

Office of Counsel to the Inspector General

The Office of Counsel to the Inspector General (OCIG) provides general legal services to OIG, rendering advice and opinions on HHS programs and operations and providing all legal support in OIG's internal operations. OCIG imposes program exclusions and civil monetary penalties on health care providers and litigates those actions within HHS. OCIG also represents OIG in the global settlement of cases arising under the Civil False Claims Act, develops and monitors corporate integrity agreements, develops compliance program guidances, renders advisory opinions on OIG sanctions to the health care community, and issues fraud alerts and other industry guidance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To determine (1) the written standards States have implemented for frequency of caseworker visits with children in foster care, (2) the extent to which States could provide statewide automated reports reflecting the frequency of caseworker visits, and (3) the extent to which statewide reports indicate that children were visited.

BACKGROUND

A critical element in maintaining the safety and well-being of children in foster care is face-to-face contact (visits) between caseworkers and children. There is no Federal requirement regarding how often children in foster care are visited by caseworkers. However, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) reviews caseworker visits as part of its Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR). ACF reviewed all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico between 2001 and 2004. During CFSRs, ACF determines whether the frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient to meet the child's needs for approximately 50 child welfare cases (a combination of foster care cases and those receiving in-home services) in each State. ACF uses monthly visits as a minimum benchmark when assessing the frequency of visits; however, in some instances, more frequent visits may be necessary to meet a child's needs. If visits are less than monthly, States must present substantial documentation that the child's needs were being met to receive a positive assessment for caseworker visits. On a national level, ACF summarized the CFSR results of the 35 States completed in 2002 through 2004. Twenty-seven of the States were cited as needing improvement in the area of frequency of caseworker visits.

The difference between the CFSRs and this evaluation is that CFSRs include a detailed review of approximately 50 child welfare cases (a combination of foster care cases and those receiving in-home services), whereas our evaluation included analysis of State frequency standards for children in foster care. In contrast to the CFSRs, OIG's evaluation focused exclusively on children in foster care and did not examine standards for children receiving in-home services. In addition to examining statewide frequency standards, this evaluation also analyzed State capacity to produce statewide reports and, when available, FY 2003 statewide reports indicating the frequency of caseworker visits for at least 70 percent of States' foster care caseloads. The information in

this report should enhance ACF's oversight of State foster care programs related to the frequency of caseworker visitation.

Many States have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, automated systems that may include the capacity to capture data about caseworker visits and produce automated reports detailing the frequency of visits with children in foster care. Most commonly, States have implemented a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Approximately $2.8 billion in Federal and State funds have been spent on the design, development, implementation, and operation (including initial and replacement hardware) of SACWIS since 1994. There is no Federal requirement that States produce statewide reports detailing how often children in foster care are visited.

Our primary data source for this evaluation was a document review to determine standards for caseworker visits for all 50 States and the District of Columbia (referred to as 51 States throughout this report). In addition, the 51 States completed an e-mail data collection instrument and participated in structured telephone interviews between February and July 2004. Since ACF uses monthly visits as a benchmark during its reviews of State child welfare systems, we asked States to submit monthly statewide caseworker visitation reports for Fiscal Year 2003 (FY 2003). Our request allowed us to test States' ability to produce reports as well as to determine how often reports indicated that children were visited in FY 2003.

This report is the first in a series of three reports about caseworker visits with children in foster care. In the second report, "State Standards and Practices for Content of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care," OEI-04-03-00351, OIG analyzed State written standards for the content of caseworker visits. The third report in the series, "Compendium of State Standards: Content of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care," OEI-04-03-00353, provides State written standards guiding the content of caseworker visits with children in foster care. The compendium includes standards provided by 38 States.

FINDINGS

Forty-three States had statewide written standards calling for caseworkers to visit children in foster care at least monthly. Fifty of fifty-one States had statewide minimum standards regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with the majority of children in foster care

placed in-State. Forty-three of fifty had standards for at least monthly visits. States reported that the CFSRs, lawsuits or consent decrees, and collaboration with child advocacy groups were the most common events that contributed to the development or enhancement of their standards. In addition, 33 out of 50 States had standards stating that at least some caseworker visits should take place specifically in the foster care placement. Many of these States reported about the benefits of visits in the placement, including the value of assessing child safety and well-being in the home environment.

Twenty States demonstrated their ability to produce statewide reports detailing the extent to which visits occurred during FY 2003. Nineteen of these twenty reports were produced using SACWIS. The remaining statewide report was produced from the results of a State administrative review process. We identified several impediments to report production for the 31 States that did not provide statewide automated caseworker reports. These impediments were: documentation in paper case files, insufficient automated system capacity, or lack of resources (e.g., insufficient staffing or computer time to produce the reports).

Seven of the twenty statewide reports indicated on average that fewer than half of children in foster care were visited monthly in FY 2003. Seventeen of the States that provided reports had at least monthly visitation standards, while the remaining three States had standards for less frequent visitation. Among the 17 States with standards providing for at least monthly visits, 5 State reports indicated on average that fewer than half of children were visited monthly.

The three States with standards less frequent than monthly provided a range of monthly and quarterly data for FY 2003. One State provided monthly data only, another provided both monthly and quarterly data, and the third provided quarterly data only. The two State reports with monthly data indicated on average that fewer than half of children in foster care were visited monthly. However, the State report providing both monthly and quarterly information indicated on average that 88 percent of children were visited by the end of the quarter. In contrast, the State report with only quarterly data indicated that 58 percent were visited during the quarter.

All 20 States reported factors that affected the visitation rates found in the reports. Many States reported negative factors that may have resulted in low visitation rates in their reports. These factors include

insufficient documentation of caseworker visits, high caseloads and insufficient staff to conduct visits, and other factors such as private provider visitation information not being included in the reports. The range and severity of some of these factors reported by States clearly can result in reports that do not reflect all visits that occurred. In addition to these negative factors, States also cited positive areas affecting caseworker visitation, including that caseworker visits were a priority in the State or that it was an area that was closely monitored. Finally, five States reported that they either improved their visitation rates by the end of 2003 or that they were able to significantly improve their rates after that timeframe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For States with limited or nonexistent automated capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should promote the development of automated systems such as SACWIS. We recognize that child welfare programs are complex and that States face challenges related to competing priorities, resource issues, and the implementation of automated systems. However, in our evaluation, 19 States demonstrated their ability to quantify caseworker visits through SACWIS even though there are no requirements to have systems structured to produce these reports. To the extent that ACF wants to strengthen States' abilities to quantify how often caseworkers visit children, we recommend the agency work with States to ensure that systems are structured to both record visits and produce reports. These reports could be particularly useful for States cited in the CFSRs as needing improvement in the area of frequency of caseworker visits. The reports would also enhance ACF's ability to monitor caseworker visits, providing statewide, comprehensive visitation data in addition to the information gathered during the CFSRs.

For States with automated system capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should work with States to ensure that visitation data are recorded in automated systems. ACF should continue to assist States to develop clear policies for recording caseworker visits in automated systems to promote the accuracy of reports. Improved visitation data would allow both ACF and the States to monitor visitation frequency with enhanced accuracy, and thereby plan program improvements more effectively.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES

To determine (1) the written standards States have implemented for frequency of caseworker visits with children in foster care, (2) the extent to which States could provide statewide reports reflecting the frequency of caseworker visits, and (3) the extent to which statewide reports indicate that children were visited.

BACKGROUND

Caseworker visits are a critical element in ensuring the safety and well-being of children in foster care. There is no Federal requirement regarding how often children in foster care placed in-State are visited by caseworkers. However, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) reviews caseworker visits as part of its Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR). As part of these reviews, States are assessed to determine if the frequency of caseworker visits with children (both those in foster care and those receiving in-home services) was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of children's safety and well-being and whether visits focused on substantive issues. ACF uses monthly visits as a minimum benchmark when assessing the frequency of visits; however, in some instances, more frequent visits may be necessary to meet a child's needs. If visits are less than monthly, States must present substantial documentation that the child's needs are being met to receive a positive assessment for caseworker visits.[1] A positive assessment is referred to as a strength rating; ACF reported that a strength rating for caseworker visits is associated with positive outcomes of achieving permanency and ensuring child safety. ACF reviewed all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico from 2001 through 2004.

The difference between the CFSRs and this evaluation is that CFSRs include a detailed review of approximately 50 child welfare cases (a combination of foster care cases and those receiving in-home services), whereas our evaluation included analysis of State frequency standards for children in foster care. In contrast to the CFSRs, OIG's evaluation focused exclusively on children in foster care and did not examine standards for children receiving in-home services. In addition to examining statewide frequency standards, this evaluation also provided analysis of State capacity to produce statewide reports, and, when available, FY 2003 statewide reports indicating the frequency of

caseworker visits for at least 70 percent of States' foster care caseloads. The information in this report should enhance ACF's oversight of State foster care programs related to the frequency of caseworker visitation.

Concerns about State caseworkers' ability to conduct visits with children in foster care and to meet their needs have been well documented. On a national level, ACF provided a summary of all States with completed CFSRs, with additional information about the 35 CFSRs that were completed during 2002 through 2004. For these 35 States, the ACF summary included details about caseworker visitation for the child welfare cases reviewed, which included both children in foster care and those receiving in-home services. Twenty-seven of the States were cited as needing improvement in the area of frequency of caseworker visits.[2] In addition, a review of 500 foster children's case records from a class action lawsuit in New Jersey was released in 2003.[3] The review indicated that 78 percent of children in foster care had at least one period of more than 90 days without contact from a caseworker.[4]

The Foster Care Program

The Title IV-E Foster Care Program is an entitlement program administered by the Children's Bureau within ACF, part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). According to ACF, foster care is defined as "twenty-four-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State Agency has placement and care responsibility."[5] Children in foster care live in a variety of placement settings, including family foster homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and preadoptive homes.[6]

The Federal budget for the foster care program in fiscal year (FY) 2005 is $4.9 billion.[7] HHS anticipates that it will provide funding for 233,000 Title IV-E eligible children monthly during FY 2005. States receive Federal matching funds under Title IV-E for children in foster care whose families meet income requirements. States may also direct some of these funds to training and to the operation and development of a computer-based data and information collection system, typically the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS).

Federal Role

Although Federal law does not mandate how often caseworkers should visit children placed in-State,[8] ACF assesses States as part of the CFSRs to determine if the frequency of caseworker visits with children is sufficient to ensure the adequate monitoring of each child's safety and

well-being. The CFSRs are one of several reviews ACF conducts as part of its Federal oversight role. Other reviews ACF conducts to assess State compliance with Federal requirements include Title IV-E eligibility reviews, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System reviews, and SACWIS reviews.[9] Of these reviews, only CFSRs address caseworker visitation.

Pursuant to 45 CFR §§ 1355.31-37, promulgated under section 1123A of the Social Security Act (the Act), ACF conducts CFSRs to ensure conformity with Federal child welfare requirements and to measure compliance with State plan requirements under Titles IV-B and IV-E. CFSRs, a joint Federal and State process, examine three categories of child welfare outcomes: safety, permanency, and well-being. In addition, the reviews address systemic factors affecting the child welfare system. If States are not found to be in substantial conformity, they must submit to ACF within 90 days a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) outlining steps to correct deficiencies. States not in substantial conformity in the first round of CFSRs must begin a full review 2 years after approval of their PIP. None of the States (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) were in substantial conformity after the first round, and therefore ACF will schedule each State's subsequent review upon State completion and ACF evaluation of the PIP.

As part of CFSRs, a total of approximately 50 child welfare cases (a combination of foster care cases and those receiving in-home services) are reviewed in each State from selected sites.[10] One of the items assessed is caseworker visits with children. Each case is rated as either a strength or needs improvement, and the State is given an overall rating for all cases reviewed.

State Role

Although all States must comply with Federal regulations to receive Federal funding, each State determines how services are provided to children in foster care. States develop their own standards for frequency of caseworker visits. The structure of foster care systems varies from State to State and often varies within States. Some have State-administered systems in which the State directly provides foster care services to children. Other States have county-administered systems; the State retains responsibility for the safety and well-being of children in foster care while counties provide the services. Adding a further layer of complexity, some State and county-administered

programs contract a portion of or all foster care services to private agencies.

To be eligible for foster care payments, States must submit a plan to be approved by the HHS Secretary. Section 471(a)(22) of the Act requires that the plan include "standards to ensure that children in foster care placements in public or private agencies are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children." In addition, the State plan must provide for the development of a written case plan for each child and provide for a case review system (section 471(a)(16)). The case plan must include steps for ensuring that the child receives safe and proper care and that services are provided to the child, parents, and foster parents to address the needs of the child while in foster care (section 475(1)(B)). State case review systems must include procedures for ensuring that the status of each child is reviewed at least every 6 months by either a court or by administrative review (section 475(5)(B)).

State Systems for Documenting Caseworker Visits

Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems. Many States have implemented or are in the process of implementing SACWIS. The development and implementation of SACWIS is not mandatory; however, many States and the District of Columbia chose to accept Federal matching funds to develop these systems. Approximately $2.8 billion in Federal and State funds have been spent on the design, development, implementation, and operation (including initial and replacement hardware) of SACWIS since 1994. According to the ACF Web site, as of May 2005, 45 States (including the District of Columbia) are in various stages of development, implementation, or planning of such systems. Six States have no SACWIS activity planned.[11]

A SACWIS functions as a comprehensive case management tool for caseworkers' foster care and adoption assistance case management. To provide a unified automated tool to support child welfare services, States were also encouraged to structure their SACWIS to support child protective and family preservation services.[12] In addition, pursuant to 45 CFR § 1355.53, these systems are required to produce data for the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. As specified in ACF Transmittal No. ACF-OISM-001, SACWIS is also required to support both case planning and administrative review processes.

States may choose to include a field to record caseworker visits with children in their SACWIS. The ability to produce reports detailing how frequently caseworkers visit children depends on individual State priorities, stage of automated system development, and how States have developed their systems. Even States with implemented systems may not have the capability to produce these reports. States are not required to produce reports; however, statewide visitation reports are one resource States can utilize to determine the extent to which caseworkers are visiting children in foster care.

Other Systems for Documentation. States may also develop non-SACWIS systems to monitor caseworker visits with children; these systems may be eligible for Title IV-E funding. Types of systems States can develop include new Web-based systems or modifications to legacy systems.

Some States do not use any automated system to record caseworker visitation, relying instead on paper case files. Due to the variation in States with or without automated systems, types of automated systems (SACWIS and other State-developed systems), and stages of automated system development, States may record caseworker visitation in automated systems, in paper case files, or in a combination of automated systems and paper case files.

Related Work

This report is the first in a series of three reports about caseworker visits with children in foster care. In the second report, "State Standards and Practices for Content of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care," OEI-04-03-00351, OIG analyzed State written standards for the content of caseworker visits. The third report in the series, "Compendium of State Standards: Content of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care," OEI-04-03-00353, provides State written standards guiding the content of caseworker visits with children in foster care. The compendium includes standards provided by 38 States.

In addition to Office of Inspector General work, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report in 2003 detailing the challenges States experienced while implementing SACWIS. GAO found that the reliability of child welfare data from SACWIS could be improved.[13] GAO also examined the CFSRs in a 2004 evaluation and found that ACF and the States viewed the reviews as a valuable process. The report offered several recommendations to further improve the reviews.[14]

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of our evaluation, we defined visits as face-to-face contacts between caseworkers and children placed in foster care. Visits can take place in a variety of locations, including but not limited to the foster care placement (where the child lives), school, and the child welfare office. We defined standards as written procedures providing guidance for caseworker visitation included in State law, regulations, policies, memoranda, or other documents.

We requested the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to provide State standards for caseworker visits. Puerto Rico did not respond. To provide a comprehensive picture of how caseworker visits were addressed, the 50 States and the District of Columbia (referred to as 51 States throughout this report) also completed a structured data collection instrument via e-mail and participated in a structured telephone interview. In addition, we requested that all States provide statewide reports of caseworker visits. We also interviewed organizations with expertise in child welfare and conducted site visits in two States.

Documentation Review, E-Mail Data Collection Instrument, and Phone Interview

A critical component of data collection was our review of 51 States' written standards related to caseworker visits. We specifically requested current standards from the States for the following areas:

- Frequency of caseworker visits,
- Location where caseworker visits should occur, and
- System in which caseworkers document visits (State automated system and/or paper case file records).

Documentation from the 51 States was supported by responses from both the e-mail data collection instruments and the telephone interviews. The data collection instruments and interviews were completed between February and July 2004. If there were discrepancies between State documentation and State responses, we worked with the States to resolve these differences. When State information was incomplete, we continued to follow up with States throughout the fall of 2004. The information presented in our report regarding State written standards represents standards in place between February and July 2004.

Although the documentation review was the primary data source for standards related to caseworker visits, the e-mail data collection instrument and interviews helped provide a comprehensive picture of State policies and practices. States responded to question areas including, but not limited to, standards for caseworker visits and the status of automated systems. We developed automated databases to compile survey and documentation information collected from States. We analyzed data to compile categorizations of State responses and to aggregate our data.

Statewide Monthly Reports of Caseworker Visitation With Children in Foster Care

Using a benchmark of monthly visits from ACF's CFSRs, we asked all States to submit monthly statewide caseworker visitation reports. We requested FY 2003 data (October 1, 2002, through September 30, 2003) since it was the most recent complete fiscal year of data available at the time of our evaluation. The request allowed us to test the extent to which States could provide reports. In addition, monthly data allowed us to systematically determine the extent to which State reports indicated that caseworkers were visiting children in foster care. For each month in FY 2003, we asked States to provide the total number of children in foster care and the number who received caseworker visits. If States did not immediately provide reports or required additional clarification, we e-mailed them a table providing an example of the requested data.

Based on these data, we calculated a monthly average of children visited in FY 2003 by dividing the number of children visited each month throughout the year by the total number of children in foster care. For example, if for a 6-month period there were 100 children in foster care each month and the numbers of children visited were 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90, then the monthly average number of children visited would be 65 percent ((40+50+60+70+80+90)/600). Our report presents both the monthly range as well as the monthly average for each State when available. If States were unable to produce reports, we determined the reasons during our telephone interview. This type of statewide data had never been systematically requested from States on a national level before our evaluation.

We anticipated several reasons that States would not be able to meet our request for monthly statewide visitation reports. First, a statewide report of caseworker visitation was only available if a State recorded

visits in a statewide, automated system or performed and reported summary information from statewide reviews of foster care cases. If States did not have statewide data for the entire 12-month period, we accepted data for the months available. Also, if a State had a previous report providing aggregate visitation information for FY 2003 that was not detailed for each month, we accepted those reports as well. We requested monthly data for our analysis, and also gave States the option of providing quarterly information in addition to the monthly data; however, we did not request that States provide visitation data in accordance with their frequency standards. For example, if a State had a biweekly visitation standard, we did not request biweekly visitation data. Data presented in the report are annotated to reflect any limitations in Appendix C.

In addition to statewide reports that included children placed in foster care, we also received reports from some States that included a sample of their foster care cases. Due to the limited number of cases and the wide variation in how this information was presented by each State, we only included statewide reports that included at least 70 percent of children in foster care.

Interviews With Organizations and Site Visits to States

To gain a richer understanding of how caseworker visits were addressed in States prior to designing our evaluation, we interviewed organizations and conducted site visits in two States. The organizations included: Chapin Hall, the Center for Law and Social Policy, Children's Defense Fund, Children's Rights, Inc., Child Welfare League of America,[15] the Heritage Foundation, and the Urban Institute. In addition, we visited one predominately urban State and one State that was more rural (Florida and Kentucky) to: examine foster care records and determine the format in which caseworker visits were recorded, interview State and local administrators, conduct a focus group with foster parents (Kentucky only), interview caseworkers, collect State regulations and policies regarding caseworker visitation, and review computer data systems. We also solicited input from ACF staff.

Limitations

Safety of children in foster care is affected by many factors in addition to frequency of caseworker visits. However, our evaluation focused specifically on frequency of caseworker visits and does not address any other factors. We focused exclusively on standards and reports from the State level. We did not examine standards from local or county levels of

State child welfare systems, nor did we examine standards private agencies may have in place. In addition, our review of visitation standards was limited to children placed in-State and did not include children placed out-of-State. Also, many States have exceptions to their visitation standards, which are determined by factors such as how recently the child was placed in foster care, type of placement setting, needs of the child, case status, and caseworker caseload size. We did not categorize exceptions to State standards.

Regarding the reports we received, we did not verify whether the visits reflected in the reports actually occurred, nor did we independently validate that all visits were reflected in reports. Also, we did not assess whether visits were meeting children's needs.

Standards

We conducted this inspection in accordance with the "Quality Standards for Inspections" issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency and the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

Forty-three States had statewide written standards calling for caseworkers to visit children in foster care at least monthly

Fifty of fifty-one States had minimum standards regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with children in foster care.[16] Forty-three out of fifty States had statewide written standards that call for caseworkers to visit the majority of children in foster care placed in-State at least once a month. Of these 43 States, 39 had monthly standards and the remaining 4 had more frequent standards. In contrast, the remaining seven States had standards that were less frequent than monthly. They were as follows:

- Quarterly (three States),
- Every 2 months (one State),
- Every 6 weeks (one State),
- Between once a week and once every 12 weeks (one State), and
- Range from monthly (not to exceed 35 days) to quarterly (one State).

We define visits as face-to-face contacts between caseworkers and children placed in foster care. Visits can take place in a variety of locations, including but not limited to, where the child lives, school, and the child welfare office.

State standards often specified exceptions that could result in either more or less frequent visits. One common exception that resulted in more frequent visitation standards was how recently the child has been placed in foster care. Other exceptions included type of placement setting, needs of the child, case status, and caseworker caseload size. We did not report exceptions to State standards. For a complete listing of State standards, please refer to Appendix A.

States reported several events that contributed to the development or enhancement of their standards for both the frequency and content of caseworker visitation. (States could report more than one event, therefore the total is higher than 50.) States most commonly reported the following:

- Lawsuits and/or consent decrees (8 States),
- Collaboration with child advocacy groups (8 States),
- Child and Family Services Review process (10 States),

- Other events, such as State legislative action; consultations with other States, ACF, or stakeholders; new leadership or organizational restructuring; media reports; best practice work groups; and a child's death (17 States).

Eighteen States reported that their standards were not modified or developed due to any particular event.

Thirty-three States had written standards detailing how often visits should occur in the placement setting: 15 States recommended that every visit occur in the placement, and 18 States recommended some visits in the placement

Although there are no Federal requirements mandating that caseworkers visit children where they live, 33 of 50 States' standards specified that at least a portion of visits should occur in the placement setting for the majority of children in foster care. The specifications ranged from seeing the child in the foster care placement for every visit to outlining that some visits should occur in the foster care placement. Some State standards specified exceptions that could result in either more or less frequent visits in the foster care placement, such as how recently the child was placed in foster care and type of placement setting. However, we did not categorize these exceptions to State standards. For a complete listing of State standards, please refer to Appendix B.

Fifteen of the 33 States had standards stating that children should be seen in their foster care placements during every visit. These States most often reported that the main value in requiring visits where the child lives was the ability to assess child safety and well-being or the home environment. Other benefits cited by States included ensuring that the child's needs are being met while in care, building caseworker relationships with the child, ensuring that the child is actually at the foster home, assessing the nature of the foster parent's relationship with the child, and assessing other children in the home.

> *"We feel it's very important for the caseworker to see where the child is living . . . it is our belief that the State assumes the responsibility of the parent."*
> *—West Virginia*

Eighteen out of thirty-three States had standards stating that some visits occur in the placement. For these 18 States, standards for visits where the child lives were less frequent than the minimum visitation standards. We determined that State standards recommended visits:

- Quarterly in the foster care placement (eight States),
- Every 2 months in the foster care placement (six States),
- Where the child lives, but not at a specific frequency (three States), or
- At least once every 6 months in the foster care placement (one State).

Twenty out of fifty-one States demonstrated their ability to produce statewide reports detailing the extent to which visits occurred during FY 2003

Production of statewide visitation reports is one method States can use to determine how frequently caseworkers are visiting children in foster care. Therefore, we requested State reports detailing caseworker visits with children in foster care for FY 2003. Given the significant Federal investment in SACWIS, we anticipated that SACWIS would be a likely source of State visitation reports. There are no specific Federal requirements for States to produce reports reflecting caseworker visitation.

Of the 20 statewide reports, 19 were from States with SACWIS and 1 resulted from a State administrative review process

Many States' SACWIS were structured to produce reports before our evaluation. Some States used the reports to monitor caseworker visits. We are aware of at least two States that post their visitation reports either on the Web or on their own Intranet. In contrast, other States were not producing visitation reports prior to our evaluation and produced these reports specifically at our request. One such State produced both our requested statewide report and specific reports for localities within the State to be used by local foster care offices.

Only one State, Colorado, provided a visitation report resulting from a review of caseworker visits during its 6-month administrative reviews of children in foster care. Children were reviewed 6 months after placement in foster care and every 6 months thereafter. Cases were assigned a "yes" if it was determined that the caseworker had a monthly visit with the child after the first month. The cases were then summarized in statewide reports. In FY 2003, Colorado generated the case review results using its own proprietary database. However, beginning in July 2004, these reports were generated from its SACWIS.

We identified several impediments to report production from the 31 States that did not provide statewide automated caseworker reports

Based on States' responses to the telephone interviews and their documentation standards and practices, we identified three impediments to State report production:

- Documentation: States record visitation information primarily in paper case files.
- Insufficient capacity: State automated systems could not produce reports, either because systems were not implemented statewide or because systems were not structured to extract the information.
- Lack of resources: States reported they did not have resources such as staffing or computer time to produce the reports.

These impediments are explained below.

Eighteen of the thirty-one States recorded caseworker visits primarily in paper case files during FY 2003. These States did not provide statewide reports detailing caseworker visitation for FY 2003. Many of these States were in the process of either planning or implementing SACWIS or other automated systems. However, these States reported that during FY 2003, caseworkers were not recording visits primarily in an automated system. One of the eighteen States reported that caseworkers were not recording visits in their automated system in FY 2003; however, this State reported it could produce statewide visitation reports starting in 2004. Four of the eighteen States reported that they had automated system capacity to record caseworker visits, but that caseworkers were still using paper case files as their primary record of visits in FY 2003.

Eight of the thirty-one States reported that their systems did not have the capacity to produce visitation reports for FY 2003. The specific issues affecting capacity varied. In one of these eight States, SACWIS had not yet been implemented statewide, and therefore the data were not available for all children. In this State, visits were recorded in both the automated system and in paper case files. In another five of these eight States, visits were documented in the automated system but the system was not structured to produce the reports. One of the eight States reported that its system was not developed in time to produce

> *"[We] built the program to gather caseworker contacts 11 months ago [Fall 2003] . . . still getting the bugs out of the system . . ."— Oregon*

reports specifically for FY 2003, but reported that capability for 2004. Another State reported that it was still working through issues with its system.

Five of the thirty-one States reported that they did not have the resources to produce the reports. These States cited issues such as limited staff resources or computer time as the reasons they could not produce the reports. One of these States cited the competing priority of the CFSRs as a barrier to generating reports. Two of the five States reported that their systems would have the capability to produce visitation reports in 2004.

> *"[We] don't have the manpower to generate reports." — New Mexico*

Seven of the twenty statewide reports indicated on average that fewer than half of children in foster care were visited monthly in FY 2003

Using the benchmark of monthly visits from ACF's CFSRs, we asked all States to submit monthly statewide caseworker visitation reports. Twenty States provided statewide reports, and these States had different visitation standards.

States with standards for at least monthly visits

Seventeen States with standards for at least monthly visitation submitted statewide reports for FY 2003. These reports reflected on average that 5 of the 17 States visited fewer than half of children monthly. Five other State reports detailed that on average between 50 and 75 percent of children were visited monthly. The remaining seven States provided reports indicating that between an average of 76 and 97 percent of their children were visited monthly.

States with standards for visits less frequent than monthly

The three remaining States that also submitted reports did not have monthly visitation standards. Virginia and Washington both had a quarterly minimum visitation standard. Iowa had minimum visitation standards ranging from monthly (not to exceed 35 days) to quarterly, depending on both the placement setting and whether private agencies provide the foster care services.

Virginia provided monthly reports for FY 2003 which indicated that an average of 45 percent of children were visited monthly. Iowa provided both monthly and quarterly information. Its report indicted that on average 24 percent of children were visited monthly and that, on average, 88 percent of children were visited by the end of the quarter. In contrast, Washington provided a quarterly report for April through

June 2003. The report showed that 58 percent of children were visited during the quarter. Monthly data were not available.

State-reported factors affecting visitation rates

States reported multiple factors that may have resulted in lower visitation rates in their reports. These factors could affect accurate reporting for the visitation rate and/or actual visitation frequency. Seven States reported that the percentages reflected in their reports were affected by documentation issues. These issues included workers not documenting visits in the system or workers using the wrong codes or fields for data entry. Five States cited other issues that negatively affected their visitation rate, such as private providers not entering visits in the system and visits only being included in the reports if they took place specifically in the foster care placement. Five States reported that insufficient staffing/high caseloads affected their rates. These factors affected some States more than others. For example, of the two States that reported that private provider visits were not included in reports, one had a 44 percent monthly average visitation rate and the other had a 78 percent rate. The range and severity of some of these factors reported by States clearly can result in reports in which not all visits that occurred are reflected in State monthly averages. In other instances, the factors affected actual visitation frequency.

States also cited several positive areas affecting caseworker visitation. Seven States indicated either that conducting caseworker visits was a priority, or that it was something that was closely monitored. The positive impact of monitoring the visitation rate was also indicated by States that had comparatively low rates in FY 2003. Five States reported that they either improved their visitation rates by the end of 2003 or were able to significantly improve their rates after that time. Two additional States reported plans to address visitation issues through their CFSR PIP. For a detailed summary of each State's visitation report and the factors affecting visitation rates, refer to Appendix C, Tables 1 and 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable segments of our society. We recognize that child welfare programs are complex and that States face challenges related to competing priorities, resource issues, and the implementation of automated systems. However, caseworker visits with children in foster care are a critical element of ensuring child safety and well-being. Most recently, ACF found that 27 out of 35 States needed to improve the frequency of caseworker visits with children. Our study found that 50 out of 51 States have statewide written standards regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with children in foster care. Most States have implemented standards for at least monthly visits for the majority of children in foster care. In addition, many States have developed or are in the process of developing statewide automated systems (both SACWIS and non-SACWIS). For our evaluation, 19 States produced reports from SACWIS. These systems provide the opportunity for States to quantify the extent to which caseworkers visit children in foster care. Therefore, to the extent to which ACF wants to strengthen States' abilities to quantify how often caseworkers within their State are visiting children, we recommend the following:

For States with limited or nonexistent automated capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should promote the development of automated systems such as SACWIS.

These reports could be particularly useful for States cited in the CFSRs as "needing improvement" in the area of frequency of caseworker visits. The reports would also enhance ACF's ability to monitor caseworker visits, providing statewide, comprehensive visitation data. Some States have already begun to examine caseworker visits through automated systems to ensure that visits are occurring, even though there are no requirements to have systems structured to produce these reports. Several States in our evaluation reported that although caseworkers were recording information in automated systems, this information could not be extracted to produce reports. As SACWIS and other systems continue to develop, ACF should consider working with States to ensure that systems are structured to both record visits and produce reports.

For States with automated system capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should work with States to ensure that visitation data are recorded in automated systems.

Seven States that provided reports indicated that their visitation rates were affected by documentation issues in FY 2003. ACF should continue to assist States to develop clear policies for recording caseworker visits in automated systems to promote the accuracy of reports. Improved visitation data would allow both ACF and the States to monitor visitation frequency with enhanced accuracy, and thereby plan program improvements more effectively.

AGENCY COMMENTS

In its comments to the draft report, ACF concurred with our recommendations. ACF plans to initiate an effort to develop direct guidance to States to implement management reporting capabilities to determine the frequency and outcomes of client visitation.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL RESPONSE

We appreciate ACF's comments to this report and are pleased that it will continue to provide technical assistance to States in the area of automation. In addition, we look forward to ACF's development of direct guidance that will assist States in implementing management reporting capabilities within current automated systems specific to client visitation.

AGENCY COMMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

NOV 10 2005

TO: Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General

FROM: Wade F. Horn, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

SUBJECT: Comments on the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Draft Reports Entitled, "State Standards and Capacity to Track Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Children in Foster Care" (OEI-04-03-00350), and "State Standards and Practices for Content of Caseworker Visits with Children in Foster Care" (OEI-04-03-00351)

Attached are the Administration for Children and Families' comments on the above-referenced OIG draft reports.

Should you have questions or need additional information, please contact Dr. Susan Orr, Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau, at (202) 205-8618.

Attachments

COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL'S (OIG) DRAFT REPORT ENTITLED: "STATE STANDARDS AND CAPACITY TO TRACK FREQUENCY OF CASEWORKER VISITS WITH CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE" (OEI 04-03-00350)

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the OIG draft report.

OIG Recommendations:

Children in foster care represent one of the most vulnerable segments of our society. We recognize that child welfare programs are complex and that States face challenges related to competing priorities, resource issues, and the implementation of automated systems. However, caseworker visits with children in foster care are a critical element of ensuring child safety and well-being. Most recently, ACF found that 27 out of 35 States needed to improve the frequency of caseworker visits with children. Our study found that 50 out of 51 States have statewide written standards regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with children in foster care. Most States have implemented standards for at least monthly visits for the majority of children in foster care. In addition, many States have developed or are in the process of developing statewide automated systems (both Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) and non-SACWIS). For our evaluation, 19 States produced reports from SACWIS. These systems provide the opportunity for States to quantify the extent to which caseworkers visit children in foster care. Therefore, to the extent to which ACF wants to strengthen States' abilities to quantify how often caseworkers within their State are visiting children, we recommend the following:

For States with limited or nonexistent automated capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should promote the development of automated systems such as SACWIS.

These reports could be particularly useful for States cited in the CFSR (Child and Family Service Reviews) as "needing improvement" in the area of frequency of caseworker visits. The reports would also enhance ACF's ability to monitor caseworker visits, providing statewide, comprehensive visitation data. Some States have already begun to examine caseworker visits through automated systems to ensure that visits are occurring, even though there are no requirements to have systems structured to produce these reports. Several States in our evaluation reported that although caseworkers were recording information in automated systems, this information could not be extracted to produce reports. As SACWIS and other systems continue to develop, ACF should consider working with States to ensure that systems are structured to both record visits and produce reports.

For States with automated system capacity to record the frequency of caseworker visits and produce statewide reports, ACF should work with States to ensure that visitation data are recorded in automated systems.

Seven States that provided reports indicated that their visitation rates were affected by documentation issues in FY 2003. ACF should continue to assist States to develop clear policies for recording caseworker visits in automated systems to promote the accuracy of reports. Improved visitation data would allow both ACF and the States to monitor visitation frequency with enhanced accuracy, and thereby plan program improvements more effectively.

ACF Comments:

We concur with the recommendation to encourage States to develop automated systems that support their business needs and program requirements. We will continue to work with States to provide technical assistance and guidance to implement and/or enhance comprehensive systems (SACWIS or non-SACWIS) to support case management activities in the child welfare domain. ACF's Children's Bureau is examining new technologies to assess their usefulness in implementing mobile tools that will enable social workers to extend the collection point of case information beyond the confines of local offices. ACF will develop guidance and best practice papers to encourage States to take advantage of newer technologies that will support States' efforts to track visitation data. ACF will initiate an effort to develop direct guidance to States to implement management reporting capabilities in States' current systems to identify the timeliness and outcomes of client visitations.

In addition, the Children's Bureau promotes tracking and monitoring of visits through States' Quality Assurance (QA) Systems. QA is one of the systemic factors covered in the CFSR, and most States have adapted some version of the CFSR as their approach to QA and to evaluating their own progress in implementing Program Improvement Plans, although not all States have at this point. Monitoring visits through QA, in addition to automated reports, allows States to know more about the quality and content of visits and the results of visits (for example, through case reviews and stakeholder interviews used in the CFSR) rather than simply how many visits are made.

2

ENDNOTES

[1] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/tools/onsitefinal.pdf.

[2] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/results/statefindings/genfindings04/index.htm, accessed November 1, 2005.

[3] http://childrensrights.org/press_releases/07-09-03.htm, accessed December 8, 2004.

[4] Figure applies to children in foster care longer than 90 days.

[5] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/appendb.htm, accessed April 25, 2005.

[6] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm01/appendb.htm, accessed April 25, 2005.

[7] http://www.hhs.gov/budget/05budget/acf.html, accessed April 25, 2005.

[8] For children placed in foster care out of State, the Federal Government requires a minimum of one annual visit either by the State in which the child's parents live or by the State in which the child has been placed. [Section 475(5)(A)(ii) of the Social Security Act.]

[9] http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/olab/legislative/testimony/2004/cw_testimony.htm, accessed April 25, 2005.

[10] The cases reviewed onsite are selected from a random oversample of no more than 150 foster care and 150 in-home services cases. 45 CFR 1355.33(c)(6). The onsite review may take place in several political subdivisions of the State, but must include a State's largest metropolitan subdivision. 45 CFR 1355.33(c)(2).

[11] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/sacwis/statestatus.htm, accessed May 11, 2005.

[12] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/sacwis/about.htm, accessed May 11, 2005.

[13] http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03809.pdf.

[14] http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04333.pdf.

[15] The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) recommends that caseworkers visit children in foster care monthly. CWLA's standards allow for more or less visitation based on the needs of the child or as requested by the foster parent, but never less than once every 2 months.

[16] Wisconsin did not have a minimum visitation standard that applied statewide. This State provided monthly standards from its only State-administered county, which were created as a result of a lawsuit. Wisconsin reported that most local offices/counties had standards for frequency.

APPENDIX ~ A

Table 1 shows the caseworker visitation standards reflected in State documentation for the majority of children in foster care. Table 2 describes the standards for States classified as "Other" in Table 1 (Iowa and New Jersey).

Table 1: Minimum Caseworker Visitation Standards for the Majority of Children in Foster Care, February–July 2004

State	Weekly	Twice Monthly	Monthly	Every 6 weeks	Every 2 Months	Quarterly	Other*
AK			X				
AL			X				
AR	X						
AZ			X				
CA			X				
CO			X				
CT			X				
DC		X					
DE			X				
FL			X				
GA			X				
HI			X				
IA							X
ID			X				
IL			X				
IN					X		
KS			X				
KY			X				
LA			X				
MA			X				
MD			X				
ME				X			
MI			X				
MN			X				
MO		X					
MS			X				
MT			X				
NC			X				
ND			X				
NE			X				
NH			X				
NJ							X
NM			X				
NV			X				

Table 1: Minimum Caseworker Visitation Standards for the Majority of Children in Foster Care, February–July 2004							
State	Weekly	Twice Monthly	Monthly	Every 6 weeks	Every 2 Months	Quarterly	Other*
NY						X	
OH			X				
OK			X				
OR			X				
PA			X				
RI			X				
SC			X				
SD			X				
TN		X					
TX			X				
UT			X				
VA						X	
VT			X				
WA						X	
WV			X				
WY			X				
Total	**1**	**3**	**39**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**2**

*Please refer to Table 2 for a description of "Other" State standards.

Source: Document review of State foster care visitation standards by OIG.

Table 2: Description of Minimum Visitation Standards for States Categorized as Other, February–July 2004	
State	Minimum Visitation Standards
IA	Standards vary depending on both the placement setting and whether the services are purchased. Standards range from monthly (not to exceed 35 days) to quarterly.
NJ	Between once a week and once every 12 weeks.

Source: Document review of State foster care visitation standards by OIG.

APPENDIX ~ B

Standards for How Often Caseworkers Were Instructed to Visit Children Specifically in Foster Care Placement, February–July 2004							
State	Minimum Visitation Standard	Same as Minimum Visitation Guideline	Every 2 Months	Quarterly	Every 6 Months	Recommend Visits Take Place in Home	No Specifications
AK	Monthly		X				
AL	Monthly			X			
AR	Weekly	X					
AZ	Monthly			X			
CA	Monthly						X
CO	Monthly		X				
CT	Monthly						X
DC	Twice a Month	X					
DE	Monthly			X			
FL	Monthly	X					
GA	Monthly		X				
HI	Monthly					X	
IA	Other*						X
ID	Monthly	X					
IL	Monthly	X					
IN	Every 2 Months	X					
KS	Monthly	X					
KY	Monthly	X					
LA	Monthly			X			
MA	Monthly						X
MD	Monthly			X			
ME	Every 6 Weeks			X			
MI	Monthly		X				
MN	Monthly						X
MO	Twice a Month						X
MS	Monthly						X
MT	Monthly			X			
NC	Monthly						X
ND	Monthly						X
NE	Monthly		X				
NH	Monthly	X					
NJ	Other*					X	
NM	Monthly	X					
NV	Monthly		X				
NY	Quarterly						X
OH	Monthly				X		
OK	Monthly	X					
OR	Monthly						X
PA	Monthly						X
RI	Monthly					X	

Standards for How Often Caseworkers Were Instructed to Visit Children Specifically in Foster Care Placement, February–July 2004							
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Same as Minimum Visitation Guideline**	**Every 2 Months**	**Quarterly**	**Every 6 Months**	**Recommend Visits Take Place in Home**	**No Specifications**
SC	Monthly						X
SD	Monthly						X
TN	Twice a Month						X
TX	Monthly			X			
UT	Monthly	X					
VT	Monthly						X
VA	Quarterly						X
WA	Quarterly	X					
WV	Monthly	X					
WY	Monthly	X					
Total		**15**	**6**	**8**	**1**	**3**	**17**

*See Appendix A, Table 2.

Source: Document review of State foster care visitation standards by OIG.

APPENDIX ~ C

The following tables provide caseworker visitation data for the 20 States that provided statewide reports. These tables present a State-by-State comparison of visitation standards and rates for FY 2003. While we were most interested in statewide data for foster care cases only, States track their foster care population in different ways. Several States monitor children in foster care as part of their overall child welfare population and therefore include other groups in these reports, such as children receiving in-home care or children in independent living programs. Some States excluded specific populations for reasons such as children belonging to a particular placement status (e.g., adoptive placements), children classified as runaways, or children subject to a different visitation standard. In addition, some States chose to include out-of-State children, while other States excluded this population. For these reasons, we have included a column entitled "Data Considerations" for each State, describing excluded populations and other important information for understanding each State's visitation rate.

Unless otherwise indicated, the visitation rates below represent face-to-face visits with all children in foster care (regardless of whether the visits occurred in the placement) with the exception of AR, MA, and WA, which only include visits that occurred in the placement in their visitation data.

Table 1 includes the visitation information for the 17 States with at least monthly visitation standards, with the following columns:

- State minimum visitation standards,
- FY 2003 months included in State reports,
- Monthly range and monthly average of children visited for FY 2003,
- Data considerations about populations included in State reports, and
- State reported factors affecting the visitation rate.

Table 2 provides the visitation data for three States with visitation standards less frequent than monthly. It includes the same information as Table 1, and also lists the type of data provided (monthly and quarterly) as well as the quarterly visitation range and average for FY 2003 when available.

Table 1: Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With at Least Monthly Standards						
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Months Included**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
AR	Weekly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	68-75%	71%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children, children in therapeutic foster homes, and children in preadoptive placements (totaling approximately 22 percent during FY 2003). Children in the report for whom monthly data were not available are not included in these figures (less than 1 percent). **Other:** Visits reflected in the report include only those occurring in the placement; face-to-face visits occurring elsewhere are not counted.	The State reported that the most significant factor negatively affecting visitation is staffing. "As time goes on, caseload [size] has increased." In addition, the State reported that documentation issues may result in lower visitation rates.
AZ	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	55-66%	59%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children and runaway children (totaling approximately 5 percent of caseload for April through September 2003).	AZ reported that the percentage reflects visitation that is accurately documented in SACWIS [if workers did not always accurately document their visits, this would result in a visitation rate that did not reflect all visits conducted].
CA	Monthly	6 Months: 04/03-09/03	85-86%	86%	**Populations excluded**: Children classified as having exceptions to their monthly visitation standard (an average of 20 percent per month). Exceptions included: child contacted by another agency, child placed with legal guardian, child placed with relative, child placed out of State, child receiving family reunification services/ stable, child receiving permanent placement services/stable, child under 2 years of age, and child's whereabouts unknown. **Population included in report in addition to children in foster care**: Children receiving in-home care (approximately 8.7 percent of total children during 04/03-09/03).	CA reported changing its methodology for generating reports in July 2004, resulting in reporting data on more children in care (fewer exclusions).
CO	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	89-94%	91%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 5 percent of the reviewed population during FY 2003. **Other:** Statistics are from the review of caseworker visits as part of CO's administrative case review of all children in foster care for 6 months. Children are reviewed 6 months after placement in foster care and every 6 months thereafter.	CO reported that it has improved its visitation rate dramatically over time. It is CO's view that caseworker visits are the most critical element for ascertaining child safety.

Table 1 (cont): Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With at Least Monthly Standards						
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Months Included**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
DC	Twice a Month	4 Months: 06/03-09/03	42-44%	43%	**Populations excluded**: Children in third-party kinship nonfoster care and those placed outside DC, MD, and VA or in residential treatment facilities more than 100 miles away were excluded (totaling approximately 4 percent of children during 06/03-09/03).	In 2001, one of the District's goals was to improve data integrity by focusing on documenting case plans for children in foster care in SACWIS. In 2003, the focus was shifted to documentation of visits to children in foster care. DC reported that as documentation improved, the monthly visitation rate increased to 81 percent by 2005.
FL	Monthly	9 Months: 01/01/03-09/30/03	93-96%	95%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 3 percent of children in September 2003. **Population included in report in addition to children in foster care**: Children receiving in-home care (approximately 33 percent of children 01/03-09/03) and children receiving young adult services (accounting for less than 1 percent of children 03/03-09/03).	FL stated that its monthly visitation rate is high because of the commitment leadership has shown and indicated that performance is measured daily. The State commented that visitation is necessary for achieving safety and that resources have been dedicated to ensuring that children are seen each month.
KY	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	36-53%	44%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of State children represented approximately 1.5 percent of children in FY 2003. **Other**: KY reported that approximately 40-45 percent of children were receiving care from private providers. These children receive quarterly visits from State caseworkers, and may receive more frequent visits from private providers. Visits from private providers are not reflected in these data as private provider visitation is not tracked by the State in its visitation reports.	Visits from private providers are not included in the data. KY provided additional information indicating that between 75-82 percent of all children received a visit from State caseworkers by the end of each quarter in FY 2003.

Table 1 (cont): Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With at Least Monthly Standards						
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Months Included**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
MA	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	75-80%	78%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 3 percent of children in September 2003. **Other**: Visits reflected in the report include only visits occurring in the placement; face-to-face visits occurring elsewhere are not counted. In addition, visits conducted by private agencies are not included in the report. Visits are recorded by those agencies and furnished to the State via quarterly reports.	The report is a tool management uses to assist social workers to focus and prioritize casework contacts. Visits reflected in the report only include visits with the child in placement by the child's social worker; face-to-face visits conducted by the social worker assigned to the foster home to work with the foster parents are not included. In addition, visits conducted by private agencies are not included in the report. Private agency contacts are monitored separately.
NE	Monthly	11 Months: 11/01/02-09/30/03	11-68%	50%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 1 percent of children in September 2003. **Population included in report in addition to children in foster care**: Children receiving in-home care. According to the State, in-home care cases represent less than 10 percent of total children in FY 2003.	NE reported the initial monthly percentages were low due to the newness of requirements for caseworkers to enter data into the automated system (August 30, 2002).
NH	Monthly	6 Months: 01/01/03-06/30/03	NA	49%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 8 percent of children in September 2003. **Populations excluded**: Children placed in residential facilities (approximately 26 percent of total children during 01/03-06/03) are not included in these figures, since monthly information was not presented for them. **Other**: Report was a 6-month summary of children in foster family homes visited at least once a month and did not include month-by-month totals. Therefore, a range could not be calculated.	NH provided additional information indicating that 44 percent of children in foster family homes were visited at least once a month 07/01/03-12/31/03. However, NH reported that other measures, such as receiving a CFSR rating of "substantially achieved" for 74 percent of 50 cases reviewed, and a more recent management report indicating fewer than 10 percent were not visited in the last 2 months demonstrate progress on the part of the Division for Children, Youth and Families.

Table 1 (cont): Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With at Least Monthly Standards						
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Months Included**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
OK	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	92-95%	94%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children, children in tribal foster care who are not in State custody, children in care fewer than 14 days, and children in trial adoption (approximately 6 percent of all children during FY 2003).	OK reported that it considers visitation to be a priority and that there is no way to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being without visits to the children. The State reported monitoring visitation closely at all levels.
SC	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	96-97%	97%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 4 percent of children in September 2003. **Population included in report in addition to children in foster care**: Children in the independent living program (approximately 6 percent of all children during FY 2003).	SC reported that "State law requires we visit every child, and the counties are good at that." SC includes caseworker visitation as one of approximately 15 outcome measures reported to the State legislature. SC provided additional information indicating that 99 percent of children received a visit by the end of the quarter.
TN	Twice a Month	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	41-81%	53%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 4 percent of children in FY 2003. **Populations excluded**: Children in the placement types of youth development center and runaway—approximately 10 percent of children in September 2003.	TN reported that significant staff turnover rates during FY 2003 were a factor affecting visitation. Since then, TN indicated it has significantly tightened controls around caseworker visitation and case manager responsibilities. During the last 3 months of FY 2003, the monthly visitation rate was 81 percent.
TX	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	69-77%	75%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented less than 2 percent of children in September 2003.	TX reported several issues that affect visitation figures, including that caseworkers were not entering visitation rates in the correct data field. However, the State reported that the largest issues affecting its visitation rate were high caseloads and turnover.

Table 1 (cont): Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With at Least Monthly Standards						
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Months Included**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
UT	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	91-94%	93%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 2 percent of children in September 2003. **Other**: Starting in May 2003, UT changed its standard from twice a month to monthly visits.	UT stated that caseworker visits are the best way for the State to fulfill its responsibility to children in care, and that they have targeted caseworker visitation for years.
WV	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	35-46%	42%	**Populations excluded**: Out-of-State children represented approximately 15 percent of all children in FY 2003.	The State reported that staffing and caseload issues affected its visitation rate.
WY	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	13-46%	27%	**Populations excluded**: Children placed out-of-State via Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, in tribal placements, in adoption placements, and those categorized as runaways are excluded from the report. (Approximately 30 percent of all children were classified in these groups on September 30, 2003.)	WY reported that the data reflect a period when information was not being routinely entered into the system. However, WY reported that, since May 2004, face-to-face visits were substantially higher and reported a visitation rate of 82 percent for August 2004.

Source: Document review of State visitation reports by OIG.

Table 2: Caseworker Visitation Reports for FY 2003 Generated by States With Standards Less Frequent Than Monthly									
State	**Minimum Visitation Standard**	**Type of Data Provided**	**Months Provided**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Monthly**	**Monthly Average**	**Range of Children in Care Visited Quarterly**	**Quarterly Average**	**State-Reported Data Considerations**	**State-Reported Factors Affecting Visitation Rate**
IA	Ranges from monthly to quarterly	Monthly and quarterly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	21-26%	24%	86-89%	88%	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented less than 1 percent of children in 09/03.	IA reported that child welfare staff's high caseloads made monthly visits difficult, although IA supplements visits by contracting with private agencies to visit more frequently. Also, as part of its CFSR PIP and child welfare redesign, IA plans to streamline workload and utilize alternative services for low-risk children with the goal of increasing monthly visitation.
VA	Quarterly	Monthly	12 Months: 10/01/02-09/30/03	41-50%	45%	NA	NA	**Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of-State children represented less than 3 percent of children in 09/03. **Population included in report in addition to children in foster care**: Children receiving in-home care. According to VA, these cases were approximately 11 percent of total children in FY 2003.	The State reported that in light of quarterly standards, the 45 percent monthly rate indicates that 45 percent of the workers see the importance of monthly visits. The State plans to update its visitation standards in its program improvement plan for the CFSRs.
WA	Quarterly	Quarterly	3 Months: 04/03-06/03	NA	NA	NA	58%	**Populations excluded**: Children in care for less than 60 days (estimated to account for 13 percent of all children during 04/03-06/03). **Out-of-State placements included**: Out-of State children represented less than 2 percent of children in 09/03. **Other**: Report reflects visits occurring in the placement only; face-to-face visits occurring elsewhere are not counted.	WA reported that its visitation rate can be explained in large part by documentation issues. The State indicated that during FY 2003, some visits were not being recorded with the correct code, and therefore the rate was artificially low. WA provided additional information indicating improvement in its visitation data, with an 89 percent quarterly visitation rate in the placement during January through March 2005.

Source: Document review of State visitation reports by OIG.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared under the direction of Ann O'Connor, Regional Inspector General for Evaluation and Inspections in the Atlanta regional office, and Graham Rawsthorn, Assistant Regional Inspector General. Other principal Office of Evaluation and Inspections staff who contributed include:

Stacey Bloomer, *Co-Team Leader*

Peggy Daniel, *Project Lead*

Linda Moody, *Program Specialist*

Gerius Patterson, *Data and Statistical Analyst*

Elander Phillips, *Program Analyst*

Joe Townsel, *Co-Team Leader*

Elise Stein, *Director, Public Health and Human Services*

Michala Walker, *Program Analyst*