

Ms. Brenda Donald Walker
Director
Child and Family Services Agency
400 Sixth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Ms. Walker:

From December 6 – 10, 2004 staff of the Children's Bureau, ACF Region III, and the Office of Information Services (OIS) conducted an Assessment Review of the District of Columbia's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The AFCARS data used for the review was from the report period April 1, 2004 through September 30, 2004 (2004B). I have summarized the major findings from the AFCARS review in this letter. Enclosed please find the full report.

The AFCARS assessment review evaluates two areas: the AFCARS general requirements (reporting populations and technical standards) and the data elements. Information collected on these areas is combined and a rating factor is assigned to the general requirements and each data element. A scale of one (does not meet AFCARS standards) to four (fully meets AFCARS standards) is used to assign a factor to each element.

The District was found to be in full compliance with both the foster care adoption population requirements and the technical requirements. The review team found the District to be mostly in compliance with the AFCARS standards. The team identified some technical changes/modifications that are needed to the data entry screens and the program code that extracts the data. However, during the post-site phase, the District completed most of these changes.

The most significant issue relates to the timely and correct entry of the data into the system in order for it to be extracted and represent an accurate picture of the District's child welfare practice. There were several areas (e.g. information on disabilities, whether a child was previously adopted, and dates of birth for adult caretakers) that were underreported. In order to achieve improved data quality, additional training for caseworkers and monitoring by supervisors to ensure accurate data entry may be necessary. The District may want to consider reviewing the data in the file at the time of a periodic review to ensure it is accurate and up-to-date. (See AFCARS Federal regulation at 45 CFR 1355 Appendix A, I. I. E.)

You should note that as a result of the technical corrections made to the system, the District's semi-annual data submission may fail to meet the missing data standard. In order to ensure that the data are complete and accurate, the agency must require workers to enter the data and assess its validity prior to submitting it to ACF. To do so, the District may utilize the management reports created by the agency, as well as the Data Quality Utility and the Frequency Utility posted on the Children's Bureau's website.

The enclosed documents include the final report of the on-site review, the final findings of the general requirements and data elements, and the AFCARS Improvement Plan for the data elements. Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AFCARS Improvement Plan, the District staff needs to submit the Improvement Plan electronically to the ACF Regional Office with estimated due dates for completing the tasks identified in the Improvement Plan. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. The District should provide electronic quarterly updates of its progress to the Regional Office.

Test cases will be provided to the District once all of the required modifications are completed. Dates for the submission of the extracted test data file will be arranged with the ACF Regional Office and OIS. Once ACF and the District agree that the quality of the data is acceptable, the AFCARS Improvement Plan will be considered finished, and a letter will be sent to the District from the Children's Bureau confirming this fact. The letter will include a summary of the actions taken by the District and the completed AFCARS Improvement Plan.

Additionally, the District's plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the District's title IV-B Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required in 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5).

The ACF Regional Office will work with the District to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AFCARS Improvement Plan. The District may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). If you wish to request on-site technical assistance from the NRC-CWDT, please contact your ACF Regional Office.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff who participated in the review for their hard work and commitment to collecting accurate and reliable AFCARS data. If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact Angelina Palmiero at (202) 205-7240.

Sincerely,

Susan Orr, Ph.D.
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc: Anthea Seymour, CFSA, SACWIS Project Manager
Harold Beebout, CFSA, Chief Information Officer
David Lett, Regional Administrator, ACF Region III
Angelina M. Palmiero, M.S.W, AFCARS
Terry Watt, Director, Division of District Systems
Jerry Milner, National Child and Family Services Review Team