

Ms. Virgena Wieseler
Division Director
Child Protection Services
Department of Social Services
Richard F. Kneip Building
700 Governors Drive
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-2291

Dear Ms. Wieseler:

From April 25 - 29, 2005, staff of the Children's Bureau, ACF Region VIII, and the Office of Information Services (OIS) conducted an Assessment Review of the South Dakota'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 State was found to be in full compliance with both the foster care and adoption population requirements and the technical requirements. The review team found the State 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.

The most significant issue relates to the inability of the system, Family and Children Information System (FACIS), to capture whether title IV-A funds are a source of income for a child during the report period. Since AFCARS is a mandatory data system and the State must collect all related data, this item needs to be addressed as a high priority. I am aware that the State does not have an interface with the title IV-A information system as required by the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) requirements, and that the State is addressing this issue in its SACWIS action plan. However, FACIS also does not have any other means to record the AFCARS information and a means to do so must be implemented until the interface is completed.

Most of the other technical corrections are relatively minor and in the case of one area, conditions associated with removal, one correction affects 16 foster care elements. This requires a change to the screen that collects this data. Your staff shared during the on-site review that this correction is already being addressed.

In addition to the screen modifications for the collection of the title IV-A data and the conditions associated with removal, modifications need to be made to other screens for the collection of information about adoptions that occur prior to the current placement into foster care. Currently, the State is only reporting this information on children that were previously adopted from the South Dakota foster care system. The AFCARS requirement is that this information be collected for any adoption, whether through a public or private agency or from another State or country.

Many of the other findings pertain to the timely and accurate entry of the data into the system in order for it to be extracted and represent an accurate picture of the State's child welfare practice. In order to achieve improved data quality, additional training for caseworkers and monitoring by supervisors to ensure accurate data entry may be necessary.

I want to acknowledge the proactive approach your staff have taken to correcting both technical and data entry issues as a result of this review and prior technical assistance provided to the State by the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). We have incorporated into the final report the changes made by your staff after the on-site review.

You should note that as a result of the technical corrections made to the system, the State'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 State 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 State staff must submit the Improvement Plan electronically to the ACF Regional Office and the Children's Bureau 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 State should provide electronic quarterly updates of its progress to the Regional Office.

Test cases will be provided to the State 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 State 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 State from the Children's Bureau confirming this fact. The letter will include a summary of the actions taken by the State and the completed AFCARS Improvement Plan.

Additionally, the State’s plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the State’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 State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AFCARS Improvement Plan. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children’s Bureau’s 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: Kim Thomas, South Dakota CPS
Thomas Sullivan, Regional Administrator, ACF Region VIII
Paul Hasz, ACF Office of Information Services
Angelina M. Palmiero, M.S.W., AFCARS
Terry Watt, Director, Division of State Systems
Jerry Milner, National Child and Family Services Review Team