

Ms. Marva Livingston Hammons
 Executive Director
 Colorado Health and Human Services
 1575 Sherman Street
 Denver, Colorado 80203-1714

Dear Ms. Hammons:

From June 5 - 9, 2006, staff of the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region VIII, and the Office of Information Services (OIS) conducted an Assessment Review of Colorado’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The AFCARS data used for the review was from the report period April 1 - September 30, 2006 (2005B). 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 each of the general requirements and each data element. The rating factors are: “1,” the system is not collecting the AFCARS data elements and the data are not transmitted to ACF; “2,” technical corrections are required; “3,” improvement in data quality is needed; and “4,” the State fully meets the AFCARS standards. The report provides a more detailed explanation of each of the rating factors.

General Requirements (26)

Rating Factor	Foster Care	Adoption	Technical
4	8	3	13
3	0	0	2
2	0	0	0
1	0	0	0

Data Elements (103)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	15 (23%)	13 (35%)	28 (27%)
3	27 (41%)	4 (11%)	31 (30%)
2	24 (36%)	20 (54%)	44 (43%)
1	0	0	0

The State was found to be in compliance with the majority of the general requirements. Areas needing improvement relate to the overall timeliness and accuracy of data entry. There were also areas related to incomplete data conversion specific to the AFCARS elements that will need to be addressed by reviewing cases and ensuring that all removal episodes experienced by a child are entered into the system; as well as, dates of parental rights termination where applicable. During the case file review, it was noted that several of the cases contained dates of termination of parental rights, but the dates were not entered into the system and not reported to AFCARS. It is crucial that the State ensure that all of these dates, removals and termination of parental rights are correctly entered into Trials prior to the State's next Child and Family Services Review.

There are a significant number of technical modifications needed for both the data entry screens and the program code that extracts the data. As noted in the attached report, there are areas that require enhancements to the screens in order for the AFCARS data to be collected more accurately and in accordance with the AFCARS requirements. These changes will require more time and resources, but should lead to better data collection. Some of the technical modifications affecting the data elements are described below.

One set of data elements that is being underreported, that will require programming and possibly screen design changes, are those related to whether the child has been seen by a licensed professional and found to have health/mental health conditions. For AFCARS reporting purposes, the information reported for these elements reflect chronic and/or significant diagnosed conditions that the child may have. According to the frequency report for the data under review (2005B), 15% of the children in foster care have a diagnosed condition that is reportable to AFCARS (such as, attention deficit disorder, reactive attachment disorder, etc.). Based on the case file findings, there were several records indicating the child had no diagnosed condition in AFCARS, yet the reviewers did find diagnosed reportable conditions.

You should also 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 the data are complete, the agency must increase supervisory oversight and require workers to enter the data in a timely manner. Assessment of the validity of the data prior to submitting it to the ACF will also be required. 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. It is important that the AFCARS data accurately reflect the circumstances of children in foster care and under the agency's responsibility.

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 ACF Regional Office and the Children's Bureau, and OIS 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 and the Children's Bureau.

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 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: Stephan K. Bates, Director, Office of Family and Children Services, CDHS
Ted Trujillo, Director, Division of Child Welfare
Ron Huston, Chief Information Officer, CDHS
Ron Ozga, Deputy Chief Information Officer, CDHS
Thomas Sullivan, Regional Administrator, ACF Region VIII
Angelina M. Palmiero, M.S.W., AFCARS
Terry Watt, Director, Division of State Systems
Jerry Milner, National Child and Family Services Review Team