

September 11, 2003

Carlis V. Williams
Southeast Regional Hub Director
U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration of Children and Families
Atlanta Federal Building
61 Forsyth Street, S. W., Suite 4M60
Atlanta, GA 30303-8909

Dear Ms. Williams:

The Mississippi Department of Human Services, pursuant to 45 CFR 1356.71(i), is submitting its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to correct the areas determined not to be in compliance as a result of the Title IV-E Eligibility Review conducted February 10-14, 2003 by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

The PIP addresses all areas identified in the review as needing improvement. The four areas identified by ACF as needing improvement were:

- Placement in a licensed foster family home or child care institution
- ADFC eligibility as of July 16, 1996
- Judicial determination of reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan
- Judicial determination that continuation in the home is contrary to the welfare

We are utilizing the following matrix to outline the PIP for easy reading and updating. The matrix is divided into the four (4) components that are required to be addressed in the PIP. The components are: 1) Specific goals; 2) Action steps required to correct each identified area needing improvement; 3) A date by which each of the action steps is to be completed; and 4) A description of how progress on the plan will be evaluated by the State and reported to the ACF Regional Office, including the frequency and format of the evaluation procedures.

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We appreciate the help your staff continues to provide the Mississippi Department of Human Services in order to improve the processes that impact services to children and families. Please contact Gloria Thornton Salters at (601) 359-4495 if you have any questions regarding the PIP.

Sincerely,

Thelma W. Brittain
Executive Director

TWB:GTS:gts

Enclosures

pc: Gloria Thornton Salters

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
 DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
 Title IV-E Eligibility
 Program Improvement Plan

	Area Needing Improvement		Specific Goal(s)		Action Step(s)	Completion Date		Evaluation Procedure(s)
1.	Placement in a licensed foster home or child care institution	1.1	Insure Title IV-E payments are discontinued during the period of provisional licensing and provisional license approval.	1.1a	A policy bulletin was released on February 26, 2003 implementing policy that would eliminate approval of provisional licenses.	February 26, 2003	1.1	Completed (See Attachment A)
2.	AFDC eligibility as of July 16, 1996	2.1	Insure the eligibility determination process is clear and concise when documenting AFDC eligibility.	2.1a	The Eligibility Unit revised its procedures and eligibility form (Form MDHS-SS-444) to insure the AFDC eligibility is documented in a manner that is concise and supports the AFDC eligibility requirement as of July 16, 1996.	February 14, 2003	2.1	Completed (See Attachment B)
3.	Judicial determination of reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan	3.1	Insure a judicial determination is made within twelve months of the date a child is considered to have entered foster care and increase the collaboration between the agency and the judicial community.	3.1a	<p>The agency will establish a focus group that will include the Court Improvement Program Coordinator, Jamie McBride, to discuss issues that impact the judicial determinations of children in agency custody.</p> <p>The focus group will meet on a quarterly basis to discuss issues regarding the judicial community. The focus group will also develop strategies to establish a more comprehensive partnership with the judicial community.</p> <p>The Regional Directors continue to meet with the judicial community on a monthly basis to address issues and specific cases that lack the appropriate judicial determination.</p>	<p>September 3, 2003</p> <p>Ongoing Quarterly</p> <p>Ongoing Monthly</p>	3.1a	<p>The agency will collaborate with the Court Improvement Program Coordinator to establish protocols that will be disseminated to the judicial community.</p> <p>The agency will build a better working relationship with the judicial community. There will be a process developed to insure federal requirements are corresponded to the judicial community and are enforced.</p>
		3.2	Insure the appropriate permanency	3.2a	Ronnie Crawford, Region I-East	September 19, 2003	3.2a	All appropriate court order

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			language is included in the Permanency Court Order.		Regional Director, will work with Jamie McBride, Court Improvement Program Coordinator, and other members of the Judicial College to insure appropriate court order language is inserted into the Mississippi Youth Court Hand Book.			language will be readily available to the judicial community.
				3.2b	Ronnie Crawford, Regional Director, Region I-East, will conduct a training session for the judicial community during its annual meeting to be held on September 18-19, 2003. Mr. Crawford will reiterate the importance of appropriate court orders and holding appropriate hearings.	September 19, 2003	3.2b	The judicial community will be appropriately trained on federal requirements regarding permanency planning and the judicial determination.
		3.3	Insure that the court order (judicial determination) is in the eligibility file and case record.	3.3a	<p>The Eligibility Unit will continue to provide the local offices with a monthly report of redetermination notices (permanency hearings) due dates. This report is provided forty-five (45) days prior to the redetermination (permanency hearing) due date.</p> <p>The case worker will insure that the cases identified on the report are scheduled on the court docket for the permanency hearing.</p>	Monthly Ongoing	3.3a	The agency will demonstrate an improvement in the area of judicial determination by the decrease of ineligible children and an increase in the Title IV-E penetration rate.

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				3.3b	The Eligibility Unit will continue to provide the Regional Directors and Area Social Worker Supervisors with a listing of all cases that have missing court documentation (judicial determination).	Monthly Ongoing	3.3b	The Performance Appraisal Report will reflect those workers who are not performing according to policy and procedures.
				3.3c	A case worker's lack of compliance with policy and procedures will be documented in the Performance Appraisal Report which is the rating mechanism established to insure personnel are meeting the elements and standards of their job description.	Yearly	3.3c	The agency will demonstrate an improvement in the area of judicial determination by the decrease of ineligible children and an increase in the Title IV-E penetration rate.
				3.3d	The Area Social Worker Supervisor will take appropriate action to insure that any missing documentation is provided to the Eligibility Unit or provide an explanation of why the documentation cannot be provided.	Monthly Ongoing	3.3d	

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4.	Judicial determination that continuation in the home is contrary to the welfare	4.1	Insure that the Initial Court Order includes language "contrary to the welfare" or "placement is in the best interest of the child".	4.1a	Ronnie Crawford, Region I-East Regional Director, will work with Jamie McBride, Court Improvement Program Coordinator and other members of the Judicial College to insure appropriate court order language is inserted into the Mississippi Youth Court Hand Book.	September 19, 2003	4.1a	All appropriate court order language will be readily available to the judicial community.
				4.1b	Ronnie Crawford, Regional Director, Region I-East, will conduct a training session for the judicial community during its annual meeting to be held on September 18-19, 2003. Mr. Crawford will reiterate the importance of appropriate court orders and holding appropriate hearings.	September 19, 2003	4.1b	The judicial community will be appropriately trained on federal requirements regarding permanency planning and the judicial determination.
5.	Update agency policy, Section E, Volume IV, in accordance to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements.	5.1	Update Title IV-E Eligibility, Section E, Volume IV, policy in accordance to ASFA requirements.	5.1a	The Eligibility and Administration Unit will update Title IV-E Eligibility policy, Section E, Volume IV, in accordance to ASFA requirements.	Draft completed August 2003. Final completed by January 31, 2004.	5.1a	The updated policy will be issued and appropriated implemented as a revision to Section E, Volume IV.
			Provide training to Regional	5.1b	The Eligibility Unit in collaboration with	January 2004	5.1b	Regional Directors will be able to

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			Directors during Senior Management Meeting for the month of January 2004.		<p>the Training Unit will provide training to the Regional Directors and State Office Unit Directors. During the training all changes made to Section E, Volume IV will be highlighted and discussed.</p> <p>If needed, technical assistance will be requested through the National Resource Center.</p>			<p>return to the local offices and train Area Social Worker Supervisors, who will then train Social Workers on the changes to policy.</p> <p>Each Trainer in the Training Unit will provide technical assistance to the counties in their assigned regions.</p>
			Disseminate the revised policy to all holders of the Volume IV Policy Manual.	5.1c	<p>The Administration Unit will have copies of the revised Section E, Volume IV copied and ready for distribution to county, region and state staff.</p> <p>The revised policy will be incorporated into the MACWIS online policy database.</p>	February 2004	5.1c	<p>All county, region and state staff, holders of the Volume IV Policy Manual, will have access to the revised policy.</p> <p>The online policy revisions will be accessible through MACWIS.</p>