

**Mississippi Department of Human Services
Division of Family and Children's Services
Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan
May 2009**

Issue #1: Valid removals		
<p>A. The child was left in the removal home for a period of time after the court granted MDHS placement and care responsibility and found it was contrary to the child's welfare to remain in the home. A removal is not valid for title IV-E purposes when legal custody is removed from the parent or specified relative and the child remains in the home. Consistent with Federal regulation at 45 CFR 1356.21 (k) (2) and Federal policy, in a court-ordered removal the physical removal of a child must coincide with the judicial ruling that authorizes the child's removal from the home and placement in foster care, unless the court authorizes a delay in placement.</p>		
<p>Goal: To ensure title IV-E foster care maintenance payments are not claimed for a court ordered removal in which the physical removal of the child does not coincide with the judicial ruling that authorizes the child's removal from the home and placement in foster care. The MDHS policy and practice also will ensure children do not remain in unsafe conditions in the home prior to and after court authorization for removal.</p>		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. IV-E eligibility training material will be developed to help staff understand the Federal requirement concerning removals for title IV-E eligibility.	1. 06/30/2009	1. Training Director
2. All field staff and field management staff will receive training on IV-E eligibility policy and procedures related to removals and child safety.	2. 09/30/2009	2. Training Director
3. Provide technical assistance/training on IV-E eligibility policy and procedures training material as applicable with judges, county prosecutors and other court personnel.	3. 12/30/2009	3. Division Director
4. MDHS will address this issue with the specific county and court involved in the error case.	4. 03/31/2009	4. Regional Director
5. The Eligibility Unit will verify the required findings are in the court orders, contact counties if issues arise, and disburse payments from sources other than IV-E until appropriate eligibility criteria have been established.	5. 03/31/2009	5. Eligibility Unit
<p>Evaluation of Progress: MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that the date of the physical removal of a child coincides with the date of the judicial ruling that authorizes the child's removal from the home for claiming title IV-E payments.. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to MDHS Regional Directors for corrective action.</p>		
<p>Evaluation of Achievement: Cases reviewed will document that the date of the physical removal of a child coincides with the judicial ruling that authorizes removal from the home in accordance with IV-E substantial compliance standards.</p>		

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Issue #2: Judicial Determinations		
<p>A. Judicial determinations addressing reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan and reasonable efforts to prevent removal were not made in court-ordered removals to qualify for Federal Financial Participation (FFP) as required in 45 CFR 1356.21(b)(1) and (2).</p>		
<p>Goal: To ensure there are judicial determinations regarding reasonable efforts to prevent the child's removal within 60 days of removal and regarding reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan at least every twelve months thereafter until the child's permanency goal is achieved and the child is no longer in foster care. In court-ordered removals, the judicial determination must be made in a valid court order. If an acceptable court order is not furnished, a transcript of the court proceeding is the only alternative to substantiate that the judicial determination requirements are satisfied.</p>		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. MDHS will collaborate with the Judicial College and Court Improvement Project to ensure the required judicial determinations are made explicitly and timely for each child for whom title IV-E maintenance are paid. To assist courts in making judicial determinations, MDHS will develop sample court orders containing language addressing reasonable efforts regarding removal and permanency.	1. 03/31/2009	1. Court Improvement Workgroup
2. IV-E eligibility training material will be developed to emphasize the judicial requirements of reasonable efforts and to convey the importance of the findings.	2. 06/30/2009	2. Training Director
3. All field staff and field management staff will receive training that includes material related to reasonable efforts.	3. 09/30/2009	3. Training Director
4. Title IV-E training material related to reasonable efforts will be shared with judges, county prosecutors and other court personnel.	4. 12/31/2009	4. Division Director
5. MDHS will provide technical assistance and training to the specific counties and courts to ensure that all court orders include findings of reasonable efforts to prevent the child's removal and that courts continue to address reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan in subsequent court orders until the child's permanency goal is achieved.	5. 03/31/2009	5. Regional Directors
6. The Eligibility Unit will verify the required findings are in the court orders, contact counties if issues arise, and disburse payments from sources other than title IV-E until appropriate eligibility criteria have been established.	6. 03/31/2009	6. Eligibility Unit
<p>Evaluation of Progress: MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that court orders contain judicial findings of reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their homes and to finalize permanency plans. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to MDHS Regional Directors for corrective action.</p>		
<p>Evaluation of Achievement: Orders reviewed will contain judicial findings of reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their homes and to finalize permanency plans in accordance with the title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.</p>		

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Issue #3: Licensing and Safety:		
<p>A. Children were not living in licensed foster family homes during the periods the IV-E maintenance payments were claimed and the licensing and safety requirements were not met in the child's foster care placement of record.</p>		
Goal:		
To ensure that title IV-E maintenance payments are claimed for a child only for the period that the otherwise eligible child is placed with a foster care provider that meets the licensing and safety requirements for licensure.		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. Procedures will be established to allow county staff to indicate "placement only" or "placement and board payment" to ensure that no board payments are generated until resource homes are fully licensed and the criminal record check requirements are met.	1. 04/01/2009	1. Licensure/MACWIS
2. Procedures will be established to stop board payments to a resource home upon a child's removal and placement into another resource home. The field worker who is assigned to the child's case worker will enter a "placement correction" in a timely manner notifying the Eligibility Unit to stop the board payment and to generate payment to the appropriate home.	2. 03/01/2009	2. Regional Directors/ASWS/Eligibility Unit
3. MACWIS updates and edits will be implemented to allow timely board payment changes to ensure that overpayments do not occur. A scrolling message will be transmitted to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff via MACWIS to notify them to have correct placement information in the system prior to the first day of the next month.	3. 09/30/2009	3. MACWIS
4. Training will be provided to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff to ensure these procedures are followed.	4. 04/01/2009	4. Training/Regional Directors/Unit Directors
Evaluation of Progress:		
<p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that payments are generated only to the homes and facilities in which children reside. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to appropriate Unit Directors for corrective action.</p>		
Evaluation of Achievement:		
PQI, MACWIS, and/or similar reports will substantiate that title IV-E maintenance payments are generated only for licensed facilities for the dates that children are placed in those facilities.		

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Issue #3: Licensing and Safety:		
<p>B. Title IV-E maintenance payments were claimed for children placed in foster family homes that did not meet the State's standards for full licensure.</p>		
Goal:		
<p>To ensure that IV-E maintenance payments are issued only for children placed in foster care settings that are fully licensed per sections 472(b) and (c) of the Social Security Act and §1356.71(d)(1)(iv).</p>		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
<p>1. Procedures will be established to allow the field worker who is assigned to the child's case to indicate "placement only" or "placement and board payment" to ensure that no board payments are generated until resource homes are fully licensed in MACWIS.</p> <p>2. Agency policies will prohibit the granting of temporary licenses or waiving pre-service training for resource homes.</p> <p>3. Training will be provided all field staff, resource staff and field management staff to ensure compliance with licensing standards.</p> <p>4. MDHS Licensure staff will be required to notify the Eligibility Unit when a license has been revoked or a renewal has not been granted.</p>	<p>1. 04/01/2009</p> <p>2. 03/01/2009</p> <p>3. 04/01/2009</p> <p>4. 04/01/2009</p>	<p>1. Licensure/MACWIS</p> <p>2. Policy/Licensure Unit</p> <p>3. Training/Unit Directors/Regional Directors</p> <p>4. Licensure Unit</p>
Evaluation of Progress:		
<p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). A sample of child records and provider records will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that resource homes are fully licensed when board payments are made through IV-E. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child's case into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to appropriate Unit Directors for corrective action.</p>		
Evaluation of Achievement:		
<p>PQI, MACWIS, and/or similar reports will substantiate that resource homes and facilities are fully licensed when title IV-E board payments are made.</p>		

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Issue #3: Licensing and Safety:		
<p>C. Child placing agencies and group homes are not providing MDHS with copies of foster home licenses and safety checks required to document compliance with the Federal requirements for title IV-E eligibility.</p>		
Goal:		
To ensure that child placing agencies and group homes provide MDHS with copies of licenses and safety checks sufficient for title IV-E eligibility.		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> MDHS will update and issue Licensing Directives for Residential Child Caring Agencies and Child Placing Agencies to include the requirement that within 10 calendar days after licensure these agencies furnish licenses and required safety information on all homes, staff and employees as needed per Title IV-E regulations. A copy of this documentation will be maintained in the MDHS case record. MDHS will provide training to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff regarding facility and group home licensure and safety requirements. The Licensure Unit will document through periodic site visits and through maintenance of central files that licensure and safety information is complete and current on all homes and facilities especially those licensed by Child Caring and Placing Agencies. A tickler system will be set in place to remind staff at regular intervals when the license or safety documentation is not received. MDHS will issue a policy directive to staff that will prohibit claiming title IV-E funds prior to receiving all of the documentation necessary for establishing eligibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12/31/2009 04/01/2009 On-going 12/31/2009 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Policy/Licensure Units Training Licensure Policy, Training, Eligibility
Evaluation of Progress:		
<p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Licensure Unit will compile and submit quarterly reports to appropriate Unit Directors to ensure corrective action regarding licensure and safety of these homes and facilities. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child's case into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument.</p>		
Evaluation of Achievement:		
Licensure reports will substantiate that copies of licenses and safety documentation are filed in accordance with the title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.		

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Issue #3: Licensing and Safety:		
<p>D. Criminal background checks for foster family homes and safety requirements for child care institutions were not completed according to the requirements for title IV-E eligibility found at 45 CFR 1356.30 and section 471(a)(20)(A) of the Social Security Act.</p>		
Goal:		
To ensure that all providers have met the criminal background checks and safety requirements and that documentation is filed in each provider's file before title IV-E funds are claimed.		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. MDHS will develop policy to address all applicable criminal background checks and safety requirements.	1. 02/28/2009	1. Licensure Unit
2. MDHS will train all field staff, resource staff and field management staff and provide policy and procedures to licensed child care agencies.	2. 04/30/2009	2. Licensure/Training Units
3. MDHS will develop procedures to ensure all provider records will contain documentation from criminal background check and Central Registry clearance on all applicable persons. A copy of this documentation will be maintained in the MDHS provider case record.	3. 04/30/2009	3. Licensure Unit/Resource ASWS
4. Training will be given to the provider's regarding these requirements and the documentation needed.	4. 01/30/2010	4. Licensure Unit
Evaluation of Progress:		
<p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). A sample of provider records will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to verify criminal records and child abuse registry compliance. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to Licensure and Resource ASWS for corrective action.</p>		
Evaluation of Achievement:		
<p>Provider cases will contain documentation of criminal background check and Central Registry clearances on all applicable household members in accordance with title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.</p>		

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Issue #4: Re-determination of Eligibility		
<p>A. Re-determinations of children's eligibility for AFDC were completed in many cases reviewed. The agency must be able to show that the child meets the mandatory eligibility requirements before title IV-E maintenance payments are claimed for the child.</p>		
Goal:		
To ensure re-determinations of children's eligibility are conducted within the timeframes established and documentation is placed in the eligibility files.		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. MDHS will develop procedures to establish manual ticklers to ensure timely re-determinations of title IV-E eligibility.	1. 03/01/2009	1. Eligibility/County staff
2. MDHS will develop a system of automated ticklers within MACWIS to ensure timely re-determinations of IV-E eligibility.	2. 10/30/2009	2. MACWIS staff
3. Policies and procedures will be formalized to define the title IV-E eligibility determination and re-determination process.	3. 03/31/2009	3. Eligibility/Training
4. Training will be provided to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff on policies and procedures governing the eligibility re-determination process.	4. 04/01/2009	4. Training/Unit & Regional Directors
5. The Eligibility Unit will maintain a paper copy of all re-determinations in the child's central file.	5. 03/31/2009	5. Eligibility
Evaluation of Progress:		
<p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). MACWIS will provide monthly reports on the status of re-determinations. The Eligibility Unit will notify appropriate Regional Directors of any overdue re-determinations. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. Performance and Quality Improvement will conduct a sample review of children's central files to ensure that current re-determinations are filed. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child's case into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds.</p>		
Evaluation of Achievement:		
PQI, MACWIS, and/or similar reports will confirm that re-determinations are current in accordance with title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.		

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<p>Issue #5: Court Documentation</p> <p>A. In many cases, written court orders did not include the hearing date, did not clearly specify the agency's responsibility for placement and care and were amended several times to include missing information or to correct typographical errors. In addition, there is a delay in the agency receiving copies of court orders, which has taken up to six months to obtain the documents in some cases. A delay in receiving court orders containing clear, accurate and appropriate information delays the eligibility determination process and claiming of Federal funds for children.</p>		
<p>Goal: To ensure that court orders explicitly convey all pertinent court findings, contain the necessary information, are accurate and are provided to the agency in a timely manner in order to properly assess IV-E eligibility.</p>		
<p>Action Steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MDHS will collaborate with the Judicial College and Court Improvement Project to review the process for managing court orders and make necessary changes that will help the judges ensure that court orders are produced and disseminated timely. MDHS also will develop and deliver technical assistance/training regarding the process and procedures. 2. MDHS will collaborate and provide technical assistance to the specific counties and courts to convey the urgency and importance of ensuring that court orders are produced and disseminated timely. 3. All field staff and field management staff will be informed of this issue to ensure corrective action. 	<p>Projected Completion Date:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 12/31/2009 2. 03/31/2009 3. 03/31/2009. 	<p>Person Responsible:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training Director; Division Director 2. Regional Director 3. Policy
<p>Evaluation of Progress:</p> <p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that copies of all pertinent documents including the most recent court orders are contained in the child's case record. Necessary corrective measures will be taken to bring the child's case into compliance and discontinue improper claiming of title IV-E funds. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to MDHS Regional Directors for corrective action.</p>		
<p>Evaluation of Achievement:</p> <p>Cases reviewed will contain all court orders in accordance with title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.</p>		

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Issue #6: Court Documentation		
<p>B. Court petitions for removal are not included in the child's central eligibility file which makes it difficult to determine the removal home and the circumstances of removal. When a removal petition is filed in a case, including the petition in the eligibility record provides a comprehensive account of the removal episode and helps to document information pertinent to determining compliance with certain requirements related to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and judicial determinations.</p>		
<p>Goal: To ensure that the child's central eligibility file contains all pertinent documents and information, such as the removal petition, that helps to accurately establish a child's eligibility.</p>		
Action Steps:	Projected Completion Date:	Person Responsible:
1. Petitions, as well as removal orders, will be placed in the child's central eligibility file and entered into MACWIS correctly.	1. 04/30/2009	1. Court Improvement Workgroup
2. Instructions regarding these action steps will be sent to all field staff and field management staff to ensure compliance.	2. 03/31/2009	2. Policy
3. IV-E eligibility training material will be developed.	3. 06/30/2009	3. Training Director
4. All field office staff and field management staff will receive training on IV-E eligibility policy and procedures including MACWIS training.	4. 09/30/2009	4. Training Director
<p>Evaluation of Progress:</p> <p>MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with brief descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS PQI measure every six months to ensure that the child's central eligibility file contains all pertinent information to help establish eligibility. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to MDHS Regional Directors for corrective action.</p>		
<p>Evaluation of Achievement:</p> <p>Cases reviewed will document clearly all of the title IV-E requirements to ensure the child is eligible in accordance with title IV-E eligibility requirements for substantial compliance.</p>		



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During the week of July 14, 2008, the Children's Bureau (CB), of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), conducted a primary eligibility review of Mississippi's title IV-E foster care program. The review team was comprised of representatives from the State agency, cross-state reviewers, CB Central and Regional Offices, and ACF Regional Grants Management Office.

The purposes of the primary title IV-E foster care review were: (1) to determine whether MDHS was in compliance with the eligibility requirements as outlined in statute and regulation at section 472 of the Social Security Act and 45 CFR 1356.71; and (2) to validate the basis of Mississippi's financial claims to ensure that appropriate payments were made on behalf of eligible children. A computerized statistical sample of 80 cases were reviewed to determine the State's level of compliance in meeting the Federal eligibility requirements for the six month period under review of October 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008.

For a primary review, substantial compliance means that the case error rate does not exceed four. A statistical sample of 80 cases was drawn from a universe of cases that received title IV-E payments during the review period noted above. This sample was obtained from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for the period under review which was transmitted by MDHS to ACF.

During the onsite review, each child's case file in the selected sample was reviewed to determine title IV-E eligibility. The provider's file was examined to ensure that the foster home or child care institution in which the child was placed during the period under review was licensed or approved and the safety considerations were appropriately addressed. Payments made on behalf of each child were also reviewed to verify that the expenses were allowable under title IV-E. Efforts were made to identify any underpayments that may have existed in the reviewed sample cases. In addition, CB and MDHS agreed that

subsequent to the onsite review Mississippi could submit additional child and provider documentation for any case that was found to be in error, in pending status, or to have an ineligible payment. As a result of the provision of additional documentation, a number of case and payment determinations were modified.

The review team determined that 16 error cases and 3 non-error cases with improper payments were ineligible for Federal funding. The CB determined that the State of Mississippi's title IV-E foster care maintenance program was not in substantial compliance with Federal eligibility requirements for the period of October 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008.

Pursuant to 45 CFR 1356.7(i), Mississippi is required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) designed to correct those areas needing corrective action as identified by the CB.

MDHS has developed a PIP which should bring the title IV-E's foster care maintenance program into compliance. Along with this narrative is a matrix which details the person(s) responsible for each action step and the projected completion date of each action step.

During the review, the following areas were identified as areas that are in need of corrective action:

- Valid Removals
- Judicial Determinations
- Licensure and Safety
- Re-determinations, and
- Court Documentation

1. Valid Removals

The child was left in the removal home for a period of time after the court granted MDHS placement and care responsibility and found it was contrary to the child's welfare to remain in the home. A removal is not valid for title IV-E purposes when legal custody is removed from the parent or specified relative and the child remain in the home.

MDHS's goal is to ensure title IV-E foster care maintenance payments are not claimed for a court-ordered removal in which the physical removal of the child does not coincide with the judicial ruling that authorizes the child's removal from the home and placement in care. The MDHS policy and practice also will ensure children do not remain in unsafe conditions in the home prior to and after court authorization for removal.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

1. Title IV-E eligibility training material will be developed.
2. All field staff and field management staff will receive training related to removals and child safety.
3. MDHS will address this issue with the specific county and court involved in the error case.
4. Provide technical assistance/training on removals as appropriate to youth court judges, county prosecutors and other court personnel.
5. The Eligibility Unit will verify the required findings are in the court orders, contact counties if issues arise, and disburse payments from sources other than title IV-E until appropriate eligibility criteria have been established.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is MDHS will submit quarterly reports to the Region IV ACF office with descriptions of progress toward completion of each task and, where appropriate, the end product(s). Each child's record will be reviewed through a MDHS Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI) measure every six months to ensure that the date of the physical removal of a child coincides with the date of the judicial ruling that authorizes the child's removal from the home for claiming title IV-E payments. A second level eligibility review will be conducted utilizing the federal onsite review instrument. PQI will submit monthly reports to MDHS Regional Directors for corrective action.

2. Judicial Determinations

Judicial determinations addressing reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan and reasonable efforts to prevent removal were not made in court-ordered removals to qualify for Federal Financial Participation (FFP) through title IV-E.

The goal is to ensure there are judicial determinations regarding reasonable efforts to prevent removal within 60 days of removal and regarding reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan at least every twelve months thereafter until the child's permanency goal is achieved and the child is no longer in foster care. In court-ordered removals, the judicial determination must be made in a valid court order. If an acceptable court order is not furnished, a transcript of the court proceeding is the only alternative to substantiate that the judicial determination requirements are satisfied.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

- 1.** Collaborate with the Judicial College and the Court Improvement Project to ensure the required judicial determinations are made explicitly and timely for each child for who title IV-E maintenance is paid. To assist courts in making judicial determinations, MDHS will develop sample court orders containing representative language addressing reasonable efforts regarding removal and permanency.
- 2.** Title IV-E eligibility training material will be developed to emphasize the judicial requirements of reasonable efforts and the importance of the findings.
- 3.** All field staff and field management staff will receive training related to reasonable efforts.
- 4.** Title IV-E training material related to reasonable efforts will be shared with judges, county prosecutors and other court personnel.
- 5.** Provide technical assistance/training to the specific counties and courts to ensure that all court orders include findings of reasonable efforts to prevent the child's removal and those courts continue to address reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan in subsequent court orders until the child's permanency goal is achieved.
- 6.** The Eligibility Unit will verify the required findings are in the court orders, contact counties if issues arise, and disburse payments from sources other than title IV-E until appropriate eligibility criteria have been established.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as listed in Item 1.

3. Licensing and Safety

A & B. Children were not living in the foster family homes during the periods the title IV-E maintenance payments were claimed and the licensing and the safety requirements were not met in the child's foster care placement of record.

The goal is to ensure that title IV-E maintenance payments are claimed for a child only for the period that the otherwise eligible child is placed with a foster care provider that meets the licensing and safety requirements for licensure.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

- 1.** Procedures will be established to allow county staff to indicate "placement only" or "placement and board payment" to ensure that no board payments are generated until resource homes are fully licensed and the criminal record check requirements are met.

- 2.** Procedures will be established to stop board payments to a resource home upon a child's removal and placement into another resource home.
- 3.** MACWIS updates and edits will be implemented to allow timely board payment changes to ensure that overpayments do not occur.
- 4.** Training will be provided to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff to ensure these procedures are followed.
- 5.** Agency policies will prohibit the granting of temporary licenses or waiving pre-service training for resource homes.
- 6.** MDHS Licensure staff will be required to notify the Eligibility Unit when a license has been revoked or a renewal has not been granted.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as listed in Section 1.

C. Child placing agencies and group homes are not providing MDHS with copies of foster home licenses and safety checks required to document compliance with the Federal requirements for title IV-E eligibility.

MDHS's goal is to ensure that child placing agencies and group homes provide MDHS with copies of licenses and safety checks sufficient for title IV-E eligibility.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

- 1.** Update and issue Licensing Directives for Residential Child Caring Agencies and Child Placing Agencies to include the requirement that within 10 calendar days after licensure these agencies furnish licenses and required safety information on all homes, staff and employees, as needed per title IV-E regulations.
- 2.** Provide training to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff regarding facility and group home licensure and safety requirements.
- 3.** The Licensure Unit will document through periodic site visits and through maintenance of central files that licensure and safety information is complete and current on all homes and facilities, especially those licensed by Child Caring and Placing Agencies.

4. MDHS will issue a policy directive to staff that will prohibit claiming title IV-E funds prior to receiving all of the documentation necessary for establishing eligibility

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as listed in Section 1.

D. Criminal background checks for foster family homes and safety requirements for child care institutions were not completed according to the requirements for title IV-E eligibility.

MDHS's goal is to ensure that all providers have met the criminal background checks and safety requirements and that documentation is filed in each provider's file before title IV-E funds are claimed.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

1. Develop policy to address all applicable criminal background checks and safety requirements.
2. Train all field staff, resource staff and field management staff and provide policy procedures to licensed child care agencies.
3. MDHS will develop procedures to ensure all provider records will contain documentation from criminal background checks and Central Registry clearance on all applicable persons.
4. Training will be given to the provider's regarding these requirements and the documentation needed.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as in Item 1.

4. Re-determination of Eligibility

Re-determination of children's eligibility for AFDC was not completed in many cases reviewed. The agency must be able to show that the child meets the mandatory eligibility requirements before title IV-E maintenance payments are claimed for the child.

MDHS's goal is to ensure re-determinations of children's eligibility are conducted within the time frames established and documentation is placed in the legibility files.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

1. Develop procedures to establish manual ticklers to ensure timely re-determinations of title IV-E eligibility.
2. Develop a system of automated ticklers within Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) to ensure timely re-determinations of title IV-E eligibility.
3. Policies and procedures will be formalized to define the title IV-E eligibility determination and re-determination process.
4. Training will be provided to all field staff, resource staff and field management staff on policies and procedures governing the eligibility re-determination process.
5. The Eligibility Unit will maintain a paper copy of all re-determinations in the child's central file.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as in Item 1.

5. Court Documentation

A. In many cases, written court orders did not include the hearing date, did not clearly specify the agency's responsibility for placement and care were amended several times to include missing information or to correct typographical errors. In addition, there is a delay in the agency receiving copies of court orders, which has taken up to six months to obtain the documents in some cases. A delay in receiving court orders containing clear, accurate, and appropriate information delays the eligibility determination process and claiming of Federal funds for children.

MDHS's goal is to ensure that court orders explicitly convey all pertinent court findings, contain the necessary information, are accurate and are provided to the agency in a timely manner in order to properly assess title IV-E eligibility.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

1. Collaborate with the Judicial College and Court Improvement Project to review the process for managing court orders and make necessary changes that will help judges ensure that court orders are produced and disseminated timely.
2. Develop and deliver technical assistance/training regarding the process and procedures.

3. Collaborate and provide technical assistance to the specific counties and courts to convey the urgency and importance of ensuring that court orders are produced and disseminated timely.

4. All field staff and field management staff will be informed of this issue to ensure corrective action.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as Item 1.

B. Court petitions for removal are not included in the child's central eligibility file, which makes it difficult to determine the removal home and the circumstances of removal. When a removal petition is filed in a case, including the petition in the eligibility record provides a comprehensive account of the removal episode and helps to document information pertinent to determining compliance with certain requirements related to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and judicial determinations.

MDHS's goal is to ensure that the child's central eligibility file contains all pertinent documents and information, such as the removal petition, that helps to accurately establish a child's eligibility.

In order to achieve this goal, MDHS will take the following action steps:

- 1.** Petitions as well as removal orders will be placed in the child's central eligibility file and entered into MACWIS correctly.
- 2.** Instructions regarding these action steps will be sent to all field staff and field management staff to ensure compliance.
- 3.** Title IV-E eligibility training material will be developed.
- 4.** All field office staff and field management staff will receive training on IV-E eligibility policy and procedures including MACWIS training.

The evaluation of progress toward meeting this goal is the same as Item 1.