

**West Virginia Title IV-E
Foster Care Eligibility Review Report
10/1/99-3/31/00**

I. Introduction

During the week of September 18-22, 2000 Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) staff from the Regional and Central Offices and the State of West Virginia, Office of Social Services' (OSS) staff conducted an eligibility review of the West Virginia title IV-E foster care program.

The purpose of the title IV-E eligibility review was to validate the accuracy of West Virginia's claims to assure that appropriate payments were made on behalf of eligible children to eligible homes and institutions.

II. Scope of Review

The West Virginia title IV-E foster care review, which was conducted in Charleston, W.Va., encompassed a computerized statistical sample of 80 cases drawn from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, which was transmitted by the State Agency to the Administration for Children and Families. The sampling frame consisted of cases of individual children who received at least one title IV-E foster care maintenance payment during the six-month period from October 1, 1999 to March 31, 2000. For each of the 80 cases, the child's case record file was reviewed for documentation to support the determination of title IV-E eligibility and to ensure that the foster care provider was licensed and that safety considerations were addressed.

During this initial primary review, one of the 80 cases reviewed was determined ineligible for either part or all of the review period for reasons that are identified in the Case Record Summary section of this report. Since the number of ineligible cases was fewer than nine for the initial primary review, West Virginia is in substantial compliance and no secondary review is warranted.

III. Case Record Summary

Sample # 78 - Case ID # 20026139

Finding: A judicial determination of reasonable efforts was not made. The court orders provided by the State Agency indicate that a reasonable effort determination was only made after the review period ended on March 31, 2000. The amount disallowed for this case is \$9,221 (\$6,884 FFP).

IV. Strengths - Observations

The West Virginia Family and Children Tracking System (FACTS) is a quick and efficient way of finding information for AFDC eligibility including review of resources and deprivation, and provider information. The review team found that it was generally available as the "ultimate authority" in finding key information. Staff say: "it is wonderful." Although this was primarily a paper review, FACTS played a key role and will be a larger factor in the future. Field staff are used to using FACTS and it is perceived as a strong ally in the child welfare work being done for children in West Virginia. It appears from the comments of the Review Team that FACTS is a good investment for West Virginia.

Safety information and criminal background checks were readily available for all providers in both State and private agency foster homes. It was observed that the criminal background check requests are routed through the State Office when initially requested by providers. The Review Team recommended that a record of these requests and responses be kept at the State Office. It was also suggested that copies of home studies be kept at the State Office so that all safety information could be kept in one place.

The State Agency did an excellent job in providing sufficient case documentation for the Review Team.

The review team was a good mix of staff representing the State Office, Regional & Local offices, IV-E Eligibility unit, FACTS and Licensing. There was a close working relationship among review team members that helped in resolving problem cases.

State review team members observed that this review process taught them a lot about IV-E and how important it is to document the record to support accurate eligibility determinations. The review was good training for reviewers and it was something that will be taken back to other State

staff. One of the team members recommended that the results of the review and the review process should be reported back to the State Supervisors Group for increased awareness and staff training.

From the cases reviewed, it was observed that the State moved quickly to permanency decisions for children in care as required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

V. Areas in Need of Improvement - Observations/Recommendations

A recommendation was made by the Review Team that all State Agency databases be interfaced together to permit ready access to all eligibility information.

Information on where a child is placed at any given time was not always easy to find. It is recommended that the State have this information readily available.

The IV-E Eligibility Unit needs to have all documentation completely filled out for each child. Initial eligibility determination documents and redetermination documents were not always completely filled out, signed and dated. There was variation in completeness of records from Region to Region within the State. It is recommended that that all eligibility documents in the IV-E review process be complete.

West Virginia should assure that all judicial determinations of contrary to the welfare are consistent with the intent and purpose of title IV-E foster care. A judicial determination that "return home is contrary to the State of West Virginia" does not meet the test of a judicial determination that it was not in the child's best interest to remain at home. Contrary to the welfare determinations must be made in the first order that sanctions the removal of the child from home and each determination must be explicit and reflect the circumstances of the individual child. We recommend that the State work closely with its judiciary and staff to assure that court orders are reflective of this requirement.

Key eligibility determination information on State Wards, who have been adopted, was hard to find for periods before and after the adoption. Apparently local offices have some information, the State Office has some information and FACTS has some information. It is recommended that a single record file be maintained for adopted State Wards.

Team Members

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DHHR - Logan - Social Services Supervisor
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This title IV-E foster care eligibility review reflects the evolving partnership between the Administration for Children and Families and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources with a focus on continuing program improvement and technical assistance for the child welfare program.

October 20, 2000