

Child and Family Services Reviews Update

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Court Involvement in the Reviews

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has released an Information Memorandum (IM) that clarifies the ACF's requirements and expectations regarding the involvement of State court representatives in the child and family services reviews (CFSRs) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP) process.

Federal regulations require that States consult with various stakeholders, including the courts, when developing the State's Child and Family Service Plan and in the various stages of the CFSRs. Further, Federal legislation reauthorizing the Court Improvement Project requires that State court systems participate in the implementation of a CFSR PIP when the court system is involved and develop a strategy for participation in all stages of the CFSR.

The IM outlines specific steps that the ACF will take to promote court involvement in the CFSR and PIP process. These steps include the following:

- The ACF will notify State court representatives in writing of the initiation of the Statewide Assessment and the projected date of the onsite review.
- In the conference calls leading up to the review, the ACF will ask for specific plans from the States regarding their involvement of the courts.
- Recently retired judges will make site visits to States beginning their Statewide Assessments and at the beginning of the PIP process to provide technical assistance.
- PIP trainings for the States will emphasize the importance of including the courts in the PIP process, and States will be encouraged to invite court representatives to the training.
- In reviewing future PIPs and PIP quarterly reports, the ACF will review specifically for court involvement.
- In reviewing future CIP strategic plans, the ACF will review specifically for strategies to facilitate court legal and judicial participation in the CFSR and PIP processes.

A copy of the IM is available on the Children's Bureau Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/im0505>.

Assistance for Family Courts

Recommendations for moving children quickly through the child welfare court system and into safe and permanent homes are provided on, *Fostering the Future*, a new DVD available from the Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care. The DVD is based on the commission's report, released last year, which recommended reform of the juvenile and family court system, and called on State Chief Justices to give child welfare top priority in their State court system.

The DVD details the specific reform recommendations and uses firsthand accounts of children, parents, judges, and administrators to highlight the importance of the court's role in the child welfare system and the obstacles that prevent children from leaving foster care.

Copies of the DVD and the final report are available through the commission's Web site at <http://www.pewfostercare.org>.

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