



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
1250 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

May 30, 2013

Jennifer R. Justice
Deputy Director
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Office of Families and Children
50 W. Town St.
Columbus, OH 43218-2709

Dear Ms. Justice:

The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, Office for Children and Family, completed a review of Ohio's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data during the week of August 20, 2012. The final report on the AFCARS Assessment Review (AAR) is enclosed, which includes the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP).

We appreciate the amount of time and effort that your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review. Every member of the State team was fully engaged during the review and ensured that the week went smoothly. We appreciate the work that each member put into preparing for the onsite review.

The AAR evaluates two areas: the AFCARS general requirements (reporting populations and technical standards) and the data elements (foster care and adoption). Information collected on these areas is combined and based on an analysis of the findings a rating factor is assigned to each of the general requirements and each data element. The rating factors are: "1," the information is not collected and/or is 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 enclosed report provides a more detailed explanation of each of the rating factors. The State team should carefully review all the findings in each document as there have been some changes from the onsite findings. Below are charts depicting the State's rating factors.

General Requirements (22)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (8)	Adoption (3)	Technical (9)	Data Quality (2)
4	5	2	8	1
3	1	1	1	1
2	2	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0

Data Elements (103)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	11	9	20
3	14	5	19
2	41	22	63
1	0	1	1

With respect to the General Requirements findings, the State is, in general, in compliance with the AFCARS standards. There were several elements, as noted in the above chart, which require some type of technical correction. Many of these involve revisions to the program code to extract the data from the correct field. Some of these errors apply to the same field but affect multiple data elements (e.g., race and Hispanic/Latino origin) and others affect a group of elements (e.g. circumstances associated with a child’s removal from home).

A design issue affecting the accuracy of several of the AFCARS data elements is how the information on the circumstances associated a child’s entry into foster care is collected. The State’s system has two fields and the caseworker must go through a drop-down list of options for each field in order to identify all reasons for the child’s removal from home. Based on the findings of the frequency report and the case file review, these data are being underreported. In the case file review nearly all of the elements (foster care # 26 – 40) had errors. In each case, the reviewer found information that should have been reported as a contributing reason for the child’s removal from home, but was not. It is likely that the caseworker selects an option from the first list (labeled Primary Removal Reason) and does not select the additional reasons from the other field (labeled Available Secondary Removal Reasons). Instead of two fields, this information should be consolidated into one, simple selection field.

The State has a good system design for the collection of information related to the AFCARS health/mental health and behavioral diagnosed conditions. However, the AFCARS data report used for the review reflects an underreporting of this information. The frequency distribution for the data reported in the 2012A report period indicates that there were only 1,229 (7%) children with a health/mental health condition that is reportable to AFCARS. The case file review revealed that 60% (43 out of 75) of the records analyzed indicated the child did have a diagnosed condition, but the response in AFCARS indicated a response of no diagnosed condition. During the post-site visit phase the State made some corrections to the program code related to mapping information from the Ohio system to AFCARS. As a result the data for the 2012B period did improve, with 3,635 (22%) records reported as the child having a diagnosed condition. The State needs to ensure that caseworkers are entering the information in a timely manner. Also, there still are some corrections to the program code related to the mapping of the State’s values to the appropriate AFCARS category in elements #11 – 15.

The enclosed report identifies the most substantial areas the State needs to address in order to meet the AFCARS requirements. Tab A of the Report, contains detailed findings for the general requirements, data elements, and the case file review. The information provided by this AAR

will enable the State to bring its data collection and AFCARS reporting into conformity with the AFCARS standards.

Due to corrections that are needed for the foster care elements, the State will have to resubmit AFCARS data for past report periods. The State and the Children's Bureau will discuss which report periods will be required for resubmission. The agency is encouraged to incorporate a review of its AFCARS data, as well as other data, as part of the periodic reviews conducted for children in foster care. Also, the agency should incorporate a review and analysis of the data as part of its quality assurance process. It is important that the information being used not only for AFCARS reporting but for the agency's own performance measures and other program evaluations is reliable, consistent, and accurate.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report, the State staff must submit the AIP electronically to the Children's Bureau with estimated due dates for completing the tasks in the AIP. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. Once the Children's Bureau and the State agree that the quality of the data has improved, and all tasks and revisions to the extraction code have been reviewed and approved, the State will receive a letter summarizing the final results of the review. 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 Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required by 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5).

The Regional Office will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AIP. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's Network of Training and Technical Assistance Centers.

In closing, I would again like to thank the staff who participated in the review for their hard work and their 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,

/s/

Joseph J. Bock
Acting Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc: Michael McCreight, Assistant Director, ODJFS
Angela Green, Child Welfare Program Manger, Children's Bureau, Region V