

Child & Family Services Review (CFSR)

CFSR Background

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has oversight responsibility for state agencies receiving federal child welfare funds. The Children's Bureau monitors state child welfare services through the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) Assessment Reviews.

Traditionally, reviews focused primarily on assessing state compliance with procedural requirements and did not provide states with opportunities for making improvements before imposing penalties. In 2000, HHS established a new approach to monitoring State child welfare programs. States are assessed for substantial conformity with certain federal requirements for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services.

CFSR Purpose

The CFSRs enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) ensure conformity with Federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services; and (3) assist States to enhance their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The CFSR Review Process

Each CFSR is a two-stage process consisting of a statewide assessment and an onsite review of child and family service outcomes and program systems. For the statewide assessment, the Children's Bureau prepares data profiles on the state's foster care and in-home service populations. The data profiles allow each state to compare safety and permanency data indicators with national standards established by the Children's Bureau.

After the statewide assessment, an onsite review is conducted by a joint federal-state team. This review includes: (1) case record reviews; (2) interviews with children and families engaged in services; and (3) interviews with community stakeholders, such as the courts and community agencies, foster families, and caseworkers and service providers.

States determined not to have achieved substantial conformity in all the areas assessed are required to develop and implement Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) addressing the areas of nonconformity. The Children's Bureau supports the states with technical assistance and monitors implementation of their plans.

States that do not achieve their required improvements sustain penalties as prescribed in the federal regulations. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico completed their first review by 2004. No state was found to be in substantial conformity in all of the seven outcome areas or seven systemic factors. The second round of reviews began in the spring of 2007.