



JEREMIAH W. (JAY) NIXON, GOVERNOR • RONALD J. LEVY, DIRECTOR

CANDACE A. SHIVELY, DIRECTOR

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P.O. BOX 88 • JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65103-0088

May 20, 2011

Jan Rothstein  
Division of Policy  
Children's Bureau  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20024

RE: Response for Public Comment and Consultation Meetings  
Federal Monitoring of Child and Family Service Programs  
Federal Register, Vol. 76, No. 65, Tuesday, April 6, 2011, Proposed Rules

Dear Ms. Rothstein,

Please accept this response from the Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division, regarding the Child and Family Services Review questions supplied in the Federal Register notification. Missouri appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on this valuable federal process.

1. How could ACF best promote and measure continuous quality improvement in child welfare outcomes and the effective functioning of systems that promote positive outcomes for children and families?  
**Response:** Missouri finds value in the direction and accountability which the Child and Family Services Review has provided. However, the federal requirements are numerous and labor intensive. If the requirements were streamlined, state resources could be redirected to further promote positive outcomes for children and families. For instance, if the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and the Child and Family Service Plan (CFSP) were melded into one process, based on a five-year cycle, removing overlapping elements, state monitoring capacity would increase. By folding the requirements into one fluid process and creating a streamlined reporting mechanism, the need for an activity driven PIP matrix would be eliminated. Through elimination of the PIP, an outcome-focused strategic plan could be developed within the CFSP process.
2. To what extent should data or measures from national child welfare databases be used in a Federal monitoring process and what measures are important for State/Tribal/Local accountability?  
**Response:** AFCARS and NCANDS data provides a barometer for states but should not be solely relied upon for accountability. This data does not capture the entire picture of the child or family situation nor reflective of states' circumstances.

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The measures most useful to states are those which provide evidence as to the status of children. For instance safety elements (i.e., repeat maltreatment, maltreatment in foster care, etc.) and permanency elements (i.e., number of placements experienced by a child in foster care, percent of foster children reunified in twelve months, etc.)

Data in and of itself can be misleading. For example, when counting the number of placements children have in foster care, no exception or allowance is made for moves which are deemed “positive” such as a move to a less restrictive environment or if the placement better suited the child’s needs such as discovering a suitable relative or kin provider.

Since Round One, there have been significant strides to provide the information to make connections between the AFCARS data and the measurements, both data indicators and composites. Yet composites are very difficult to explain to staff and stakeholders, which in turn, increase the difficulty of engaging them in the process. To formulate change efforts, data needs to be understood.

3. What role should the child welfare case management information system or systems that State/Tribes/local agencies use for case management or quality assurance purposes play in a Federal monitoring process?

**Response:** At this time, not all states have the capacity for their child welfare case management information system to capture supplemental third party documents which does not allow for a complete case review (such as medical, therapy or education reports). This particularly affects the ability to measure well-being outcomes. Many states do not have the capacity to image these documents, which is costly. All states would need a system with document imaging capabilities for this type of quality assurance review to be equitable. Given current resource constraints and differences between state spending priorities, uniformly updating systems with state-of-the-art imaging capabilities is unlikely.

If a state’s quality assurance program or processes were to be used in lieu of a federal procedure, the state should retain the discretion regarding the choice to do so, including the choice to adopt or modify state processes, measurements and tools. Flexibility should be allowed so states would have self determination regarding the manner and extent in which the quality assurance system, tools, processes and measures would be used. Core measures which demonstrate adherence to federal requirements can be incorporated into each state’s quality assurance system while still allowing state flexibility in designing a quality assurance system that meets the state’s needs. An option could remain open to allow the state a choice to use a federal process as an alternative to using the state’s quality assurance system.

4. What roles should State/Tribal/local child welfare agencies play in establishing targets for improvement and monitoring performance towards those targets? What role should other stakeholders, such as courts, clients and other child-serving agencies play?

**Response:** Given the variations in policies, laws and populations served, targets for improvement should be based on a state’s own data. The state *should* have a voice in setting goals as they are their own experts in knowing staff allocations and service resources.

Since the state agency is responsible and accountable for targeted improvements, states should have the ability to choose stakeholders from various venues to participate in the target setting process if this were to be mandated.

5. In what ways should targets and performance goals be informed by and integrated with other Federal Child welfare oversight efforts?

**Response:** The Title IV-E case review could be integrated with the CFR/CFSP process with needed elements added to either the AFCARS or the NCANDS data collection. This approach would align with other review processes with less confusion.

Federal/state coordination of efforts to schedule periodic reviews of information systems, such as an AFCARS assessment or SACWIS review, should occur to the fullest extent possible to ensure sufficient time has been granted for completion of a resulting information system improvement plan prior to using such data for establishing baselines or targets.

6. What specific strategies, supports, incentives, or penalties are needed to ensure continued quality improvement and achievement of positive outcomes for children and families that are in substantial conformity with Federal child welfare laws?

**Response:** States' QA structures should be supported with incentives as these processes have been most instrumental in moving practice improvements forward. Penalties should be used as a last resort. Before penalties are invoked, federal dollars could be used as re-investment incentives tied to specific program areas for goals not met. This could create fertile ground for practice improvements. If penalties are invoked immediately, resources are constrained and potential to make positive change is adversely impacted. Incentive processes could be a motivator toward better performance and would not create an adversarial relationship between the state and federal government. In addition, the incentive process would promote continued momentum within the continuous quality improvement structure. Ultimately, children and families would benefit.

7. In the light of the ability of Tribes to directly operate title IV-E programs through recent changes in the statute, in what ways, if any, should a Federal review process focus on services delivered to Indian children?

**Response:** Missouri has no federally recognized tribes, however, Missouri recommends Tribes be held to the same standards as states when operating Title IV-E programs. Indian children should receive the support and oversight as other children in the nation with consideration for cultural differences.

8. Are there examples of other review protocols, either in child welfare or related fields, in which Tribal/State/local governments participate that might inform CF's approach to reviewing child welfare systems?

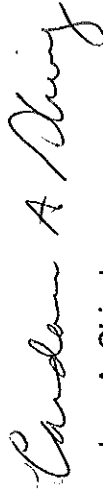
**Response:** Two elements could be added to the review process to complete a feedback loop for the CFR review. First, a survey or other formal process should occur to collect insight from states to measure the level of guidance or technical assistance provided by the Children's Bureau and regional offices during the process. Guidance and technical assistance are crucial elements

of a successful CFSR review and evaluation or feedback from states regarding this important factor would improve resource and process consistency nationwide.

A second element to consider is establishment of a formal process, allowing states to voice concerns, such as discrepancies in findings or process related issues. Instances in which this process may be beneficial include: states may face outcome discrepancies due to differing interpretations on a specific item on the case review tool, experience questionable process issues, subjectivity in scoring cases, or note a misinterpretation of stakeholder's interview information. Currently, states have no formal vehicle to address these types of concerns.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the CFSR process. Missouri recognizes the importance of our partnership with ACF in promoting permanency, safety and well-being for children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Candace A. Shively".

Candace A. Shively  
Director